



## Let's get writing – Five suggestions for teaching writing in the early years

There are many ways to incorporate writing into the early childhood program. Here are a few suggestions:

Class news

Diary writing

Transforming sentences

Caption books

Innovating on poems and songs

### **Class news – modelled and collaborative writing**

Most teachers have a morning sharing or “show and tell” session. It is an easy transition to transform a simple talk into a powerful literacy lesson that engages, motivates and empowers students. I implemented the technique for many years with my year one children, starting from the first week of school.

#### **In brief**

A child would talk about an event or object; then we (the class and I) collaboratively wrote the news, which we then read. It demonstrated the integrated process of literacy learning.

#### **Why it worked**

It was engaging – it was about them.

It was purposeful – reporting their news to read later.

It was easy to read – like the language experience approach, we composed it together, wrote it collaboratively, and read it back using all cuing systems in an integrated way: we knew what it was about, the sentence structures were familiar and in our language, and we had the grapho-phonics to check that what we were reading was correct. *Note:* We changed the first person of the child telling, to the third person for everyone reading.

#### **In greater detail**

The children were rostered to share in the morning session one day a week. We would write the news of two or three children each day, which meant that each child would be featured in the news every two to three weeks.

This is how it worked:

#### **1. Talk**

The child would tell their news to the class. The children needed to actively listen in order to report back.

## 2. Report

I would ask the children what we were going to write about the child's news. A child would suggest a sentence or two.

## 3. Write

### Content

In the beginning, we would write just one or two sentences. As the children's literacy skills developed we would write more. Often the news would begin with "On the weekend" or "On \_\_\_\_ day" and follow with the child and the event; for example,

"On the weekend Jamie went to the park."

Later it might be:

"On the weekend Jamie went to the park with his family."

And even later:

"On the weekend Jamie went to the park with his family. He played on the swings."

I tried to keep to a simple recount structure with When, Who, What. We would often add a feeling, also as required by a recount; for example, "He had fun." or "He was excited." or "He can't wait to go again." (They always enjoyed using the exclamation mark to show excitement!)

As time went on, we would also add a headline (or main idea) for the news item.

The amount written would be determined by the children's literacy needs rather than the detail shared.

### Process

I would place a piece of paper on the easel within easy reach of the children. I would encourage children to participate in the writing if possible. The child in the news could at least write his or her own name or first letter.

I would model the writing process, thinking aloud what I was going to write and how I would write it – meaning first, then the conventions and spelling.

*I would talk about:*

*print conventions* e.g. where to start, which way to go, begin with a capital letter, capital letter to begin a name, full stops to finish.

*spelling and phonics.* I would ask the children what sounds they could hear in the words, and what letters we would write. I would talk about unusual letter combinations, double letters, long and short vowels – whatever came up in what we were writing. I talked about it naturally, as something of interest, not necessarily as a lesson being taught or learned, although it was. We were writers, composing and writing together. I would put the pen (usually a felt pen for easy reading) in the children's hands frequently.

## 4. Read

Once written, we would read the news together to make sure it made sense. We would check with the child to make sure it was correct. Any corrections enabled a discussion of editing techniques.

I would then ask who would like to read it. There were always volunteers. They were excited to read it, and could do so easily because they had participated in the writing.

I would then point to individual words for children to identify. The content words such as the child's name, and what they did; for example, soccer or beach, would be the most recognisable, and children would quickly learn to recognise them by sight. Then I would point to sight words to help the children learn them too.

### Extension

I would type up the news and print it as "Class news" to be taken home and read to parents each day. The children would glue it into a special homework book\* and we would read it together again before they took it home. I usually asked children to circle particular words or words beginning with a particular letter.

As their reading and writing ability progressed, I would give them a question to answer; e.g. Who went to the beach on Sunday? or Where did Jamie go on Sunday? I usually encouraged them to answer in a sentence. It was easy to check the following day when we were gluing in the next day's news.

I would add a couple of things to let parents know what we did during the day; e.g. "We read *The Three Billy Goats* and then acted it out. It was fun." These weren't for the children to read, but provided conversation starters and let parents know what was happening in the classroom.

\*I printed 2 copies of the news per page. One A5 copy of the news fitted perfectly onto an exercise book page. I had a template set up in Word. Each morning before school I changed the date, and wrote the notes to parents. I quickly typed up the news during the first lunch break for distribution later in the day. The sheets on which each day's news was written were kept and stapled together to make a little book for the reading corner at the end of the week. They were very popular in quiet reading time.

(You will notice some drawings in some of the news examples on the next page. Children drew their pictures in Paint after telling their news. I saved them and then copied them into the news. While the children loved it and it is another way of showing off their skills, it is not necessary.)

IB News Monday 31 January 2011

On the weekend Brooke went to a party. She got some water balloons.

On the weekend Sarah went to her friend's house. She had a swim.

Things we did today:

- We read a story called "Bess and Butterflies", then we wrote our own story about the bee we made on Friday. We did great work.
- We did some tables to see who brought in a healthy snack, and we did some tables in our *Go Maths* book. We completed the spots on dinosaurs.

Reminders: You have four things to bring into class each morning: your homework folder, your hat, your healthy snack and your water bottle.

1. Find these words in the news. Circle them. Then write them on the lines.

went to

2. Find words that begin with this letter. Underline them in the news. Trace and copy the letter below.

s s s s s s s s s s s s s s s s

IB News Tuesday 5 April 2011

High on a Swing

Last weekend Carrie went to the park. She went on the swings. She went so high she nearly fell off!



Welcome Nahyun

We have a new girl in our class today. Her name is Nahyun. Welcome Nahyun!



Things we did today:

- We talked and wrote about our trip to the Statesboro.
- We did some maths work, showing our favourite Easter egg, then doing tables and a graph to find out which one was the favourite.
- Reminders:
  - The Cyber Safety talk scheduled for tonight has been postponed.
  - Only 2 more days to make your Easter hat in preparation for the parade on Thursday.
  - Remember the celebration after the parade on Thursday.
  - Over the holidays, if you are out and about on yards and playgrounds, please take photos of your favourite play equipment. Next term we will be designing and making models of our favourite playground equipment.

1. Find these words in the news. Circle them. Then write them on the lines.

high name

2. Find words that begin with this letter. Underline them in the news. Trace and copy the letter below.

n n n n n n n n n n n

IB News Monday 30 May 2011

The Snow Tiger

Jake brought his Build-a-Bear toy to show us today. It is a snow tiger. It has a black jacket and blue pants. Jake keeps his tiger on his bed. It is a special bear and it is cute!



Things we did today:

- We talked about Reconciliation Week and read a story "The Last of His Tribe".
- We did our Maths assessment about 2D and 3D shapes. Did you know three still?
- We got together with our buddies and played some games..

Reminders:

- Firefighters return on Wednesday. Please return your form by then.
- Red Shield appeal on Wednesday. Please bring a gold coin donation and wear a red accessory.

Write the answer to this question.

What clothes is Jake's tiger wearing?

IB News Thursday 16 June 2011

Being Healthy

Today Zeek told us what he does to stay healthy. He runs in the mornings with his father and his brother. He eats fruit every day. He brushes his teeth in the morning and at night. He drinks lots of water.



Things we did today:

- We had reading groups in the morning. We did lots of different reading - some with an adult, some on the computers, and some independently and some on the white board.
- We had maths groups. We all did one activity. Some played a memory game. Some played a 'buss the person' game. Some played an adding game, and some did a long problem on the whiteboard.
- We talked about having to please back at school to celebrate our week this term. We decided what food we will have, and what our person will bring.

Reminders:

- Dress tomorrow night.
- Sports Day next Wednesday. Do you have your house colour T-shirt ready for the day?

Write the answer to this question. Make sure you write a whole sentence and use a capital letter to start the sentence and a full stop at the end. What does Zeek do in the mornings?

IB News Monday 25 July 2011

At Sea World

On the weekend Oshan went to Sea World. He went to the movies and went on a ride.

A Birthday

On Saturday it was Jonathan's birthday. He had a number 7 birthday cake.

Going to the Shops

On the weekend Bianca went to the shops. She bought a toy puppy to play with.

Sick Boy

Last week Arian went to the doctor. The doctor gave him a mask to help him breathe better.

Things we did today:

- We read a story called "The Very Blue Thingamajig" by Nanette Oliver. We used the having a spot! from Nanette Oliver in a couple of weeks. It is exciting.
- We read "Hector's Day at Sea World" by Eric Carle and talked about the growing patterns in the story. How we make some growing patterns of our own.

Write the answer to these questions. Make sure you write in a sentence.

1. When did Jonathan have his birthday?

2. What did Oshan do at Sea World?

IB News Wednesday 26 August 2011

Going Swimming

On Tuesday Nahyun went swimming. She swam all the way to the end of the pool. She touched the bottom of the pool. She had fun!

Going on Rides

On the weekend Bryce went to Sea World. He went on the cable cart and the monorail. It was lots of fun!

Staying at Home

On the weekend Jake stayed at home. He watched TV with his brother and sister. Then he went outside to play on the trampoline.

Going to the Hotel

Last Friday Arian went to the hotel. He played with his brother.

Things we did today:

- We had reading groups in the morning and maths groups in the middle session. This week we have all played a game of clock legs. We are learning to tell the time on an analogue clock showing the hour and half past.
- We had some mail sport in the afternoon.

Reminders:

- Library tomorrow. Please bring your library book in your library bag.
- Premier's Reading Challenge closes on Friday. Please return your reading records by then.

Write the answer to these questions. Make sure you write in a sentence.

1. When did Nahyun go swimming?

2. Where did Bryce go on the weekend?

## **Diary writing – independent writing for purposeful communication**

I distributed diaries\* to the children and explained that they were to write a message to me. They could tell me anything they liked; for example, what they liked to do at home, things they enjoyed doing, who was in their family – whatever they liked. If they ever told me they didn't know what to write, which was rare, I told them to tell me that.

This was usually one of the first activities of the day.

Each day, I gave the children about 10 – 15 minutes to write. I walked around the room looking at what the children were writing, asking a discreet question if I couldn't read or wasn't sure of the message. Then I collected their diaries.

Every afternoon after the children went home, I read their diaries and responded to what they had written. I didn't correct their work at all. I responded to their message and encouraged more writing by asking a question.

Responding to their messages, allowed me to model correct spellings of their words, which they could use as reference in their response. I could also model correct punctuation.

The children didn't always answer my questions, but often did. Many delighted in telling me that they could read what I had written, others asked me if they weren't sure.

Once again this provided an opportunity for reading and writing for real purposes and for meaning. It was motivating having me respond to their writing, and it helped develop a bond between us. I got to know much more about each child as a person, and it was a wonderful record of their writing development.

This writing occurred in an atmosphere of acceptance, whatever level of development the children were at. Some children wrote a few words, some a couple of sentences, and some a page or more.

The diaries made a wonderful record of their development over time. As each diary was filled I kept them, and then gave them to parents as a gift at the end of the year. Many parents treasured the diaries. I recently bumped into the parent of a child I taught in the 1980s. They had recently been looking at his diaries with his children who are now the age he was when he wrote them!

\*I made small diaries for each child using paper with wide blue lines initially. I bought sheets of lined butcher's paper which were a little larger than A4. I folded them in half and stapled them along the middle. Of course, any paper or exercise book would do.

## Transform sentences – understanding sentence structure

Transforming sentences is a great way of getting children thinking of different things they can write about, and different ways of structuring sentences. There are many ways of doing this for teaching many different things. It is good for developing sight words, discussing word types, or improving on writing.

One of the easiest ways to get started is to begin with a simple sentence that you construct, or a sentence from a book. Write the sentence on the board and read it to or with the children; for example:

I see a horse. (You *could* do this after reading “Brown Bear, Brown Bear”.)

Ask children to substitute words for horse and write it below “horse”, e.g.

I see a horse.

cat

elephant

cow

Read the new sentence formed each time.

Depending on children’s development, you could stop there, and then ask children to write and illustrate a sentence of their own.

You could start with the same sentence and add adjectives; for example, what type of horse was it. Use a caret to show the word is inserted. Then write other substitutions below, reading the new sentence each time.

I see a <sup>^</sup>old horse.

grey

brown

spotted

(Point out the use of “a” or “an” if necessary.)

You could then ask questions such as where, when, or what it was doing, and substitute different phrases for each one.

I see an old horse in the garden.

I see an old horse eating grass in the garden.

I (saw) an old horse eating grass in the garden in the morning.

These should be just short fun sessions, and after each lesson, the children should write, illustrate, and share their own sentences. If they are done on paper, they can be stapled to form a book and put into the reading corner.

## Caption books

These are easy starters for the beginning of the year and work well with learning sight words.

Brainstorm with children things they can do, or things they like, for example. List them on a chart.

Give children blank booklets and have them write and illustrate "I can (skip, run, hop, swim), one on each page.

When finished, the children should read their books to each other. They can be placed in the reading corner or taken home to share with their families.

Other suggestions are:

I like

I am

I have

Horses can

The cat is (on the mat, on the chair, in the box, under the table)

## Innovate on poems

Read and innovate on poems. Suitable poems types include:

Acrostic poems

Sound poems

Haiku

"I love" poems

For details on these poems, refer to the readilearn resources:

[Write your own "I love" poem](#)

[Writing Christmas poems](#)

[Christmas poetry – writing with children](#), and

[Christmas poems](#) (interactive)