

Writing

When given opportunities, children experiment with writing and explore different ways to convey messages in print. Research confirms that reading and writing develop together as interactive and interrelated processes. Writing is an essential part of preschool literacy programs and supports children's development with regard to several components of literacy. Although teachers demonstrate letter formation, the main focus in preschool is on writing as a communication tool rather than on handwriting instruction.

Young children enjoy the process of writing, the social relationships they develop during the process, and the sense of accomplishment they feel as they use writing to express themselves. They experience **literacy as a source of enjoyment**.

Children increase their **vocabulary and oral language** skills as they read and as they talk about their early writing and drawing. As they realize that what they think and say can be written down, their oral language becomes the basis of what they write.

Writing with children helps them to understand the sound structure of words (**phonological awareness**). For example, a child may become more aware of syllables if a teacher, while writing Leo's name, exaggerates their segmentation and says "Leeee" (while writing *Le*) and "ooooo" (while writing *o*). When writing a word, the teacher calls attention to each phoneme by saying the sound aloud as she writes the letter(s). Once children become aware that words are a sequence of sounds represented by letters, they begin to try to sequence letters in a conventional way.

Interactive writing helps children develop their **knowledge of print**. As teachers model writing and talk about their purposes, thinking, and actions while writing, children learn that print conveys meaning and that what they say can be written and then read. As adults model writing, children develop understandings about left-to-right directionality, the correspondence between spoken and written words, spacing, punctuation, and capitalization. By offering children opportunities to create a variety of texts (e.g., stories, lists, letters, cards, and recipes) through interactive writing, they learn that print is organized differently for different purposes.

As teachers talk with children about print while they model writing, children learn about **letters and words**. They learn specific letter names, become aware of letter features, and see how letters are formed (the line segments used to form each letter and the direction and sequence in which the segments are written). Children also learn that letters represent one or more sounds, that letters are grouped together in a particular order to represent words, and that written words have meaning.

The writing process helps promote children's understanding of **books**. As children attempt to compose their own stories by dictating or writing them on their own, they develop and refine their sense of story. When children explore a variety of genres by writing their own books, they learn about the features and structure of each type. For example, when children create their own alphabet books, they learn that alphabet books typically introduce one letter per page, with pictures of objects whose names begin with the sound (phoneme) represented by the letter.

How to Begin

Both teacher-initiated and child-initiated writing experiences should be a part of daily life in the classroom. Teachers must

- consider the strengths, needs, and interests of their children
- plan a variety of writing experiences
- provide materials and opportunities for children to write on their own

Considering Children’s Strengths, Needs, and Interests

In any class, children are at different levels of development in their awareness of print and the purposes of writing. Children demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of written language through their own writing, dictation, and comments. Teachers can use the curricular objectives to guide their observations and to reflect on what children are doing. Then they plan experiences and interact with children in ways that help children develop understandings about written language.

Support can take many forms: responding to children’s writing (regardless of the format) and acknowledging their writing as attempts to communicate; modeling the mechanics of writing (e.g., demonstrating letter formation, directionality, and spacing); answering children’s questions; offering information; and, when appropriate, asking questions that help children think about written language.

Planning Writing Experiences

Teachers who use *The Creative Curriculum* engage children in learning about and producing many kinds of written language. Meaningful writing experiences are included in various events of the day so that children learn how written language is used for various purposes. Some of these experiences are teacher-directed; others are child-initiated and offer children opportunities to explore writing on their own. Here are strategies that encourage children to write:

Write names. When teachers plan activities that require children to recognize and write their names, they help children learn that written language can be used to express identity and show ownership. Teachers give children reasons to write their names, such as signing their names on

- attendance sheets upon arrival each day
- drawings, stories, greeting cards, letters, and other products
- sign-up sheets for a popular activity
- “question of the day” charts

To help children learn to write their names, provide name cards written conventionally with upper- and lowercase letters. Children’s ability to write their names develops over time, depending upon their level of motor control, knowledge of letters as discrete units, and awareness of the distinguishing features of letters. Many children’s first attempts at name writing are scribbled shapes or lines and contain no letters at all. As children practice writing and become more aware of print, they begin including letter-like forms and letters in their signatures.

Make lists. When teachers involve children in making lists, children learn that written language can be used to satisfy needs and desires (e.g., to recall information or to have a turn with a particular toy). List-making is an effective strategy because it is a brief activity and each child may contribute more than once. Class lists are useful for documenting

- things to do to prepare for a special event
- what children saw on a neighborhood walk or a study trip
- supplies needed for making snacks
- children who want a turn with a particular toy or piece of equipment
- favorite things (foods, places to go, colors)
- story characters

Write cards, letters, and notes. These writing experiences show children that written language enables them to communicate with others. Children can

- make greeting cards for family members and friends
- write thank-you notes or letters to classroom volunteers, guest speakers, and the sponsor of a class field trip
- participate in a pen pal program with another preschool class and write letters to one another
- use a message board or post office in the classroom and write notes to each other

Write instructions. When teachers write instructions, children learn that written language can be used to tell others what or how to do something. Teachers can

- involve the children in making signs, labels, or notices for the classroom (e.g., “Do not touch,” “Please flush,” “Exit,” and “Please be quiet”)
- involve the children in making class rules, writing them down, posting them, and reviewing them regularly
- create simple picture and word recipes

Record information. When teachers create various written documents, children learn that written language is used to communicate information. Teachers can

- make a telephone and address book with the children (after getting families’ permission to share contact information) and refer children to it during play; place note pads and pencils nearby to encourage children to write messages
- invite children to help make written announcements or invitations for special events, such as a family breakfast or class art show
- create a picture dictionary or word wall of common words for children to refer to when they are writing independently
- create a log for children to record their observations, such as changes in a tadpole or the growth of bean sprouts
- chart children’s experiences during a class trip or special school event

Take dictation and create journals. When teachers take dictation and offer opportunities for independent journal writing, children learn that written language is a way to express their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and opinions. Teachers can

- encourage children to dictate captions (words or sentences) or stories about a drawing, painting, or photo
- record on a chart, on the class calendar, or in a class journal children's thoughts about daily classroom events, experiences related to a study topic, exciting outdoor discoveries, and new information
- give each child a personal journal in which to draw, dictate, or write about self-selected topics

Write in response to literature. Offering children opportunities to respond in writing to literature helps them understand that written language is a tool for self-expression. Teachers can

- encourage children to create and dictate the narrative for a story originally published as a wordless book; record children's language on sticky notes
- invite children to draw and write about a character who appears in a series of books (e.g., the monkey Curious George)
- have children create experience stories; record the stories on a chart
- have children create and dictate stories for a chart or book, using predictable books as a model
- use other types of books (e.g., nonfiction and alphabet books), poems, rhymes, songs, and chants to encourage children's expressive language development

Providing Materials and Opportunities for Children to Write

Children first notice print in real-life settings where writing is used for a variety of purposes. For many children, print is not part of everyday experiences, so they do not develop the insight that it carries messages. Preschool teachers must offer meaningful opportunities for children to write and read, especially through teacher-directed activities such as those described in the previous section.

Teachers also need to encourage child-initiated writing. Children need time, opportunities, and materials to explore writing on their own. They need to try the ideas about writing they form through their observations of and interactions with others.

In *The Creative Curriculum* classroom, the Library area is the primary place for children to explore writing by creating cards, drawing, dictating, writing stories, and making books. In *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool, Volume 2: Interest Areas*, you will find an extensive list of writing materials to include in the Library area.

Reading and writing materials are also important in the Dramatic Play area. Through dramatic play, children explore real-world situations in which reading and writing are useful. As children explore adult roles in their play, they imitate writing behavior in order to understand its purpose and conventions. For example, in a pretend doctor's office, the child assuming the role of the doctor is likely to write on patient charts or scribble prescriptions, while the receptionist might sign patients in or keep an appointment book.

Writing is not limited to just the Library and Dramatic Play areas. Teachers encourage children to explore reading and writing in all interest areas by placing paper, writing tools, and other print props alongside toys, games, blocks, and so on. By providing literacy materials in all interest areas, children have opportunities to explore print in their own way, deciding when, what, and how to write. For more ideas and information about incorporating literacy in interest areas, see chapter 20 of this volume and *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool, Volume 2: Interest Areas*.

Writing should also be integrated with content activities for math, science, social studies, the arts, and technology. With each topic of study, materials can be added and experiences offered to encourage writing and reading (e.g., books and bookmaking, experience charts, graphs, and journal writing).

Supporting Children's Writing

Materials alone are not enough. Teachers must thoughtfully and intentionally model reading and writing, and they must interact with children to promote their literacy learning. One of the most powerful strategies teachers use to help children learn about written language is to talk about it when they write, themselves. When teachers describe their thoughts and actions as they write, children learn about the functions and conventions of print (e.g., letter names, letter features, how letters are formed, letter-sound associations, spacing, punctuation, directionality, etc.). Children come to understand that letters can be grouped together to form words, that words have meaning, and that words are ordered to record sentences.

The vignette that follows shows how one teacher, Mr. Alvarez, used writing during a large-group meeting to introduce many literacy skills and concepts. The notes on the right indicate the teachers' reflections about what they are doing.

The children sit on the rug, facing Ms. Tory for their morning meeting.

Ms. Tory: *Our morning meeting is almost over. Who can tell what we will do next?* (The children recite in unison as Ms. Tory points to the words *Choice time*.)

Before you go to interest areas, Mr. Alvarez is going to show you some new things. (Mr. Alvarez takes Ms. Tory's place in front of the children.)

Shows the importance of functional print

<p>Mr. Alvarez: <i>I have three new things to share with you today. Let me make a short list of them on this chart paper so I won't forget what they are.</i></p> <p><i>The first thing we need to discuss is a new toy for the Sand and Water area. It's a pump, so I'll write the word pump. Let's see. I'll start here.</i></p> <p>(He points to the top-left side of the paper and names each letter as he writes.) P-u-m-p, pump.</p> <p><i>The second thing we need to talk about is today's snack. I'm writing a list, so I'll write snack underneath pump: s-n-a-c-k. Snack.</i></p>	<p>Demonstrates and talks about a purpose of print</p> <p>Demonstrates left-to-right directionality</p> <p>Calls attention to letters and demonstrates how they are formed</p> <p>Talks about the format of a list</p>
<p>Shawn: <i>That's my name!</i></p>	
<p>Setsuko and Sonya: <i>And mine!</i></p>	
<p>Mr. Alvarez: Your names do begin with an S, <i>but there is one difference. Let's see if anyone can tell the difference.</i> (He says each child's name aloud and then writes it on the chart.)</p>	<p>Acknowledges the children's responses and challenges them to think further about the information</p>
<p>Jonetta: <i>It's bigger!</i></p>	
<p>Mr. Alvarez: <i>You are watching closely, Jonetta. Their names begin with a capital, or uppercase S, and the word snack begins with a lowercase s. The letters are formed the same way, but they are different sizes. See?</i> (Mr. Alvarez writes Ss so the children can see the difference.)</p>	<p>Calls attention to the features and forms of letters</p>
<p>Setsuko: <i>I have both.</i></p>	
<p>Mr. Alvarez: <i>You certainly do, Setsuko. You have an uppercase S at the beginning of your name and a lowercase s in the middle of your name.</i> (Mr. Alvarez draws a line under each s as he speaks.)</p> <p>The third thing I would like to share is the set of pictures from our trip to the apple orchard. Let's see. What should I write?</p>	<p>Confirms Setsuko's observation</p> <p>Involves the children in generating language</p>
<p>Malik: <i>How about pictures?</i></p>	

Mr. Alvarez: *What do the rest of you think?* (The children nod their heads, “Yes.”) Pictures. (Mr. Alvarez repeats the word as he writes it on the chart.) *Look, pictures and pump start with the same letter, p.*

Draws children’s attention to a particular letter

(Mr. Alvarez returns to the top of the list and reads *pump*.) *Have you ever seen a pump before? Can you guess what it does?* (He takes the pump from a nearby box and explains that a pump is a tool that people use to help move water from one place to another. He has prepared a tub of water so he can demonstrate how it works. The children ask several questions and take turns working the handle. Mr. Alvarez records their questions on chart paper and repeats their words as he writes.)

Plans a way to introduce a new toy

Links a new word to prior knowledge

Calls children’s attention to the correspondence between a spoken word and a written word

Shows that he values the children’s questions by writing them on the chart

Mr. Alvarez: You’ve asked some very interesting questions! I bet you’ll discover some of the answers when you use the pump in the Sand and Water area. I’ve written your questions on the chart so we can come back and talk more about them at our next meeting.

Talks about a purpose of print

Mr. Alvarez: We need to make a pegboard label for the pump so you will know where to put it when you are finished using it. (Mr. Alvarez has cut a picture of the pump from a catalog and glued it on card stock. Together he and the children make a label. He talks as he writes *p-u-m-p*.)

Prepares the materials he needs in advance

(He reads the word slowly, sweeping his hand under the word.) *Does anyone notice anything special about the word pump?*

Calls attention to features of words

Alexa: *It has two of the same letter.*

Mr. Alvarez: *That’s right, Alexa. It has two ps, one at the beginning of the word and one at the end. Listen and you’ll hear the sound that the letter p makes.* (He reads the word slowly again to call attention to the /p/ sounds in the word.) *I’ll put this label on the pegboard in the Sand and Water area, along with the pump. Be sure to try it when you work there today.*

Calls attention to the sounds represented by letters

I’ll cross out the word pump now, because we talked about it.

Mr. Alvarez and children: (Mr. Alvarez looks at the list again and then takes the snack menu out of the box. He holds it so all the children can see.) *Today's snack is trail mix. You will have an opportunity to make your own trail mix in the Cooking area.*

Let's look at the recipe and read the list of ingredients. (He holds up a picture/word recipe made with labels from familiar food products. He sweeps his hand under the words.) *Cheerios[®], pretzels, raisins, almonds.* (The children call the almonds *nuts*. He explains that almonds are one type of nut and points out the word *Almonds* on the package. He continues to read the directions with the children and tells them that the recipe will be posted for them to follow.)

Introduces new words

Mr. Alvarez: *Who remembers what to do if you want to prepare snack but the Cooking area is too crowded?*

Talks about a purpose of print

Zack: *Write your name on the snack sign-up sheet.*

Mr. Alvarez: *Zack, will you please show everyone the sign-up sheet? (Zack shows the children the new sign-up sheet for the day, and Mr. Alvarez reminds them that the sign-up sheet helps to make sure that everyone has a turn to make snack. He reminds them to cross their names off of the list when they have finished preparing snack and to let the next person on the list know it is his or her turn.)*

Provides children with a meaningful reason to write

I will cross snack off our list. (He draws a line through the word.)

Do you remember the third thing we need to talk about? (He points to the word *pictures* on the list.)

Helps children see the connections among speaking, writing, and reading

All children: *Pictures!* (Mr. Alvarez takes a photo album out of the box and shows a few pictures to the children.)

Mr. Alvarez: *I'm going to put these in the Library area for you to look at. I'll be visiting the area today so you can dictate a few sentences about the pictures. That way, your families will be able to read about all the things that happened on our trip to the apple orchard.*

Talks about a purpose of print

(Puts a line through the word *pictures*.) That's the last thing on our list. I think it's time for you to choose the area in which you want to play.

Tips to Share With Families

- Help your child develop small-muscle strength and coordination by offering materials such as play dough, clothespins, beads and string, and LEGO® pieces.
- Tell your child what you are doing when you write, e.g., “I’m making a shopping list so I can remember what to get at the store.”
- Have a box or another place in which your child can keep writing and drawing supplies.
- When your child tells you stories, write them down and read them back.
- Encourage your child to write cards and letters to family members and friends in English or any language you speak at home.
- Encourage your child to make signs related to what he or she is playing.
- Write simple notes to your child.
- Help your child recognize his name and show him how to write it.
- Together, make words with magnetic or other toy letters.
- Bring writing supplies when you travel, such as paper and pencils, a magnetic drawing board, or a magic slate.
- Outdoors, write letters in dirt or sand by using sticks or fingers, or use chalk on the sidewalk.