

YOUNG CHILDREN CAN WRITE: THE BEGINNINGS

VERA E. MILZ

Room 14

A group of children and I shape the learning that takes place within the walls of Room 14. Language, in its forms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, allows us to communicate and interact with each other as it permeates every classroom activity. Although the focus of this article is the subject of *writing*, it is well to keep in mind that it is the totality of language that must be a major consideration as one creates an instructional framework for the encouragement of writing. It is my belief that writing is one component of a total program that has language development as its foremost objective. Listening, speaking, and reading are closely related and integrated as the child learns to write.

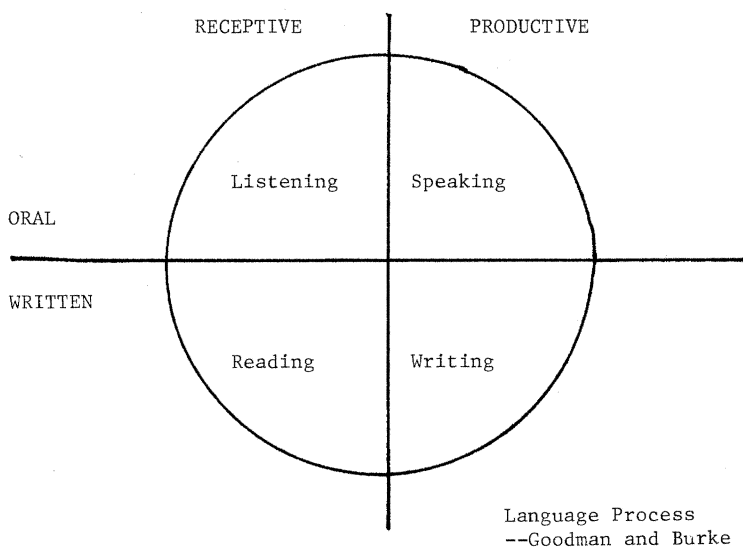
The group of children changes each school year. Sometimes, they have been all first graders — at other times the room has been used for a first/second grade combination class. The children themselves reflect diverse ethnic origins, varying abilities, multi-interests and experiences — typical of the differences found in normal children. Several have been unable to speak English upon entry, though they were proficient in their native languages. One child had physical handicaps, and several children were labeled learning disabled. Their differences were not deficiencies, as all the children brought the richness of their personal backgrounds with their needs. It is the children who are the heart of the classroom.

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As I share my observations and conclusions based on my experiences as a teacher, I hope you will reflect and consider as well as gain insights that will be of help as you plan for children within your own classrooms.

Being able to write in a meaningful way is an ability highly prized in our society. Writing is an essential means of communication in a print-oriented world such as we live in. Writing is a complex, very personal process learned by each of us as individuals — yet it is not learned in a vacuum, but in a social community. Thus, the teaching of writing becomes a societal concern shared by schools, parents, and the community at large as interactions take place between the learners and their worlds.

Learning how to write is rooted in the way that human beings learn language. Language is both oral and written, and has receptive and productive qualities.



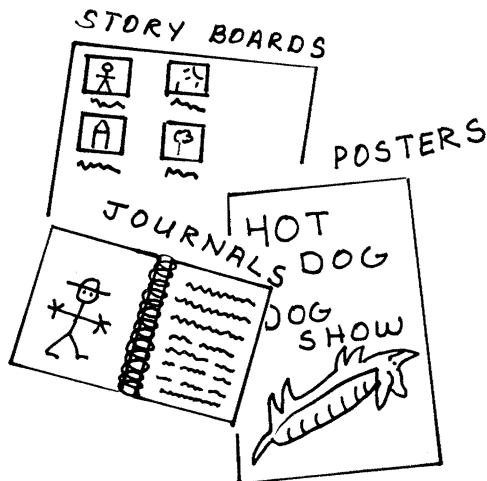
Listening and speaking are oral language while reading and writing are the written forms. It is the totality of language that is of utmost importance, for it is through language that communication takes place. As children are learning to write, they are also learning to listen, speak, and

read. These processes are interrelated and integrated within the language use. As children feel the need to communicate on a daily basis, language development is taking place.

As language serves a legitimate function in the lives of children and adults, it grows because of what it has to do. Research in oral language development has shown how children learn to speak without formal instruction. M.A.K. Halliday says: "The child knows what language is because he knows what language does."

Likewise children can learn to write as they express themselves in a journal, write a note, order an item, or create an imaginative story or poem. Children can learn to write in the same holistic way as they once learned to speak if the following principles are considered as teachers choose materials and plan classroom learning activities:

1. Writing is learned through use.
2. Children need to use and see the use of writing in many varied ways.
3. Writing must be functional at the time of learning if it is to be meaningful to the learner.
4. Writing develops both in and out of school if a literate environment surrounds the learner.
5. Writing develops at different rates within individual children of the same age.



THE LEARNER

As children enter elementary school they bring many linguistic strengths reflecting their backgrounds and experiences. They may appear to be very different in their language facility, but all are already competent language users who have mastered enough of their home language to be able to talk with adults and peers. No one has “taught” them deliberately. Languageing is a natural process as children are surrounded by meaningful functional language from birth. Their early attempts to speak are rewarded by the attention and encouragement of adults and other care givers. This interaction encourages the child to keep on trying. An example of this took place while I was visiting in my neighbor’s backyard.

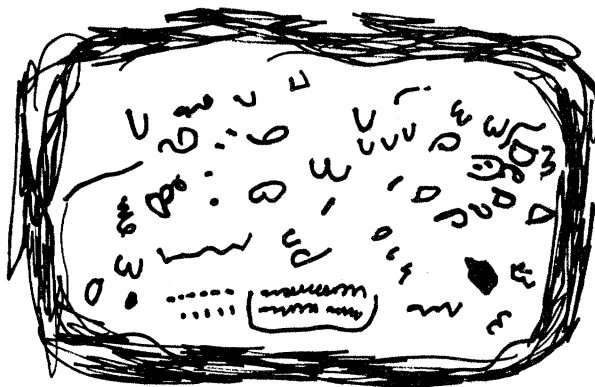
One-year-old Scott and his mom were with me in their backyard when Dad needed help in the house. As Mom hurried in and asked me to watch Scott, he looked concerned and started to follow her. When the screen door closed, he looked perplexed. After a few moments, he called, “MA.” She responded, “I’m right here, Scott.” He babbled for a few moments as his mother called back to him. He then returned to his play by me, confident that Mom was not too far away.

At this early age, Scott is understanding language, but is not able to fully produce it. When children hear language used around them, they want to use language to express their own thoughts and ideas. Later they begin to notice certain features, such as the way past tenses are formed by adding “ed,” or how plurals are formed by adding “s”:



Over-generalizations, such as these, are part of language learning, and give observers evidence that language is developing and that the child is learning how to use it to express her/his thoughts. Dan Slobin (author of *Psycholinguistics*) says: "One cannot help but be impressed with the child's great propensity to generalize, to analogize, to look for regularities — in short to seek and create order in his language."

In a literate society such as ours, children are surrounded by print in their homes and neighborhoods. There is a growing awareness of written language in its forms of reading and writing. Children begin to tell Daddy to stop the car as they approach the STOP sign. They may get excited and say EAT as they come to a McDonalds where they have had good things to eat previously. They also become aware of the use of writing. Marie Clay notes: "Somewhere between three and five years most children in a literate culture become aware that people make marks on paper purposefully." As the appropriate occasion arises, children often begin to write, though their early efforts may bear little resemblance to adult writing. It may even pass unnoticed by parents and other caregivers: Paul, at three years of age, was busy drawing the following picture at home. He attended nursery school where his teacher would label his pictures and possessions. As one looks at this drawing, there is evidence that Paul was already assuming this responsibility for himself.



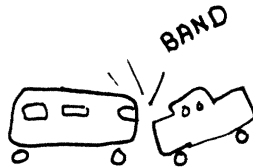
Amy, another three-year-old, became very indignant as her teacher began to manuscript her name on one corner of her drawing. She stated: "It gots my name," as she pointed to several wobbly lines present on her picture.

Roopa, aged 2½, comes from a home which had grandparents and other relatives living in England. As her mother writes to them, Roopa often encloses her own notes. One day, she eagerly answered the phone before her parents could reach it. As her mother came to the phone, Roopa said, "It's Dear Ba." Roopa is getting to know her grandmother through the medium of letters. It was unusual to be able to communicate orally as she was now able to do, and she responded with her more familiar use of written language.

The writing of pre-schoolers has become a recent focus of many researchers (Charles Read, Carol Chomsky, Marie Clay, Glenda Bissex, Donald Graves, etc.). As they observe children, they note that children exhibit certain features in their early writing once they move beyond scribbling and random letter formation. Carol Chomsky says, "They just use letters according to their names or sounds, putting down words as they hear them, and in the process, carrying out a splendid phonetic analysis. Their spellings are surprisingly uniform from child to child." These researchers have observed the following in various child-written examples:

1. Scribbling Stage
2. Use of consonants KATE = KT
3. Long or tense vowels added LIKE = LIK LADY = LADE
4. Long or lax vowels are added based on articulation awareness, phonological relationships. PEN = PAN IT = ET WET = WAT
5. Pre-consonantal nasals are omitted. BUMP = BP WENT = WET
6. Children are content to use homographs to represent various words. name = name or ENEMY

R KRS WET
BAND N A LADES
KR



Charles Read writes: "What the children do not know is the set of lexical representations and the system of phonological rules that account for much standard spelling; what they do know is a system of phonetic relationships that have not been taught by their parents or teachers." All these researchers conclude that pre-schoolers categorize sounds as they invent their own spellings prior to formal instruction. They construct words, hypothesize, revise rules, and are very systematic and logical in their approach to spelling.

Each of these kinds of pre-school experiences that children may have helps them to gain insights into how written language works. As teachers interact with learners entering school, the teachers can discover individual strengths that children bring, so that they can understand these beginnings, and expand the language base the child has. Charles Read again instructs: "An informed teacher should expect that seemingly bizarre spelling may represent a system of abstract phonological relations of which adults are quite unaware. Until we understand this system better, we can at least respect it and attempt to work with it, if only intuitively."

Children are active and eager participants in the learning process. As they enter school, their curiosity and enthusiasm are readily apparent. It is important that they be involved in the planning of learning activities for the classroom. Right from the beginning they can assume responsibility in planning the school day and can be the source of

ideas for determining subjects the class wishes to learn more about. As children learn, their ideas encouraged, they will grow in independent thinking. Donald Graves believes this process will have an effect on the writing of students. He found that "children wrote longer when writing about their own choices of topics and events." Evaluation sessions during and at the end of the school day provide all children with the opportunity to assess their experiences and be participants in making tomorrow an even better day!

As children begin formal schooling, they come with varied experience and linguistic backgrounds. Any two learners may be quite different. Ted and Vikki shared an August birthday. In one year, Ted wrote 2745 words while Vikki wrote 7089. Ted used all capital letters and invented spellings as he generated writing, and Vikki used lower case/capital letters and conventional spellings. Their writing facility was very different, yet both shared a need to communicate and interact. It is not appropriate for children to be given the same assignment and time allowance for completion, or to expect them to proceed at the same rate. Instead, individual programs must be designed if children are expected to grow and develop into competent writers.

THE TEACHER

As Yetta Goodman has noted, "Good teachers have always been kid watchers." The teacher's role in helping children to write is a very important one. Attitudes, beliefs, and actions shape the way that students feel about writing. The children in my classroom today write more and sooner than children in previous years. I am sure that my expanding interest and knowledge coupled with my actions has had an effect on the children that I teach. Frequently, teachers ask me, "What can a teacher do?" The answers to the question are surprisingly simple.

1. BE AN ADULT INTERACTING WITH CHILDREN — NOT A LECTURER DEMANDING A PASSIVE AUDIENCE. Although I work with whole groups of children at once, especially when reading to my class, the majority of my time is spent working with small groups or individuals. I respond to their writing. Children who write notes to me receive answers. As they write in journals, children know that I will read and often respond in writing to the meaning of what they write.

2. BE AN OBSERVER STILL LEARNING ABOUT CHILDREN. Many times I have asked children to explain why they are doing something. There is a big difference between the experiences and logic of a child and that of an adult. Glenda Bissex found a sign that her son had posted: DO NOT DISTURB GNYS AT WRK. She commented, "The genius at work is our human capacity for language. Do not disturb is a caution to observe how it works, for the logic by which we teach is not always the 'logic' by which children learn." Her son is one of her best teachers. He has told her, "I WILL TEACH U TO RIT AD THESE EZ HAOW U RIT" as he has written a message to her. My students have done the same for me. As I monitor their progress and begin to understand what they are doing, I can build on strengths and help with difficulties.

3. BE A ROLE MODEL. As one who loves to read, I find it easy to share with my students my experiences with books. This same feeling towards writing has developed. My class knows the excitement I have as I participate in a writing experience. For instance, as children write to pen pals, I write to their pen pal's teacher. Often I contribute a page to a classroom book. Writing is as much a part of my daily life as I expect it to be of my students'.

4. BE A MOTIVATOR AND AN ENCOURAGER. To do that, just ask children to be themselves. By this, I mean that I want them to write like six- or seven-year-olds. Once children try, they allow themselves to build on fragile beginnings. As they write their first independent words, I respond with the same excitement as a mother watching her baby take that first step or say a first word. Charles Read has a statement to explain why some children write, and others do not. I would like to consider its message as applicable to the classroom: "Possibly the most important parental contribution was that even though some of them worried about the development of bad spelling, all of the parents accepted the child's spelling as a creative production and offered adult spelling only when the child asked for it."

5. BE A RESOURCE PERSON, ENVIRONMENT ARRANGER, AND PROGRAM PLANNER. Bringing in story books, setting up a trip, talking to the school nurse about a heart model, etc., are a few of the many things which I do to stimulate learning in the classroom. As I discover interests, likes, dislikes, I can determine what is needed to further en-

hance their development. Children need successful experiences and to see themselves as able learners. They also need to be challenged to reach out and grow. Teachers can provide the support and leadership to help students grow. Teachers can be sure that time is allowed for children to think and comprehend. The day need not be so tightly controlled that the child moves from one teacher-directed activity to another.

6. DESIGN AN ENVIRONMENT FOR WRITING AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT. Susan Florio states: "Writing, as one of the many tasks in a busy school day, typically is not connected to anything or anyone else in the lives of students or teacher. If this is true, then 'letting children write' may amount to far more than pedagogical *laissez faire*. The teaching of writing may require vigilant attention to the learning environments in which writing occurs to insure that written expression is motivated and that it goes somewhere."

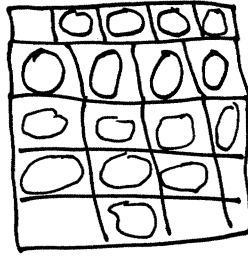
THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Traditionally most classrooms come equipped with several walls, assorted desks and tables, various bookcases and storage areas, chalk and bulletin boards. My classroom has all of these components along with a standard ABC chart stretched across the front of the room. Making that physical area a place where children are able to become literate is my first assignment.

If children are to become literate, print must be available, and children must be able to use it. Within my classroom, print is found everywhere:

1. CALENDAR — Several professionally-made calendars are hung in the room. One calendar has hooks and cards which can be changed monthly. Children can write on the cards and record special trips and happenings, birthdays, and days off.
2. CHALKBOARD — The date is recorded along with relevant news items brought in by the teacher and class.
3. BULLETIN BOARDS — During the year the class writes to various people. As answers are received, these letters are placed on one bulletin board for children to remove and read the correspondence as they wish. Another bulletin board is used to list all

I Like Putting
Mail, in Miss Milzs
Mail Box.



By
Suzie

- the class birthdays, along with names and pictures. One other board has been used to advertise books for other children to read. These may be professional or child-authored stories.
4. CHARTS — My students ride one of six different buses. All children's names are listed on a chart to remind them of their bus numbers and schedules.
 5. LABELS — Supply cans, mailboxes, coat hooks, etc. all bear the children's names. In addition, labels are made to note simple directions: "Put lunch boxes here." "No paper towels here. Go to the bathroom if you need some."
 6. PUBLISHED MATERIALS — Magazines, comics, 2000 trade books, assorted notebooks, and newspapers are found in the classroom. The trade books are filed in alphabetical order (except for those beginning with "A" or "The," of course!).
 7. STUDENT-AUTHORED BOOKS — Shelves in the Writing Center hold books written by the class. These books are kept there for the month the books

are written and the next month. For example, a book written on March 10 will go home on May 1. Often children duplicate pictures, and a copy is typed by the teacher or a volunteer. The copy remains permanently in the classroom.

8. STORE — Signs announcing sales hang on the walls of a carton-box store. Products inside are collected by the children in the classroom as mothers discard packages of family food items.

Children learn to write by writing. As they live in a literate environment, they will very naturally want to write. In order to do this, some equipment is required for children to be able to write. If materials are readily accessible, children can learn to get the items they need.

1. PAPER. Any type will do. It's a good idea to have many kinds available to accommodate different children's preferences at a given time. I keep lined and unlined paper, narrow and wider-spaced lined paper, plain white and colored paper available in various drawers.

2. CARDBOARD. Index cards, oaktag, posterboard, and cut-up boxes make good signs, which are sturdy when hung up by children.

3. MEMOS AND STATIONERY. Notepaper and memos can be dittoed and made available near the mailbox area.

4. NOTEBOOKS. Most schools have spiral notebooks. These books provide more permanence for a child's work and make very useful journals. Young writers may not be able to use the narrow-spaced lines, and may choose to use several spaces. They may also like to draw on the pages.

5. IMPLEMENTS. Pencils, both black and colored, allow children to record and erase if they change their minds. Crayons and thin markers are more permanent, but allow more color possibilities. Staplers, Scotch tape, and scissors allow children to construct booklets.

6. CHALKBOARD AND CHALK. If a space is made available for children to write, they will make use of the chalkboard to communicate to their classmates and teacher.

7. TYPEWRITER. I was able to get an old typewriter in my classroom. It has proven to be a valuable tool in getting children to write. Often children with less small muscle development than others will find writing by hand to be a laborious process, while using the typewriter goes much faster.

8. ALPHABET STAMPS, LABEL MAKER, PLASTIC LETTERS. Using a rubber stamp, young children can easily spell out words and sentences. Plastic letters serve the same purpose and often can be used on a magnetized chalkboard or other metal areas. A label maker is very useful, though the tape is somewhat expensive.

Now that the young writer has a workshop with supplies, a lot begins to happen. My classroom has been described as having a "flow." Learning to write is not locked in to a half-hour time period, just as life is not locked into compact little time units. Instead, writing — along with reading, listening, and speaking — occurs naturally and spontaneously all day long. Children are languaging as they need to when it fills a particular purpose. Some time periods are used for individual or small group activities; other time periods are available for total group work, such as reading to the class, showing a movie, or working on other projects.

To make the daily schedule come to life, the following vignette describes what happens during a work period:

Children enter Room 14 at the signal of the 9 o'clock bell. They go to different areas in the room to pick up supplies to begin or continue various projects. One child writes "December 10" on the chalkboard along with the words, "Charlie Brown is on TV tonite." Several children go to a file drawer to take out notebooks. Others begin to read. The final bell rings at 9:10, and shortly afterward, the teacher calls the class to the front of the room to take attendance and the lunch count. Time is allowed to share various news and personal information. Then the day's plans are discussed, and a brief schedule is listed on the board. An art project is briefly explained. The teacher has a newly completed classbook to read to the group, and children are encouraged to continue to add ideas. Other suggestions are made for writing or reading activities. The children are gradually dismissed to work in the classroom as they name what they plan to be working on. A mother aide comes at 9:30 to listen to children read. Soon the class is working on assorted projects around the room.

Matt is making a poster with an animal picture he cut from a magazine. He prints words underneath — sometimes writing independently, sometimes going to other resources to get information about words he needs. Stories are appearing in journals as well as in blank books. Jenny places her story in a box so that it will be published in a typed book.

Travis is reading to Jean. He follows the classbook words as she reads, and then reads a page on his own. He is a child learning English since his arrival in September. Vikki puts a note in the teacher's box, and checks her own to see if she has received any mail. Brian listens to a tape recording made by Bill Martin to accompany his *Instant Readers* book series. The teacher discusses a rough draft of a story with Ted, and then calls Caroline over for a Reading Conference. Alice and Regina read favorite stories to each other.

As an observer looks across the room, children are reading, writing, constructing, discussing, and listening. They work independently and busily on many things. At times, they are called together as a total group, or leave the room for special classes/recess, but each time they return to on-going projects. As one is finished, new ones are started. Children appear to be self-directed and involved in choosing learning activities. Writing is not isolated and done by the total class, but it is happening across the room. One child described a typical day in Room 14 in this manner:

Dear miss milz
I did all my wrke today
This is all The Things I did math
notbook letr read to myself read
to a Frend A *Frend is*
I made a mothers day book Jen.

Carol Chomsky accurately assesses what children write about: "The children write about things they know in their environment and things in which they are truly interested." It is up to the teacher to provide meaningful writing activities to generate the writing process education of children. For instance, I use notes and letters. As soon as the class members are identified, a letter is sent to each home inviting the children to stop by on the Teacher Preparation Day before school begins. Many parents come in with their children. As I show the children their new classroom, I show them their mailboxes. In them, I have placed another note from me. I also show them my mailbox and tell them that I like to receive notes during the day from them. Sometimes I am too busy to talk, and this is a chance for them to tell me things before they are forgotten.

Usually by the first actual school day several children are writing notes back to me. This note-writing extends

through the whole school year. Gradually, the children begin to write to peers and parents. If the opportunity arises, they also begin to write to pen pals. Through their note-writing experiences, they learn that print communicates a message. In addition, parents can provide valuable assistance in helping their children to begin to read and write. I suggest that they include a note in their child's lunchbox. Children respond naturally by writing notes for their parents to find.

Rather than having the children write 3 or 4 letters of a similar type to get pen pals, children make an introductory letter about themselves. I duplicate these, and send them to several possible classes.

DEAR SCOTT,
I LOVE YOU.

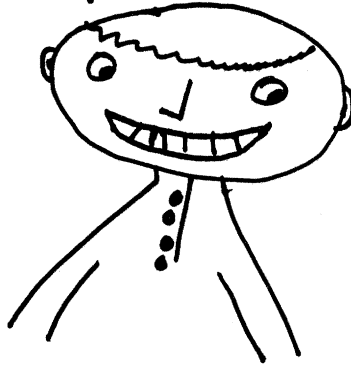
Love,
MOM



Pen pals have never been difficult for me to find. One source has been to use language arts students in a university teacher education program. As I have attended teacher conferences, I have usually found other interested teachers, and I have even found teachers within my own school district. Each year has brought new pen pals, and new topics for me, though I have remained in the same first grade classroom.

Students can also be encouraged to write to professional authors. Many authors will respond with a personal answer if children write individually to them. An entire class writing to one author usually will only get one class answer. Even authors who are too busy to respond will have their book companies send out biographical information and information about their latest books. Children take letters home to get a stamp and then mail the letters.

I am Richard
I am 6 Year sold
I like fun
Will you write
to me?



Labeling items in the classroom is beneficial provided that the children are involved in the process. When the children visit on the Teacher Preparation Day, I make a name label with them just in case they bring a sweater or coat on the first day of school. They choose a hook in our hall area to be used during the school year. This labeling process extends to all their materials and supplies. I keep several permanent magic markers just for this purpose. (They are only used with teacher supervision.) Later, labeling can be extended to give directions or describe things: "Put lunch boxes here." "Put scraps in this box." Labeling can be functional and fun. Labels are especially helpful if a child is just learning English. Most of the early reading and speaking that these children have done in my classroom have had labels as the print source: "This is Greg's chair." "Look at the ceiling."

During the first week of school I give each child an 8½ x 11 inch spiral notebook to be used as a personal journal.

This notebook keeps paper available to the child at all times. The journal can be used as the child wishes. Each day I read it and respond in writing, if appropriate. My responses are directed to the meaning, and I do not red-pencil or correct the child's writing. I ask the children to date each entry that they make, and often the children like to number the pages as they use the notebook. As soon as the entire notebook is finished, the child is allowed to take it home permanently.

Subjects vary. Holidays are a frequent choice, as well as things children like. Some of the children use a diary form, while others use the pages for stories and poems. All the topics are those in which children have enough background and interest and in which they are able to communicate a thought.

At the beginning of the year, I often suggest that children write about things they like. I also have a box of starter cards. They are approximately 8 x 10 inches with magazine pictures accompanying the captions. Each has been covered with transparent contact paper or lamination film. Some of

October 16

to day
me and

Shirley
and

tiffany

hav a

beg Svcr

Btt I cant tal

Will you tell me
someday? M.M.

the captions are: I like I can I know I wish I hope If I were In my car On my bike. Other starters can be found in *Wishes, Lies and Dreams* by Kenneth Koch.

Books can be made to remember special happenings and occasions. These books might be about a trip or a special event in the classroom. When children make a book like this, I discuss the subject and then dismiss the children from the group when they have an idea. They must continue to listen from wherever they are working so that someone does not duplicate their idea. This way books do not end up with pages that are all alike. If the last few children have difficulty, I enlist help from the rest of the group again, and everyone is able to contribute a page.

Many books by professional authors have predictable portions which children can be encouraged to join in during the reading. Books like these also lend themselves well to children extending the author's pattern with ideas of their own. After reading a book, discussing the pattern, and drawing out ideas, I often put out a ditto with the open-ended pattern typed or written on it. Children may fill in their ideas and hand them in. As soon as I have enough pages, I put them into a classbook. (I leave empty pages which can be filled in later as more children get new ideas.) This is a contribution to a book which my class named *IF I WASN'T ME*. It is based on the book *I Like To Be Me*, by Barbara Bel Geddes.

The following books are a few that encourage young authoring:

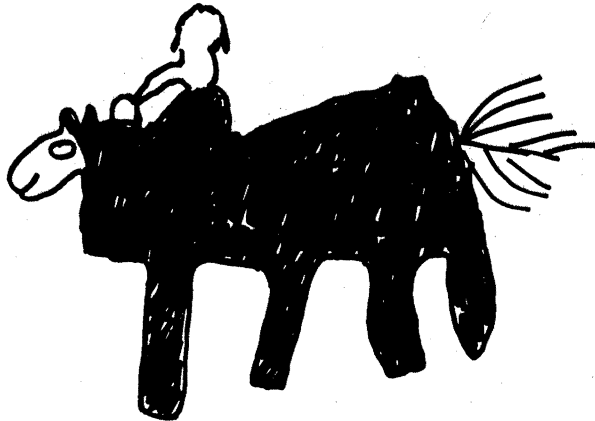
1. *How To Start A Day*, by Byrd Taylor. New York: Scribners, 1978. This beautifully illustrated book will take a class to the American Southwest and around the world, as the author declares, "A morning needs to be sung to." Have children think of the first thing they can remember that started their day. Record their thoughts, and put together a free verse collection.

Daddy singing
Amy yelling
The smell of coffee
A ring-ing-ing clock
The sun shining
The TV was on
Mama calling, "Get Up."

2. *A House Is A House For Me*, by Mary Ann Hoberman. New York: Viking, 1978. Every type of home you can think of, and many others you probably never have are mentioned in this book. My first graders had fun trying to think of kinds of houses before I read the entire book to them. Here are a few that they came up with that were not in Hoberman's book:

A cat is a house for a flea
A body is a house for a drop of blood
A coffin is a house for a vampire.

If I wasn't me, I would like to be
a HORSE so I COULD
RUN FASTER



by SUZIE.

3. If Books

Which Horse Is William? by Karla Kuskin. New York: Harper & Row, 1959.

The Runaway Bunny by Margaret Wise Brown. New York: Scholastic Books, 1942.

I Like To Be Me by Barbara Bel Geddes. New York: Young Readers Press, 1963.

If The Dinosaurs Came Back by Bernard Most. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

Read any of these books, and let children guess what will happen. Develop innovations. As William turns into different animals, his mother can always tell who he is. Chris from my classroom said, "If I were a giraffe, I would still wear my Jolly Green Giant Pants." The runaway bunny's mom always finds him. My class decided they would not get lost if they changed into something else. They said,

"I will be an egg," and then Miss Milz said,

"I will collect all the Easter eggs, and find you."

"I will be a lion in a cage." Then Miss Milz said,

"I will be the lion tamer, and come in with you."

4. *The Ten Little Caterpillars*, by Bill Martin, Jr. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970.

As you read the books aloud, encourage children to anticipate the rhyming words as you read. As they discover the structure, they can write one of their own:

One day, as I looked in a tree —

Lots of birds were seen by me.

The first bird made a nest.

The second bird decided to rest.

The third bird laid an egg.

The fourth bird hurt his leg.

The fifth bird climbed a tree.

The sixth bird met a bee.

The seventh bird hunted for a worm.

The eighth bird started to squirm.

The last bird said,

"Oh boy it's Spring!

It's a beautiful thing!"

5. *What Can You Do With A Pocket?* by Eve Merriman. New York: Knopf, 1964.

Ask about things one likes to put in a pocket. Do boys and girls put different things in their pockets? Write a pocket story. Use your own pattern. If I had a _____ in my pocket . . . In my pocket I have _____. With a _____ in my pocket . . .

6. *Merry, Merry February*, by Doris Orgel. New York: Parents Magazine Press, 1977. This nonsense book in rhyme is one to read during February. It can turn a dull winter day into an exciting one, and can give permission for a whole month of telling fabulous fibs.

7. *Deep in the Forest*, by Brinton Tuttle. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976.

When this wordless picture book is put out, it is fun to watch the surprised faces as children discover a bear cub slipping into a person's home, instead of Goldilocks. The book will take readers back to the original Three Bears for comparison and provide a stimulus for children to try other variations on old familiar fairy tales. Lev Vygotsky says that "What the child can do in cooperation today, he can do alone tomorrow."

If children are going to be young authors, it is important that they be exposed to the richness of children's literature every day. When reading to children, I often talk about the author and try to develop curiosity about who might have written the book and why. I begin to suggest that they might like to try to write a story themselves and that the stories can be typed and put into blank books to be read by children in our classroom. Children can create new adventures for favorite people found in literature.

Along with reading professional books, I show my class copies of books made by children in my previous classes. As I read these books, I tell how a particular child got an idea and put it into a story — sometimes even showing a rough draft. Once one child writes a story to be published, the class is on its way, and many children begin to write stories on their own topics.

To be ready for my young writers, I keep a supply of

When Ramona took ice skating lessons. by caroline

the first day when Ramona went on the ice she
fell down. she also was scared, but she was doing O.K.
then a little while she fell down. And it was wet.
Ramona went to her mom and said, mommy I fell down."
and I am all wet. so Mrs. Quimby took Ramona home.
days and days went by. then the test came. she was more scared
then ever, but she passed the test. she got 3 bags. Her
whole family was happy. even beezus!

blank books on hand. I usually meet with parents and get them to help me make them. After a child writes a story, we have a conference to discuss it, and the story is typed. The author illustrates it if he or she wishes, and it becomes part of our classroom library.

Students write or dictate a manuscript. After the first writing is complete, have the child read the manuscript to you. Then help to edit for publication. Offer suggestions by skilled questioning that does not in any way destroy or diminish the author's pride in the product. Discuss placement of text and where illustrations will go in the book. Type the manuscript. Work within margins of five inches. Write author's name, grade, school, and date on the title page. Include dedications and table of contents, if the child wishes.

Make the cover:

- a. Cut two pieces of cardboard (6 x 9).
- b. Cut contact paper or wallpaper fabric with dry mount or cleaner bags (14 x 11).
- c. Adhere b. to cardboard. Leave ¼ inch between cardboards, or the book will not close. Mitre corners. Cut off a triangle of contact paper, or fold corners in if it is fabric or wallpaper. Fold side edges in. Paste the triangles of contact paper over the four corners to reinforce. Set aside.

Make the pages:

- a. Stack 6-10 pages of 8¼ x 11 ditto paper. Fold in half.
- b. Sew down the middle. This can be done by machine (largest stitch available) or by hand (punch an uneven number of holes — start in the middle from the back, and go in and out).
- c. Paste end sheets to the cover you made previously.

Finish up:

- a. Cut text apart, and paste in book.
- b. Have the student make the illustrations. Iron to set the crayon and smooth the sheets. (Just face the illustration down on old newspaper and use a low temperature to iron.) Cut to 5 x 7. Paste in book.
- c. Put title on cover. The author's name can be added.

Read and share the new book. Enjoy the pleasure of publishing a book with a young author!

Carol Chomsky, observing a first grade teacher, comments:

She starts by getting this message across to the kids in her room about spelling: "Your judgment is good. Trust it. Figure out how the word sounds to you and write it down that way." Along with that kind of confidence, she provides her children with a bucketfull of wooden and plastic letters, a diary for each child and many reasons to write.

As children become aware of the usefulness and meaning of print, their desire to write by themselves begins to grow. I answer questions if a child asks me how to write a word. Gradually, I turn the question back to the child by asking, "How do you write it?" Sometimes I put the adult spelling next to a generated one if the child wants to make the comparison.

Children begin to put down remembered word forms, and generate words as they discover relationships and principles of spelling. As they construct and revise rules, their spelling can be called invented spelling. I do not correct each word, for when children first begin to write, it is important that they find success in their first attempts to communicate. Teachers need to be aware of what is happening

and be able to encourage and support the effort. The greatest way to get a child to try again is to be able to read the intended message the young writer sent. From the time each child first writes, that child intends to represent meaning. Marie Clay describes the typical beginning writer:

“The first things learned will be gross approximations which later become refined, weird letter forms, invented words, make-believe sentences.” Understanding this statement and sharing a classroom with my young writers, I easily get the meaning from Dana’s message: “I lRd Hw to PeT. By Dana”

He tells me, “I learned how to print.” Dana is at the start of his spelling career. His first attempts are similar to other first graders and related to the adult spelling he will eventually use. He shows an awareness of phonetic acuity with his letter choices and does not put down random letters to represent his words. His most important goal right now is to get a thought into written form. If Dana continues to write and receive support from understanding recipients, his spelling will continue to develop and become more conventional. Researchers such as Glenda Bissex are noting that spellings evolve through a whole series of changes.

If children are asking questions of every word and still lack confidence in their ability, I will take dictation. To do this, I ask the children to dictate brief statements that they want recorded. Then I write the statements for them and read them with the children. Spaces are left underneath for the children to copy the written statement. I suggest that they erase my “helper words” and re-read what they have written themselves. Dictation can be done on art work or in the journal.

The technique of Written Conversation, developed by Carolyn Burke of Indiana University, can also be helpful in getting children to take the first step in writing. I simply write a short message and read it aloud as I hand it to the child. I then give the child the paper and pencil for a response. If a child tells me “I can’t write,” I ask the child to

pretend and tell me what he/she wants to say. Very few children write nothing, and usually they write a lot:

Teacher: Hi
Child: Hi
Teacher: I am Miss Milz
Child: I am Dana
Teacher: I like Room 14
Child: I lk U

“A developmental writing method assumes that all writing, no matter how incoherent or how incomplete it appears, does represent an attempt at communication, an attempt that must be treated with respect,” Elizabeth McPherson wisely advises. Writing is difficult to test. Fortunately, it is not hard to evaluate if the evaluator keeps several principles in mind:

1. It must be continuous.
2. It must be based on actual writing.
3. It must involve self-evaluation.
4. It should help the learner to grow and develop.

To accomplish the above, a teacher should keep samples of writing done by each student over a year's time, and even from year to year. Writing folders can be made, and samples inserted weekly or monthly. The journals provide a daily record very naturally and interesting information if the reader goes back several months. As children look at their writing over a period of time, they can note their progress by comparing samples from different times. Parents can be shown the progress. Teachers can determine strengths and weaknesses that can be the focus of teacher/student conferences. Donald Graves outlines a conference approach to assist developing writers: “In a school whose teachers follow the process-conference approach, a teacher might think, Jennifer is ready for quotation marks in her writing now. Jennifer will meet quotation marks when dealing with the conversation of characters in the story she is writing. She will look for models from literature. ‘See, this is how an author shows people are talking. You put marks here and here. Now your knight is talking.’ ”

Research in child language development suggests errors are not random, but indicate that children are learning

language and applying their knowledge. They reveal how children are reaching out and organizing new information in relation to the foundation they already have. The more that I observe children writing, the more I believe that children have a reason for whatever they do. As I read their early messages, I am confident that these young writers will become more proficient and be able to communicate their ideas in printed form. Their beginnings will form a solid base for the future.

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