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ABSTRACT

Researchers in the field of emergent literacy have been watching young children and find that they have a natural interest in print. Many researchers have documented stages of writing and spelling and have illustrated that children can learn to read and write as naturally as they can learn to speak, given an appropriate print environment. Writing precedes reading, and these acts complement each other. In a writing process classroom, the children should have a writing time each day, beginning with the first day, and should be allowed to choose their own writing topics. Anything they produce should be accepted as writing, including drawing, scribbling, copied print, and invented spelling. Types of conferences used to benefit the writing process of each student include conferences on content, focusing, expanding, process, evaluation, and editing. Very often writing process classrooms become reading/writing classrooms. One strategy used in these classrooms is the "shared book experience" involving four steps: (1) warm-up, (2) rereading of favorite stories, (3) new story, and (4) expressive activities. Another strategy that brings reading and writing together for young children is the language experience approach. This involves the children dictating an account of an experience while the teacher writes what the child said using their language, with correct spelling. Journals are another popular way to bring reading and writing together. Educators need to provide children with real reasons and opportunities for reading and writing. (MG)

EMERGING LITERACY: THE WRITING PATH TO READING

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Emerging Literacy: The Writing Path to Reading

Writing Development

Researchers in the field of emergent literacy are "watching kids." They have taken their cue from those who have studied language development, and are reporting their observations of young children in natural settings (homes, preschools, classrooms). They find that children have a natural interest in print. Children are "reading" McDonalds signs at very early ages, and "writing" stories with scribbles and pictures just as early. Researchers note that children move through stages, similar to oral language development stages, especially with their writing. Many have reported stages of development from those first scribbles on your walls to invented spelling, and on to standard spelling.

Linda Lamme (1984) observed very young children and documented several stages of scribbling. Lamme notes the first scribbles children ever make--those marks the child makes on paper, a chalkboard or a wall--often are made before the first birthday. Lamme calls this stage "Uncontrolled Scribbling." Here the child is often not even aware of the marks she is making and may not even be watching as she makes the marks. The second stage is "Controlled Scribbling," which occurs when the child becomes aware of the marks she is making and patterns of repetitious lines or circles

appear. At this stage the child will make a distinction between drawing and writing, with the writing being linear. Also, the writing will now take on the characteristics of the child's culture. Harste, Burke and Woodward (1982, pp. 106-07) found that when three four year olds of different cultures were asked to "Write everything you can write" their scribbles resembled the writing of their culture and looked quite different from each others. The child then begins to name her scribbles, leading to the "Naming Scribbling" stage. She wants to label everything in her pictures and requests that an adult label her picture with print. The child will also give her scribble writing names. She is becoming aware of the alphabet and conventional letters. So now she can move into writing her name, which she often wants to copy from a model, she is becoming aware of letters and words in her environment so as she begins to copy these letters and words the child moves from scribbling writing to more conventional writing.

Temple, Nathan, Burris and Temple (1988) have documented the stages of spelling from the time children are indiscriminately using letters of the alphabet until they achieve standard spelling. Their first stage is "Prephonemic Spelling." At this stage, children can write letters of the alphabet, but they have no concept of the relationship between letters and sounds. They just write strings of letters. Children at this stage are not reading, but they often do "read" what they have written. Children move into "Early Phonemic

Spelling" when they develop the phonetic principle--they know there is a connection between letters and sounds. Children at this stage can use the correct letters for the sounds in words, but the concept of word is limited so they only get one, two or a few letters for each word they write. Most often they have the initial consonant for the word, sometimes an ending consonant, and there will be times when they get a medial consonant or long vowel. The next stage is "Letter Naming." This stage is more complicated. At this point the child breaks a word "into its phonemes with letters of the alphabet. The letters are chosen to represent phonemes on the basis of the similarity between the sound of the letter names and the respective phonemes" (Temple, Nathan, Burris & Temple, 1988, pp. 102-103). It is during this stage of spelling that children begin to read. When the child begins to read, her writing will contain both the letter name spelling she has been using plus the standard spelling of the sight words that she has learned in her reading. At this time the child can become very frustrated with her writing, since it does not "match" her reading text. Up to this stage writing has helped the child to read, now reading will improve the child's writing ability. "When their spelling begins to change as a result of this influence, they pass to the next stage" (Temple, Nathan, Burris & Temple, 1988, p. 103)--which is "Transitional Spelling." At this point the child's writing looks conventional, and is quite easy to read. There are still many misspelled words, however, the words which are misspelled

are those that are not phonetically spelled. Very often the child spells the word the way it should be spelled. The final stage is "Correct Spelling," in which all words, even irregularly spelled words are spelled correctly. Literate adults are able to write and read words that we have never been directly taught.

Marie Clay (1975) has been observing young children writing in New Zealand. From her observations she has developed the concepts and principles of young children's writing. The recurring principle consists of the child writing a symbol over and over again. When the child chooses to do this it seems to "provide a wonderful sense of accomplishment" (p. 210) unlike that which occurs when a teacher assigns a letter or word to be written over and over. Children soon know to write from left to right, and top to bottom--the directional principle. They will also create different patterns using the few letters they know for their writing--the generating principle. Clay found that children are constantly making lists of what they know, keeping an "inventory" of their knowledge. Children also enjoy creating contrasts. They will create these contrasts between letters, meaning and sounds. For example, they will write the same word in all lower case letters then all upper case letters (p. 37). Children also are curious about abbreviations. As soon as they see or hear about the use of some type of abbreviation, they like to use it. One student drew a picture of a naval battle and wrote SOS all over the drawing. All of these concepts and principles can be

observed as children use them naturally as they experiment with print.

Many researchers have documented stages of scribbling and spelling similar to those of Clay, Lamme and Temple, Nathan, Burris and Temple. This illustrates the fact that children can learn to read and write as naturally as they can learn to speak, given an appropriate print environment. It also illustrates the fact that writing precedes reading, and these acts complement each other. This seems to suggest that rather than the formal drills in isolated skills familiar to many reading readiness programs, we need to provide children with real reasons and opportunities for reading and writing. We also must realize that young children have a tremendous knowledge of our language. They are reading and writing at very early ages and there is no real reading "readiness" stage.

The Writing Process Classroom

Graves (1983) describes Writing Process Classrooms for the elementary grades. He maintains that writing should begin on the first day of school. He further believes that young children want to write, and believe that they can write until someone, or the school system, conveys to them that they cannot. Young children should be given blank paper and writing utensils on the first day, with the request to write. With young children, these first days' "writing" will consist of drawings, scribblings, copied print, and possibly invented spelling. Everything should be accepted as writing. The

teacher should write while the children write for the first few minutes. She does this to demonstrate that she believes writing is important, to help the children begin to write without her assistance, and for future sharing. After the teacher writes for a few minutes she moves around the room "receiving" the children's work. She makes comments on the content of the children' work, with no emphasis on correcting spelling, letter formation or grammar. After the children have written for approximately 15 minutes (depending on the group) there should be a share time. At this point volunteers should be allowed to share their pieces. In some classrooms there is an author's chair, which is a special chair for the author who is sharing at that time. At some point decisions will have to be made concerning how many students can share each day, and how they are chosen for share time, because it will not be long before everyone wants to share every day. After the sharing time all writing should go into individual folders which will be kept in a box in the classroom at all times. Eventually these folders will become an important record keeping device. Information concerning publication, writing topics, and mastered skills can be recorded on the folder. Plus, at a glance, the progress of the child's writing can be viewed by looking at the writing samples over time. By keeping the writing in the folders the teacher, the children, parents, and administrators can follow the progress of the writing program.

Writing time should continue every day, at the same time and the

children should be allowed to choose their own topics for writing each day. When children choose their own topics they tend to write more, and the writing is more interesting than when they use teacher chosen topics. When children write every day, they begin to anticipate writing time and are thinking about topics. When something happens at home, or on the playground, that is fun, or different, they store it in memory for a future writing topic. Topic choice is probably the most difficult stage in the writing process. In a class of 25 probably only five or six children will have a "hot" topic to use. Many times the teacher will need to help with topic choice. She can do this by demonstrating her own procedure for choosing topics. For example, she can write three possible topics on the board, then discuss with the class the three topics, why she could write on all of them, but why she chooses this particular one today. The teacher also has to know her children, so that when they are uncertain as to a topic, she can lead them in discussions to discover possible topics. Teachers in writing process classrooms need to know their children. Another good source of topics are the childrens' own classmates. When they talk and share their writing many ideas are generated for future writing. The reading of books also provides ideas, and even vocabulary, for the children's writing. This gives another reason for reading aloud times.

Another aspect of the writing process classroom is conferencing. Calkins (1981) describes six types of writing conferences. The first

type is the Content Conference. During this conference possible topics may be discussed, or if the child is stuck in a piece, possible content can be discussed so the child may continue. All writers tend to choose broad subjects for their writing, so a Focusing Conference may become necessary to help the author focus on the information that she actually wants to convey. Once the writer is focused, it may be necessary to generate ideas and information concerning the new focus, so an Expanding Conference is used. It is important that students become aware of the writing process with which they are involved. Then when the teacher sees that the writer has achieved some aspect of the process, she needs to hold a Process Conference to help the writer understand her achievement. There should also be an Evaluation Conference as the child concludes her piece so that she may self-evaluate her work. The writer should evaluate the work, compare it to other work, and gain a realization that it is very possible that each piece is not necessarily better than the one before. The growth of a writer is variable. Finally there is the Editing Conference. This occurs when the writer has all of the content for the paper written, and it is time to focus on the mechanics for publication. Conferencing is a very important aspect of the Writing Process Classroom. It is through conferencing that the writing process can work, children can work through drafts, and skills can be taught. Graves (1983) had second graders who chose to work through up to eight drafts for a paper.

It is the Editing Conference in which skills can be taught. This conference can also lead to publishing. Publishing is important in the Writing Process Classroom because written material is meant to be shared, it gives the writer a sense of audience, and the writer needs that finished product to become an author. Publishing can be handled in various ways. Some teachers have the children edit their own work before the Editing Conference, then at that conference the teacher focuses on one skill. If all mistakes are pointed out the writer will be discouraged. However, if one skill is developed, using the writer's own paper, this skill will probably be well learned. After the Editing Conference, the teacher then acts as editor and corrects spelling and other mechanics, leaving the child's language intact. The teacher (or parent helper) then types the story, and they, or the writer, can put the piece into book form and the writer can then illustrate the story. Books can be made using cardboard, contact paper or wallpaper samples, and thread as illustrated by Graves (1983, pp. 59-60). Actually there are a number of ways books can be made, but the writer does need that finished product, even though the teacher is more interested in the process.

Teachers that understand the new research in emergent literacy are creating these Writing Process Classrooms in which the children are allowed to write, experience the entire writing process, and feel that sense of accomplishment when they publish. These children are becoming writers and readers. Very often Writing Process

Classrooms become reading/writing classrooms. Teachers soon see that the two are connected and allowing children to read and write is the method by which children learn to read and write. Many strategies have been created that allow children to become actively involved with reading and writing and use both.

Reading/Writing Strategies

There are many strategies for the reading/writing classroom. First there is the task of developing an appropriate environment. In this classroom there needs to be several centers. Naturally there must be a book center, or library center. This center needs to not only be stocked with different types of books at different levels, but it can also have magazines, catalogs, newspapers, pamphlets, etc. It should be a quiet, inviting center. Some teachers have brought in old sofas or easy chairs, or have filled up old bath tubs with pillows. There must also be a writing center, well stocked with different types of paper and writing utensils. There can also be dictionaries, picture files, chalkboards, typewriters, word processors, sample alphabets, etc. Other types of centers found in early childhood classrooms may also contain reading/writing materials. The Dramatic Play center, when used as a house can have telephone books, catalogs, magazines, letter writing materials, memo writing materials, etc. The Dramatic Play center can also be used as a post office, business office, doctor's office, etc., all using printed materials. In the Block center, paper and markers can be available

for labeling buildings. In the Science center, or Discovery center, there can be real reasons for using graphs and charts, and for recording information. There should be labels everywhere in the room, and print should be used for all daily routines. The calendar and daily schedule should be part of the daily routine, as well as recording charts or sheets for activities. Even before the children are "reading" they should be using print for real purposes.

Many researchers including Durkin (1966), Teale (1978), and others have found the importance of read-aloud, not only in the development of the appreciation of books and reading, but also in actual reading and writing development. Holdaway (1979) has developed the Shared Book Experience, for read-aloud time in classrooms, which simulates the read-aloud experience of the home. It is necessary to choose the appropriate books for Shared Book Experience. They need to be books that are entertaining, are predictable, and have illustrations and possibly even text that the children can see. Many teachers are using big books for Shared Book Experiences now. The typical Shared Book Experience will involve the following steps in any order:

1. Warm-Up. Familiar stories, songs or rhymes will be read with enlarged text for the children to follow.

2. Rereading of Favorite Stories. The children, or teacher, choose a familiar story to reread. With this reading many teaching points can be made by focusing on the concepts and principles of print,

individual words and letters, etc.

3. New Story. A new story is introduced and read by the teacher. Since the story is predictable the children will soon join in with the reading. The teacher will also stop at times to have the children predict what will happen next. This not only involves the children to a greater degree, but it also familarizes the children with the act of prediction. Many concepts and principles of print can also be taught during the reading. The teacher may point out the aspects of the title pages such as the title, author and illustrator; mention pages; move a pointer from left to right with the return sweep, etc.

4. Expressive Activities. After the readings the children should be allowed to retell the stories, draw or paint related pictures, write new stories, act out the story, etc.

Another strategy that brings together reading and writing for young children is the Language Experience Approach. This involves the children dictating an account of an experience. The first step that is necessary for an LEA is an experience. This may be a field trip, a guest speaker, or some type of interesting object. After the experience the teacher should lead a discussion over the event so that ideas and vocabulary may be generated for the writing. Then the child, or children, dictate a story to the teacher based on the experience. With the dictation children see their words can be written, and since it is their words written, they will later be able to "read" their story. So, it is very important for the teacher to

write what the children dictate, using their language, with correct spelling. The teacher may then want to copy the dictation onto paper for the making of a book. The child or children can illustrate their story and read their book to others. Some teachers print the class LEA stories on chart paper for the class to read. The LEA stories can then be used for different activities to focus on sentences, words and letters.

Journals offer another possibility for bringing reading and writing together. Personal journals are one of the most popular types, and can be used by writers who are not quite reading. Hipple (1985) describes journal writing in her Kindergarten classroom, and she found that drawing was a very important aspect of the journal writing. She also suggests that the teacher take dictation at times. Hipple recommends journal writing, not only for student growth in all language areas, but also for the benefits to her as a teacher, and for the classroom atmosphere. As Hipple states, "When writers-kindergarteners, best-sellers, or classic level-reveal their private thoughts, they reveal themselves, and we who are privileged to share in those private thoughts get to know them better. When this revelation occurs in a classroom, teacher and student can come together in a close relationship" (pp. 260-61). There are also dialogue journals (Staton, 1988), in which teachers and students keep a running conversation. Teachers often find this activity not only helps with the development of language skills, but also allows

them to become close to their students, possibly more so than personal journals. However students need to be reading at this point. Learning logs are a type of journal for use with the content areas. Individuals or groups can record observations or knowledge gained as they study a topic. One second grade class kept a class learning log in which they recorded their observations of the growth of their bean plants. There are other types of journals, but these three are probably best suited for the early years.

Summary

Dyson (1985, p. 24) explains that the recent studies of writings of young children sees writing as a "basic means of communication, one that is interwoven throughout the environment of many preschoolers. and as such, it is available for them to investigate, to play with, and to use in personally satisfying ways." Teachers who see writing form this view, and who are developing reading/writing classrooms have students who can also actually write and read with comprehension. These students also have strong self concepts because all of their work, from those first drawings and scribbles, was accepted as writing. They feel that they are authors. When conversing with professional authors, in person or through letters, they ask real questions about writing and manage to mention their own publications. Finally, Reading/Writing Process Classrooms create a sense of closeness between the teacher and students. When people share their writing they share something very private, and in

doing so a very warm and trusting climate has been established.

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