

## Emergent Writing

### The Writing Area

The writing area should be a visibly important part of the classroom. Ensure that it is equipped with resources which offer children as many options for writing as possible and make time and space for children to initiate their own purpose for writing alongside teacher-suggested work.

The areas should have:

- a range of paper of different types, sizes, colours and shapes neatly cut
- a variety of pens, sharpened pencils, felt tips
- picture dictionaries, word banks (made with the children), word family lists
- a space to display children's writing.

The area should be well organised and maintained on a daily basis and re-stocked whenever necessary. It should be changed regularly to maintain children's interest. Further elements which can be added later are:

- story starters, e.g. 'Once upon a time', 'one day', etc.
- materials for book making and examples of 'made' books of different kinds
- more sophisticated dictionaries, picture encyclopaedias/atlasses, etc.
- texts as models, e.g. joke books, poetry books, picture dictionaries, address books, diaries, comics, newspaper, etc.
- collections of words, e.g. thematic, children's names, common words, word families
- theme-related books (to inform writing or to copy from)
- stimuli for writing – objects, posters, pictures, etc.
- a notice board for pupils to exchange messages with each other and the teacher
- individual (polythene) 'letterboxes' for each child.

Only a few of these will, of course, be present at one time! The need to change frequently, give new focus, remains. It must never become a dead area.

The writing area should invite children to use it. It should be a quiet place where writing is seen as an enjoyable and purposeful activity. There might be notices such as 'come and make a book' or 'make a list of your favourite books', encouraging children to use it both at set writing times and when they can make choices about their activities. Written suggestions and ideas about what children might write when they choose to use the area can maintain their involvement and interest, for example:

- supply a character. Describe a character. Ask the children to make up a story about him or her
- supply an opening sentence/give an ending
- use a photo, object or picture as a starting point
- leave a secret message
- put a letterbox in the area, leave out paper and envelopes
- bring in an old typewriter
- a picture book offers an opportunity for children to invent their own storyline

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- bring a special item of clothing. Dress someone up, who is this person? Why is she here? What has she done wrong? How can we help her?
- use a Story Book/Bag.

## Responding to Children's Writing

The ways in which you respond to children's writing will play an important part in what they attempt next. The following points provide a framework for response which is designed to assist learning and help you to take on a supportive role.

- Respond to the content first.
- Show an interest in the writing.
- Ask the child about the subject matter.
- Ask the child what they think of the writing.
- Read the writing together.
- Praise the attempts at spellings before pointing out they are wrong.
- Do not overload the child with too many mistakes to think about. (i.e. which is most appropriate for them to learn next?)
- Ask if the child would like to change or check anything.

Where possible it is useful to write a response to the child. This enables the writing and reading to interlink in a very meaningful way but also enables you to model the spellings which the child has not yet learned.

I went to ELLLOTS  
hawios.  
I had FoodL.  
was it good fun?  
ye?  
great!

Giving children encouragement is not just designed to keep them happy. It is a way of ensuring that they will want to try again rather than feeling they have failed or are not capable of the task in hand.

Encouragement can be given for different things:

- having a go
- using interesting words
- changing and correcting own writing
- checking a word
- experiment with new ideas
- taking the initiative
- reflecting on their own writing.

Children's perceptions of themselves as writers play an important role in their motivation and confidence to learn. It is important, therefore, for the teacher to

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continue to reflect on her/his practice and the ways in which children approach writing. We must be careful to acknowledge that children can be very independent in their early writing and that some teacher support, e.g. teacher's writing for children to copy, can actually present a barrier to children's learning and slow down the progression which has gone before. Insisting that the child should copy an adult's version of what the child wants to say or indeed model the teacher's writing has three main drawbacks.

1. The child all too often perceives this as a message that his or her writing is not good enough. This can affect confidence and limit the child's motivation to write independently.
2. The child is deprived of the opportunity to sound out and invent spellings.
3. The child will be far less likely to experiment with the things he or she plans to write and the vocabulary he or she is likely to attempt.