

WRITING TO READ IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS: AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

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In June 2010, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers announced the completion of a set of nationally-crafted academic standards now known as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Since that time, the standards have been adopted by 45 states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories. According to the CCSS Initiative website, the standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them (International Reading Association CCSS Committee 2).

In contrast to the recommendations made by the National Reading Panel in 2000 (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development), the Common Core State Standards emphasize the teaching of writing as well as reading. With an emphasis on writing as a parallel process to reading, this area of the language arts is finally receiving the attention that classroom teachers have always known it deserved based on supporting research over the past three decades. Among other writing skills, the CCSS accentuate the need for students to learn to write about the information they find in texts (International Reading Association CCSS Committee 3), drawing attention to the importance of the writing-reading connection.

The relationship between learning to read and learning to write has been well established (McGinley 226-47; Tierney, et al. 169-209; Trosky and Wood 26, 34-40). Reading and writing are two related processes that, when taught collaboratively, enhance thinking and learning (Tierney 246-60). Reading and writing have been established as parallel processes (Tierney 246-60; Trosky and Wood 26) due to similarities they share (Holt and Vacca 177-81). Both call for establishing a purpose, deriving or creating meaning, activating prior knowledge, and constructing mental images (Taylor, et al. 45). It has been established that children benefit when writing and reading are taught through simultaneous experiences. Simply stated, if reading and writing are integrated through explicit instruction, students make gains in both areas that they are not likely to make if these two significant modes of language are not linked (Kent 109).

The CCSS identify seven English Language Arts Standards in writing for children in kindergarten through second grade (see Appendix). Under these new standards, children are expected to possess such abilities as composing basic explanatory texts by the time they leave kindergarten. Further, it is expected that students' writing should demonstrate increasing sophistication in all aspects of language use, from vocabulary and syntax to the development and organization of ideas as well as addressing increasingly demanding content and sources each year.

The CCSS are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world. To become accomplished writers, children need to be engaged in real-world writing with a purpose. This means intentionally developing reading and writing skills across disciplines throughout the day using authentic experiences where they communicate in print. Authentic and motivating writing experiences are those in which children appreciate that a key purpose of writing is to communicate clearly to an external, sometimes unfamiliar, audience. To meet CCSS, children must devote significant time and effort to writing, producing numerous pieces over short and extended time periods on a regular basis throughout the year. Using writing as a way of offering and

supporting opinions, demonstrating understanding of the topics being studied, and conveying real and imagined experiences and events through adult-supported writing experiences are essential in early childhood classrooms. These early experiences build a necessary foundation for students to be able to exhibit these same skills as independent writers in upper-elementary classrooms.

In this article, we will highlight three strategies identified and recognized for promoting writing in the early grades (Tunks and Giles 4-7) that are consistent with the standards and recommendations made in the CCSS. These strategies are beneficial to emergent literacy learners because they allow children to experience the satisfaction of being an author by publishing their writing as they are still learning skills necessary to be competent readers and writers. By publishing children's writing, they learn there is a purpose for writing and experience the sense of accomplishment of sharing their stories with others.

According to Lucy Calkins (266), publishing is an important phase of the writing process. Calkins is considered one of the pioneers of the workshop approach to teaching writing and is the founding director of Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. The author of the best-seller *The Art of Teaching Writing* explains to readers, "Publication matters and it matters because it inducts us into the writerly life. Publication is then the beginning, not the culmination of the writing process" (Calkins 266). The strategies presented in this article emphasize the publishing phase of the writing process for children who are in the early stages of learning to write. Three strategies are introduced which support children's early writing: taking dictation, translating kid writing, and creating cooperative chronicles.

Dictated Anecdotes

Dictated anecdotes (Tunks and Giles 22-24) is a strategy used to introduce children to the concept that writing is a useful way to record what they have to say. When children observe teachers take dictation as they tell a story, they grasp the concept that text is simply speech written down. Over time, children begin to

understand that when their stories are written down, they can be enjoyed again at a later time or shared with others who were not present when the story was told. Since young children are unaware that written records help people remember and share past experiences (Schickedanz and Casbergue 4), making these basic connections between speech and text are crucial to early reading and writing development.

For young children, who are natural storytellers, writing their anecdotes is an obvious first step in demonstrating why and how people make written records. When children have a story to share about an event they experienced or imagined, their objective is to simply share it in the immediate moment. Because young children's concepts of time and history are limited (Kessen and Mussen 103-26), they don't realize the value of making a record of their stories. Taking dictation facilitates children's awareness of the value of writing. When teachers make a written record of anecdotes they are introducing the concept and purpose of writing. Teachers can capitalize on the everyday occurrence of children sharing stories by saying, "Let's write this down, so we can remember it later," or "share it with someone who isn't here." When children see the teacher recording a story and later witness an audience's reaction to their writing, they have a powerful image of the purpose for writing.

Young children's limited understanding of print, lack of fine motor skills, and short attention span are obstacles they will overcome with time and experience. For children who are just beginning to convey meaning through their writing, this strategy enables them to complete a writing project that is beyond their ability to write independently. For example, they may want a story recorded that includes extensive detail or specific vocabulary. An adult can support these writers by taking down what they say and suggesting the child illustrate various parts of the story to add meaning and visual clues for retelling it.

Recording dictated anecdotes is also a useful strategy when working with learners who have specific language limitations including children with special needs and English Language

Learners (ELL). Children with special needs, such as visual impairment, hearing loss, learning disabilities, speech and language disorders, impaired motor skills, and mild cognitive delays, benefit from having their oral stories recorded as well. Sharing written records of their stories with others serves as a confidence-builder and an encouraging reminder of what they can do. For children who face language barriers as they are learning to speak a second language, dictating oral anecdotes makes it possible to have their stories and ideas recorded in a new language. As they revisit their stories, they are reinforcing their knowledge of language, vocabulary, and reading content skills.

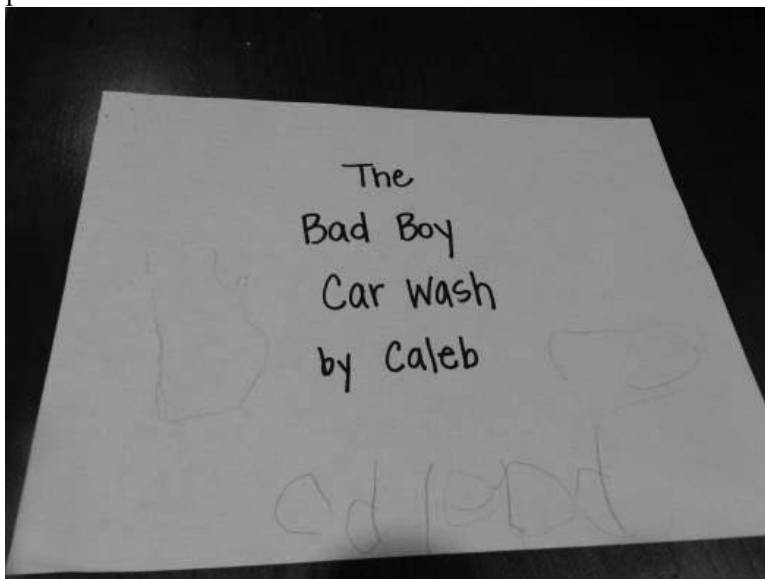
The following narrative, written by Claire Hardison, a first-year teacher, shows her use of dictated anecdotes with a child with Special Needs.

Jacob is a five-year-old boy who will enter Kindergarten in the fall. He lives with his parents and younger brother who is eighteen months old. Jacob loves anything that is associated with car washes and trains. He often uses blocks and other materials to construct car washes. Jacob also enjoys spending time playing with his train table. He frequently displays compulsive behavior and often becomes fixated or obsessed over his interests. Jacob's abilities are limited in a number of ways. He is easily distracted and has difficulty staying on task. He shows little interest in interacting or playing with others. Limited fine motor skills make it difficult for Jacob to hold and use crayons and pencils.

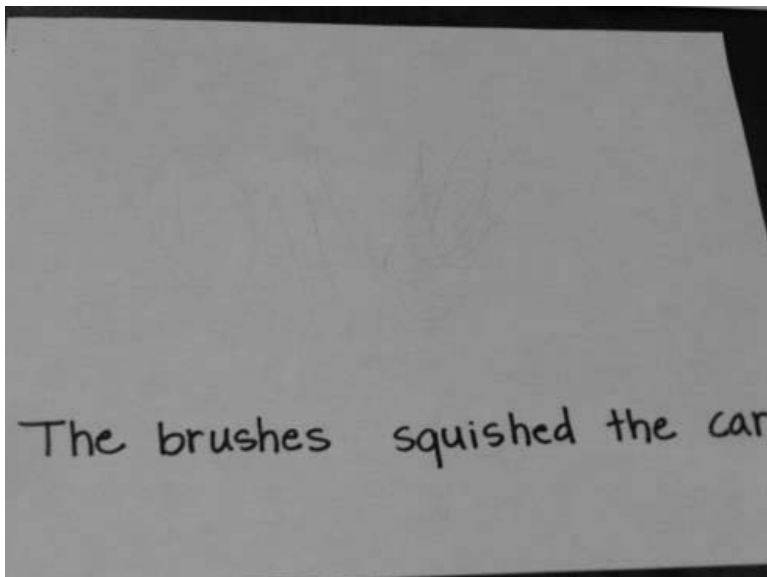
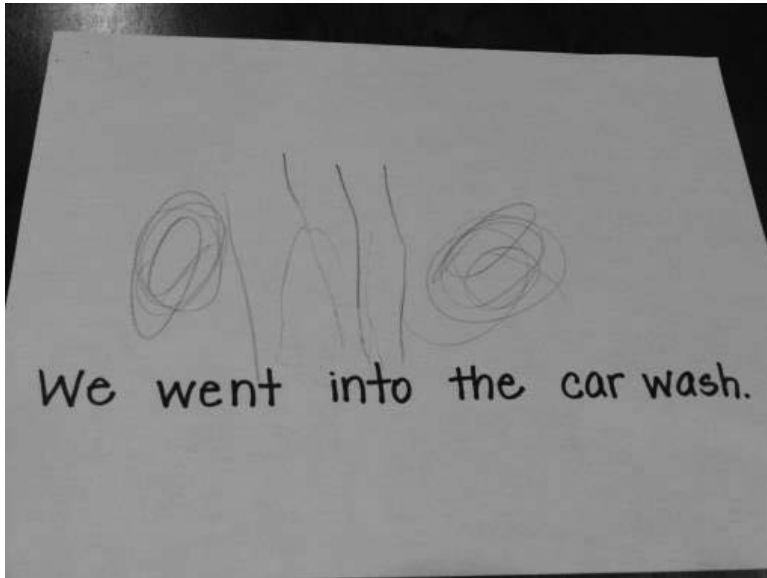
I talked with Jacob about books and explained that authors are people who write the stories and illustrators add pictures to go with the words. I asked Jacob if he had a story he would like to tell and explained that I would write it down for him. Not surprisingly, Jacob shared a story with me about going through a car wash. Jacob immediately started his story and paused after each sentence. I took dictation on white, unlined paper by writing a sentence at the bottom of each page leaving space at the top of the page for illustrations. I used a

new sheet of paper for each sentence. After writing his story as he told it, I read it back to him and asked if he wanted to change anything. He liked the story as is and had no changes.

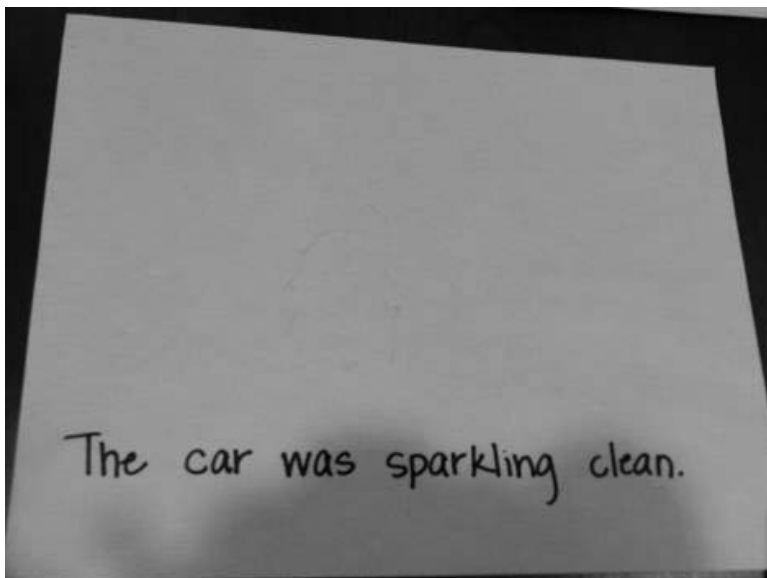
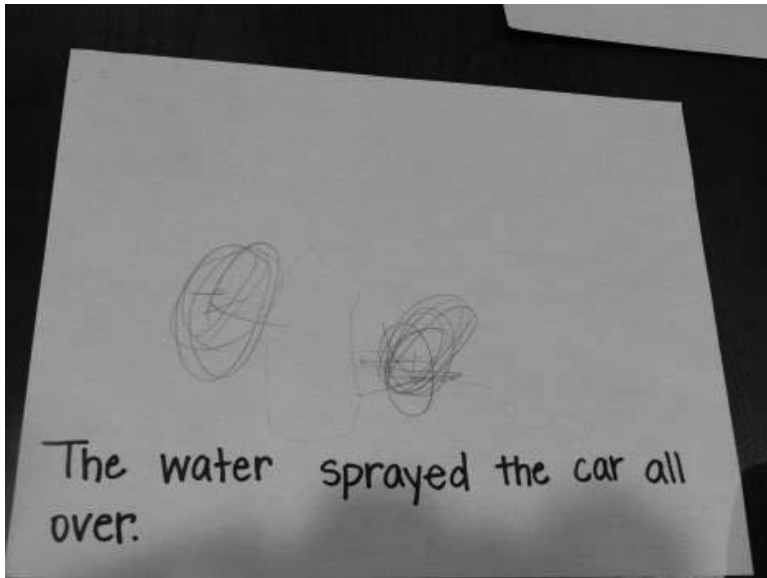
Telling and illustrating the story required concentration and focus, and it became apparent that Jacob needed a break from the activity. When we returned to the story, I read it back to him and we discussed what he might draw on each page. Jacob chose to use colored pencils for his illustrations. On every page he traced one of his Hot Wheel cars and on some pages added more features that corresponded with the text. His completed book had seven pages! When he was finished illustrating, I read the story back to him. Then I asked Jacob if he would like to read his story to me. He was excited to read his story and remembered the main ideas for each page as he told it. Later, when Jacob wanted to read his story to his mother, he recalled fewer details of his original story but used the illustrations to make up a new story also about a car wash. His mother was very proud of what he had accomplished and praised his hard work which made Jacob proud.



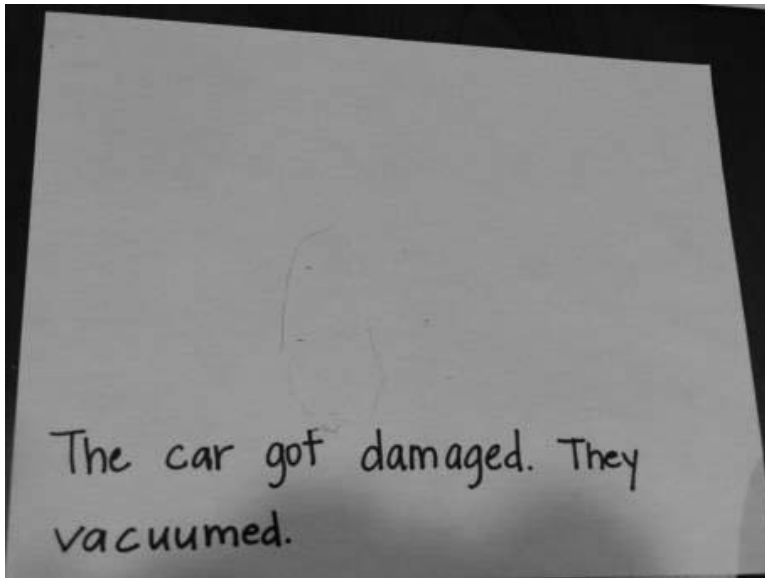
Because Jacob had difficulty holding a pencil, his illustrations are very light and difficult to see. The drawing done in addition to tracing the Hot Wheels cars can be classified as scribbles.



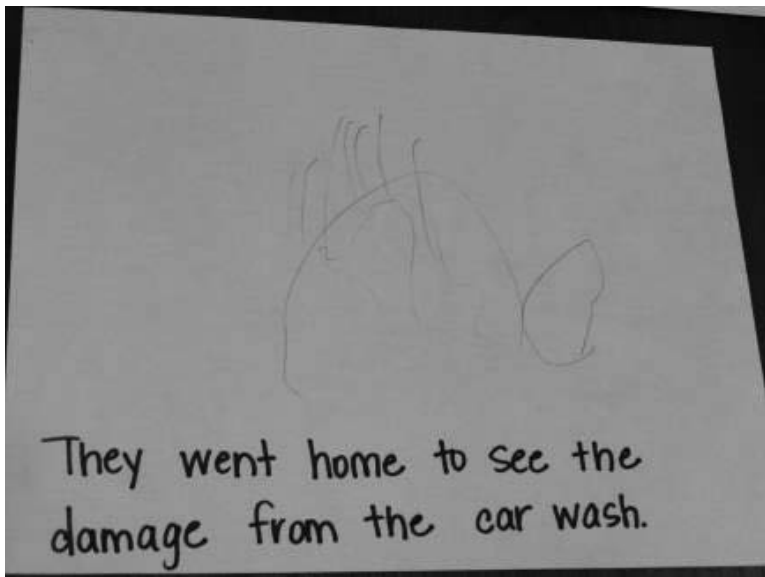
In the middle of the page above is a tracing of the Hot Wheel car with brushes on either side of the car “squishing” it.



On this page Jacob traced the Hot Wheel car. It is in the center of the page.



The marks on this page are very faint. Jacob traced the Hot Wheel car and scribbled marks on it because it got “damaged” in the car wash.



This is a picture of the house and car in the driveway.

Translating Kid-Writing

Emergent writers are characterized by a limited but growing understanding of print. They have not grasped an understanding of sound-symbol relationships but begin experimenting with writing by making random marks on paper (Clay 108; Schickedanz 71-80; Sulzby 290-97). As their knowledge of sound-symbol relationships evolves, so do the marks they make on paper. While their spelling is far from conventional, they do begin to use some letters to represent sounds (Sulzby 290-97).

Children's first attempts to communicate through symbols have been described as "kid writing" (Behymer 85-88). These marks have been categorized into different forms of spontaneous writing (Sulzby 290-97). Children's early attempts at symbol-making demonstrate a developing awareness of the purpose for writing. When the effort for experimenting is reinforced, children are more likely to continue experimenting and developing a growing understanding of the purposes of print.

Sulzby identified six different types of kid-writing (see Figure 1) typically used by emergent writers including: scribbles, drawing pictures, letter-like forms, letter strings, conventional spelling, and invented spelling (290-97; Sulzby, Barnhart, and Hieshima 4). The spontaneous forms of writing used by emerging writers are not stages and do not occur in a sequence. Instead, children use different forms under varying circumstances (Sulzby 290-97) and may even combine the different types of kid writing to convey a message (Morrow 265-85). Their choice of kid writing may be determined by the message they want to convey, knowledge of letter sounds, ability to form specific letters, and knowledge of memorized standard spellings. The result is writing that is personally meaningful and can typically be read by the writer even if it is unreadable to others.

Translating kid writing into a conventional form of writing preserves the integrity of the message while enabling others to read it. When teachers respond to children's kid writing with the understanding that it contains a meaningful message, it motivates young writers (Tunks and Giles 57). Teachers can encourage

Scribbles: Unlike the random scribbles found in children’s early attempts at drawing, scribble writing most often consists of wavy or loopy horizontal marks resembling cursive handwriting.

Drawing: Drawing used as writing, also known as picture writing, occurs when children draw pictures as a means of written communication. These drawings are intended to convey a specific message and are often “read” by children using the same tone and intonation used when reading a story aloud.

Letter-like forms: Also known as mock writing or mock letters, letter-like forms contain a combination of straight, curved, and intersecting lines giving them the appearance of actual manuscript letters.

Letter strings: Once children have acquired the ability to form at least some letters, like those in their own name, and numbers, these known symbols are strung together in random order to resemble print. While the resulting text is nonphonetic and may contain letter reversals or other errors in formation, accurate spacing and directionality are often displayed.

Conventional spelling—Children will memorize the correct spellings of words that have special meaning for them, such as names and high frequency words like *cat*, *dog*, *mom*, and *dad*, using these conventional spellings in their writing embedded among other forms.

Invented spelling—As children’s knowledge of letter’s sound-symbol relationship increases, they begin to write words based on the sounds heard when the word is said. Initially, whole words may be represented by only the first or first and last sound heard, but over time, children’s phonetic writing reaches a point that while not correctly spelled is readable. For example, “I luv mi famle.”

Figure 1: Types of Kid-Writing

children to tell or “read” what they have written. Then, similar to techniques used in taking dictation for oral stories, the teacher serves as a scribe by recording the child’s interpretation of their kid writing. This message is typically recorded by “under writing,” a technique in which the teacher writes directly under (or above) the child’s kid writing. Under writing serves as a translation of kid writing by providing a verbatim record of the child’s message. If a child questions why it is necessary for the teacher to rewrite his message, a simple explanation that it helps others to read their kid writing usually suffices. The teacher can explain that in time, with more experience writing, the child’s kid writing will resemble that of adults and under writing will no longer be necessary. As their kid writing with accompanying under writing is shared with others who can accurately read the message, children realize they play a critical role in getting their own thoughts on paper.

Creating Cooperative Chronicles

As children participate in many rewarding early writing experiences, their knowledge and abilities increase along with their confidence as authors (Tunks and Giles 66-67). The CCSS acknowledge that some writing skills are more properly defined in terms of specific writing types, like arguments, informative/explanatory texts, and narratives, while other writing competencies, such as the ability to plan, revise, and edit, are applicable to many types of writing. Once young children move beyond publishing only their initial attempts, or “rough draft writing,” creating cooperative chronicles is an effective means of introducing children to revising and editing.

While revising is a daunting task for most writers, it is particularly difficult for young authors who tend to be satisfied with first drafts. As such, young authors’ first experiences with revising should occur in a setting that demonstrates it as a necessary and doable part of the writing process. With support and guidance, children soon realize that the most compelling messages are those that have been thoughtfully reworked as opposed to hastily written. Creating cooperative chronicles clearly illustrates the need for

revising while also demonstrating to beginning writers that revision is well within their capabilities (Giles and Tunks 22-24).

As with other group writing strategies (i.e., language experience approach, interactive writing, and shared writing), creating cooperative chronicles capitalizes on the social nature of children and uses the energy of group work as the catalyst for successfully completing a piece of writing. Peers work collaboratively to ask questions, make suggestions, and judge the clarity of the writing. In a group setting, the teacher serves as scribe and support as children contribute and collaborate on a single piece of work. She asks questions and gives them an opportunity to revise by clarifying, reorganizing, or expanding the group piece of writing. Cooperative chronicles possess the unique quality of encompassing the entire writing process, from brainstorming topics and prewriting through completing a polished piece (see Figure 2).

When writing a cooperative chronicle, children actually witness the evolution and improvement of the piece as it is revised and edited. Once decisions regarding topic and format are made, an oral discussion of a shared experience follows. Ideas shared orally are then recorded by the teacher, resulting in the first draft. Whether children's language is written on large chart paper or typed and projected using technology, it is recommended that ample room be left between lines of text for future additions and changes. After reading the first draft together, it is put aside, for an hour or a few days, to give the authors some critical distance. Upon revisiting the piece, the first draft is read and a purpose for revising, such as sequence, content or vocabulary, is identified. As the piece is repeatedly re-read on subsequent visits, children offer further suggestions for change. These suggestions often result in the teacher drawing arrows, inserting words or phrases, and marking through original text. To help children easily identify the modifications from the original text, it is recommended that a different color be used for the text created on each visit. Once children are satisfied with their product, it is titled and published. As with other writing products, cooperative chronicles can be published in a variety of formats, including class books or individually illustrated stories.

The process of creating a cooperative chronicle supports children's early understanding of the writing process and builds confidence as they become independent writers.

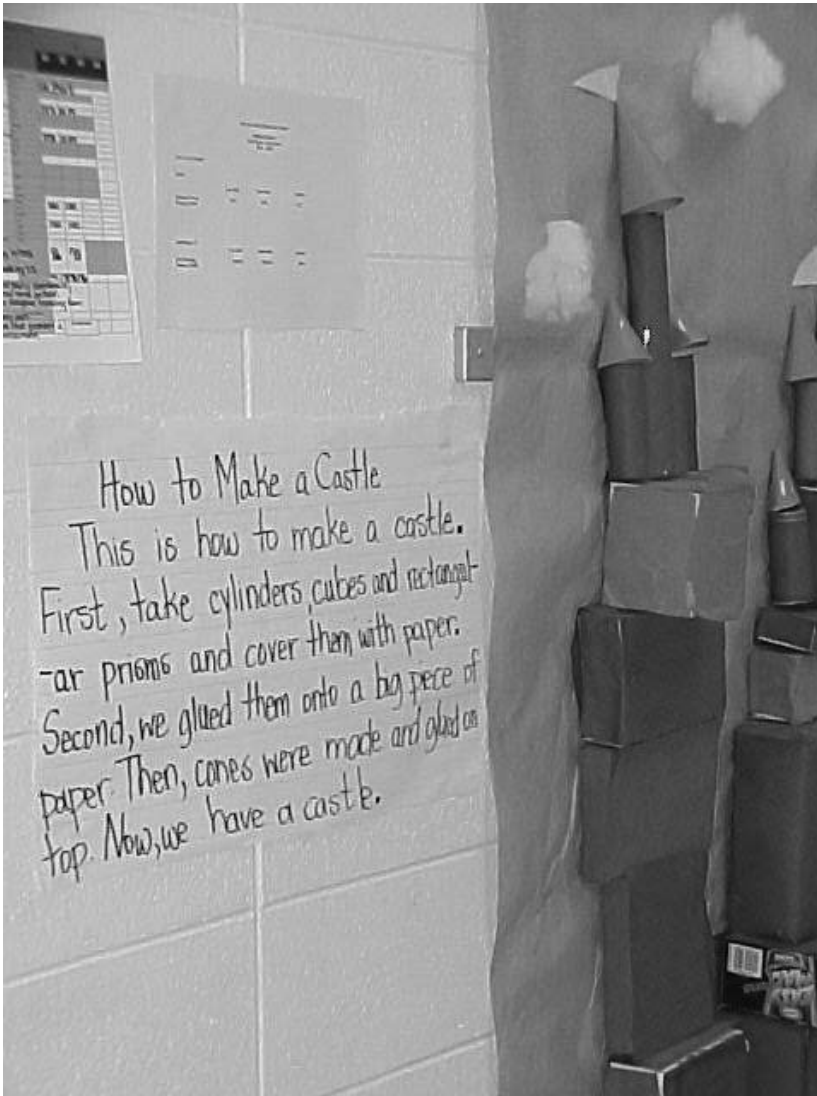


Figure 2: Final Product of a Cooperative Chronicle which the Children Drafted, Revised, and Edited as a Group with Support of their Teacher

The three strategies we have introduced are intended to support early writers as they are developing knowledge and skills on their way to becoming independent writers. Once they possess basic literacy skills learned from these strategies, such as distinguishing print from pictures, recognizing letters, phonemic awareness, and conventional spelling, children are considered independent authors. As independent authors they become less dependent on the strategies and more capable in their ability to choose topics, clarify meaning through revisions, and create a finished piece of writing to share with others.

Conclusion

The emphasis on writing as a parallel process to reading by the Common Core State Standards provides the impetus for early childhood teachers to allocate significant instructional time to adult-supported writing experiences in early childhood classrooms. The strategies described in this article—taking dictation, translating kid writing, and creating cooperative chronicles—support young children’s early writing by using scaffolding to extend their current knowledge and abilities as writers. These strategies are beneficial to emergent literacy learners because they allow children to experience the satisfaction of being an author by publishing their writing as they are still learning skills necessary to be competent readers and writers. By publishing their writing, they learn there is a purpose for writing and experience the sense of accomplishment of sharing their stories with others, both of which provide a solid foundation for their future success as writers. Although these strategies support the expectations for student-writers as put forth by CCSS, the benefits extend beyond one specific set of standards and, therefore, will remain useful even as mandated requirements change.

APPENDIX

English Language Arts Standards for Writing (Kindergarten – Second Grade)

Text Types and Purposes

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.K.1 Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose opinion pieces in which they tell a reader the topic or the name of the book they are writing about and state an opinion or preference about the topic or book (e.g., *My favorite book is...*).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.K.2 Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.K.3 Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.

Production and Distribution of Writing

- (W.K.4 begins in grade 3)
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.K.5 With guidance and support from adults, respond to questions and suggestions from peers and add details to strengthen writing as needed.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.K.6 With guidance and support from adults, explore a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.K.7 Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., explore a number of books by a favorite author and express opinions about them).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.K.8 With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.
- (W.K.9 begins in grade 4)

Range of Writing

- (W.K.10 begins in grade 3)

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