



CREATING WRITING ENVIRONMENT THROUGH MOVEMENTS

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Abstract

toting that educators need to capture the interest of primary students early on to make lifelong writers out of them, this paper discusses ways to encourage the writing process in the primary grades. The paper discusses the philosophy of the writing process, what experts say about writing, setting up the environment, writing with lower primary grades, writing with upper primary grades, topic choice, invented spellings, conferences, editing and revising, new directions, publishing, writing across the curriculum, and problems. The paper concludes that the success of encouraging the writing process in the primary grades depends largely on the teacher. Encouraging the writing process in the primary grades may be difficult but it is important. Contains 22 references. (RS)

Keywords: movement, environment, writing process, organization, differentiation.

Introduction

Some basic philosophy emerges from all the differing opinions on the writing process. In this modern day of machines, and television, children need to do writing more than ever. If children are allowed to find their own topics, their writing will have personal meaning to them. Children have an inherent desire to write if their early efforts are not quashed and murdered by bad teaching. The teaching of writing is a challenging undertaking which must be done by people who struggle with writing themselves. Katie Johnson best sums up why we need to teach children to write: Writing is one very good



way for humans to get some distance on problems, to get in touch with what is going on inside ourselves at any age...Another reason that it is important to continue to teach writing in school, and to greatly increase the amount of writing done in elementary schools in American, is television. All the children in our schools today have been brought up to, and sometimes by television. All they have to do to is listen and watch. Television can blot out their own images, and gives them an unfair assessment of their own images as wrong, to speak only of the visual side of television. And as far as language is concerned, they merely listen: No conversation is expected by the screen, and any talking is probably discouraged by others watching. Many children spend many hours in such a passive state. When they come to school, then they have no experience in knowing how to organize their thoughts into speech. Writing is a way to help them do this. Indeed, it is what writing does. (1987, 8) Funderburk further promotes the teaching of writing by saying, "The most important proposition that an educator can derive from Piaget's work is that children learn best from concrete activities. Thus classroom techniques need to accommodate for more concrete activity and writing is clearly one of these." (1986, 2) Writing is something all children want to do. Graves and Stuart say, "Most adults think children don't want to write. But children want to make sense of the world around them, and writing can help them do that. Through writing, children can discover new ways of thinking, seeing, listening, and reading. They can learn about themselves and find their own writing voices." (1985, 4) "The teaching of writing," Donald Graves says, "demands the control of two crafts, teaching and writing. They can neither be avoided, nor separated. The writer who knows the craft of writing cannot walk into a room and work with students unless there is some understanding of the craft of teaching. Neither can teachers who have not wrestled with writing, effectively teach the writer's craft." (1983, 6) As I vividly recalled in my third grade and college experiences, what a teacher does in the writing class will either foster enthusiasm and satisfaction or dread and frustration. "Set the tone: Children are affected by what the teacher does. Show them writing as a laboratory or studio subject. Instead of giving writing to children, you will share it with them. You will write with them," Graves advises. (1983, 12)

Methods

Children must write daily in order to learn the writing experience. Like any difficult and new skill, success will only be attained with constant attempts. Discouragement



can set in easily if not enough time is given to learning how to write. Children can start writing as soon as they can hold a writing implement in their hand. Graves and Stuart say, "Most adults think children can't write until they can read. But children can learn to write the same way they learn to talk, by going through a series of ever-improving approximations of what adults do. When children write first, reading comes more easily." (1985, 2) Children can learn to read and write just like they learned to talk. Donald Graves and Virginia Stuart explain: The natural process of learning to talk provides a valuable model for learning. The model can be seen at work in any skill we learn without being taught: talking, walking, riding a bicycle, or jumping rope. All these processes have several things in common. Children have a clear purpose for learning each one and a clear goal to reach toward. Because they want to talk and walk, for example, children practice on their own. (1985, 9) The best way to teach writing for children is by letting them do real writing, not worksheets. Graves and Stuart explain their thinking: The component model of learning is based on a seductive idea: to learn how to put something together, first you take it apart. This concept clearly works in the physical world of things and machines...But a growing body of research shows that children tend to learn language, oral or written, by moving from wholes to parts; they focus on meaning before mastering the fine points of the form. (1985, 11) They further state: Overemphasis on components, however, does more than train children to dislike reading and writing. In denying them the opportunity to practice actual reading and writing, the method prevents children from using important thinking skills, such as organizing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating information. Instead, standard worksheets and tests ask children to fill in the blank or circle the correct answer. (1985, 14) Setting Up the Environment Just like a gardener prepares the ground before he plants the seeds, so must a teacher prepare the classroom environment so that the writing will bloom in it Cambourne and Turbill have attempted to delineate conditions necessary to have successful writing process in a classroom. The ideal would be to have all of these conditions in a high degree. These conditions include: "Immersion in print, good modeling of reading and writing, positive teacher expectation, student responsibility for writing and lessons learned from that writing, approximation - including spelling and composing the written word, time to practice skills, engagement with demonstrations about print, mutual response between students and adults in the room." (1987, 7) Setting up routines early on will allow children to get to the business at hand without getting sidetracked on mundane issues. The room must stress



independence and the children's own responsibility for their writing. All must know: where to get supplies, writing folders, sign up sheet for conferences with the teacher, what to do if you cannot spell a word, need help with punctuation, stuck on topic, don't know what to do next, need a listener, or writing is finished for the day. Avery says, "Writing workshop is actually a highly structured environment, carefully established with clear rules and procedures that continue to develop throughout the year." (1993, 14) ...Avery adds that there are three basic rules: "We work hard, we work on writing, and we use quiet voices." (1993, 14) Katie Johnson's two main rules for writing are: "Children's writing comes from the children themselves, or it has no power; and the teacher must feel comfortable with the way writing goes in her classroom, or it won't work." (1987, 237)

Results and Discussion

The organization of the writing time itself is up to the teacher's personal preference. It should be daily if possible, or at least three times a week. The children should come to expect the same time each day for writing. This routine will enable them to get into the writing process more readily. Some teachers have one half of the writing time allocated to conferencing with others, and one half of writing time is silent writing only. In this way the classroom will take on the hushed silence of a studio where all can be alone with their own thoughts. This can be a more productive environment for writing. Writing with Lower Primary Grades Special strategies can be used to encourage writing in lower primary grades: kindergarten, first, and second. Katie Johnson's *Doing, Words* (1987) is a step by step process to enable early learners to get started putting their thoughts into the written word. Her method has six stages:

Movement 1 - After talking with the teacher, a Key Word emerges. The teacher writes the Word on unlined card for the child. The child then traces it with his finger, and reads it to class. Words are kept in large manila envelopes and the collection is read everyday. By Christmas, the average Kindergartner has between thirty and fifty Key, personal words.

Movement II - Is done the same way, except words are sentences. These are longer captions for Key images of the child. The teacher writes; the child traces and reads. Everyday cards are read to a friend.



Movement III - The stage uses sentences chosen by the child in a conference with the teacher, but now the teacher writes on a lined card. After tracing it, the child prints it on lined paper. Papers are read everyday, before and after the new sentence.

Movement IV--Now the child is printing two or more sentences after a conference with the teacher, and the words needed for that printing are written by the teacher on a large card in a list. The child retrieves the words and prints them in a booklet made of lined paper. The booklets are read. This is usually the last movement in kindergarten.

Movement V - This movement extends the retrieval of words to a personal dictionary. Stories are written independently and often continuing from day to day. Each day's work is read, and stories are posted for others to read. Movement VI--This incorporates the whole writing process, adding revision and editing, and group peer conferences to the teacher's conference, Drafts and publishing is continued from

Movement V. Children may write in either a booklet or on many papers in a folder. As the children come to use the writing process exclusively, the differentiation of genres and audience is expected in their writings. "None of the lines between the Movements is rigid," Johnson explains. "It sometimes happens that I guess wrong about where a child can best work, but the longer I teach writing the less often I guess wrong. When you goof, just back up one Movement and read everyday. By Christmas, the average Kindergartner has between thirty and fifty Key, personal words.

Movement VI - This incorporates the whole writing process, adding revision and editing, and group peer conferences to the teacher's conference, Drafts and publishing is continued from Movement V. Children may write in either a booklet or on many papers in a folder. As the children come to use the writing process exclusively, the differentiation of genres and audience is expected in their writings. "None of the lines between the Movements is rigid," Johnson explains. "It sometimes happens that I guess wrong about where a child can best work, but the longer I teach writing the less often I guess wrong. When you goof, just back up one Movement and things will be fine.

..Where you start depends on what grade you teach and how much language awareness has preceded your tenure of any group."(1987, 15) The routines of this program are fairly easy for small children to grasp: choose a word, the teacher writes it, the child traces it, reads the word, then reads it to a friend, and puts it in a basket.



Conclusion

When all students have words in the basket it is time to read. All the words for the day are shared in an all-class group. The words are passed around the circle until all have recognized their words. Each word has the child's name written by the teacher in the left-hand corner of the card. The teacher chooses someone to read first. That child chooses someone next, and so on. Each child puts their own words in their own envelope for the day. Once a week they read all the words to teacher. If a child does not remember a word, it is removed. The teacher says, "This one isn't very important," as it is being removed.

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