**“I Wrote that Picture Book!: Creating Early Childhood Writers**



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**Guidelines to Remember:**

Beginning writing skills start with pictures:

* The idea of developing writing skills to help children build understand how to put their thoughts on paper (or eventually on the screen).
* Children still have challenges with fine motor skills during the early childhood years.
* When faced with writing letters ‘correctly,’ there is no development of ideas in the child’s mind. Drawing a picture encourages creativity and lets the idea percolate inside the child’s thought process.
* Drawing a picture IS writing to a young child. It is putting her thoughts on paper the best way she knows how to do it.

Separate ‘Writing’ From ‘Handwriting’:

* Be careful not to have children copy words, sentences, or fill-in-the-blank sheets as a ‘writing’ activity.
* Forming letters is a handwriting activity and supports emergent reading and helps a child develop his fine motor skills.
* It is difficult for a child to ‘think’ of information or put a ‘story’ on paper while he is struggling to form letters and equate those letters to sounds and words.
* Writing letters to represent thoughts or stories can occur naturally with a child when he is not pressured to combine the skills before he is ready.

Writing Should be for Important Purposes:

* A teacher should not challenge the child to write “whatever you want” or “be creative,” without more direction and purpose.
* Make writing assignments have a purpose, such as creating their own book (more information to follow), or responding to something like, “Draw a picture of your favorite thing to do at school,” or “Draw a picture of your favorite part of the story we just read.”
* Make sure to have each child share what she drew with the group or individuals. Without sharing, the activity loses purpose and importance.
* When developmentally appropriate, encourage the child to write letters (for beginning sounds) or words that are associated with the picture. This begins the authentic writing process.

Writing Should be Valued by the Writer and Others:

* Sharing, as mentioned in the last list, is an important way to validate the child’s writing. Allowing others to comment and share how much they like the picture (and eventual letters and words), is another way to validate and excite a child about her work.
* Creating books to be shared is another way to show value for what the writer has produced.
* Make sure to train the parents to be constructive and supportive and not critical. For example, when the child begins to write words, adults should support that effort, not be critical about spelling or letter formation.

Writing Should Foster Communication And The Writer’s Learning And Understanding:

* Appropriate writing activities helps children use what they have learned in language arts (alphabet, phonological awareness, spelling, word patterns, sentence construction). The trick is to provide support, but not dictate or demand that they use a certain skill.
* Providing support as children explore and discover how they can put their ideas together on paper to share will help support their language and reading skills.

**Creating Books In A Writer’s Workshop Is A Great Way To Support The Natural Process Of Writing**

* Encouraging and support writing daily.
* Provide materials and time for continued writing activities (activities that continue for multiple days).
* Creating a book gives the child a sense of accomplishment and to visualize their writing potential.
* Supports stages of writing.
  + - **Stages of Writing**: observation, random scribbling, controlled scribbling, named scribbling, drawing/writing separation, production of name, linear expansions, labeling, pre-phonetic spelling, phonetic spelling, drawing to expand story, writing long stories.

**Making Books:**

* Is developmentally appropriate. Young children love to make things.
* Encourages children to do bigger work and develop stamina for writing.
* Causes children to live like writers and think about their books.
* Makes the “reading like writers” connection so clear.
* Helps children begin to understand the process of composition and decision-making.
* Helps children begin to understand genre, purpose, and audience.

(Ray, 2018 – see references)

Getting Started with Making Books

* Provide time
  + There should be set times for the children to work on their books. It could be a set time for everyone to work or a choice time during center work.
* Provide space
  + It is suggested that there be a writing center and designated space (rather than distributing everyone’s books for a certain amount of time) in case a child wants to add to his/her book at additional times. A writer’s corner can also display pictures of the writing process.
* Provide Writing tools
  + Pencils, makers, crayons should be readily available. Other tools, such as paint and brushes, could be used for illustrations.
* Provide blank books
  + Begin with blank sheets stapled together and you may want to eventually use pages with a few lines at the bottom.

***Strategies for Helping Children Make Books***

* Remember that creating and ‘writing’ books is a *process.* The focus should not be on the final product/book, but on the process of writing the child goes through during its production (although, the finished books will be fabulous!).
* At the beginning, have the child just begin drawing. When starting a book, it is not important (and it could be detrimental) for the child to begin with an ‘idea.’ Let the child begin to draw and a more natural idea will eventually occur. Often, several pictures in a book will tie an idea together for her.
* Making a book should take place over a period of time. Have the child work on parts of the book throughout a week or two week period.
* At the end of the school day, challenge the children to think of things while they are home that they can add to their book when they return the next day.
* As the children in your group participate in the book-making experience, take pictures of the process. Display those pictures of the process of writing in the book making center. Update the photos often.
* If developmentally appropriate for the age group, and the skills are previously taught, suggest that the basic rule for making a book is that when the book is finished, it has a picture and words (or letters according to age) on each page and there is a cover on the book.
* In reference to the bullet above, do not expect or insist that the child go from the cover to the end of the book in sequential order by page. The best creative thinking will come when children can revisit aspects of their story or jump ahead and fill in the middle part. Many authors create a cover at the *end* of their journey, not the beginning. In other words, resist jumping into the process with ‘organizational’ requirements. Remember, writing should be a natural process, not an explicitly organized task. Creativity and excitement will flourish when the child feels freedom to do things ‘their way.’
* It is essential that the children share throughout the process. This brings a strong sense of purpose to the writing. At the end of each day, have several children share what they added to their books during that day.
* Continue to model writing daily for your children whether it is a morning message, a class newspaper, or sentences from your reading program. This writing model will help children naturally begin to add letters and words to the pages of their books.
* Continue to provide fine motor development activities, such as molding letters in dough, writing with fingers in sand, or exploration of forming letters with pencils, markers and crayons. This fine motor development will also help in the writing process when the child begins to add letters or words to his/her book. It will become natural, not a difficult task.

Additional Things to Remember:

* Train your parents. As mentioned earlier, you don’t want a child’s creation to be destroyed by judgmental comments. Such comments can shut down the entire writing process. Explain to the parents at a back to school night, or by letter or email, what you are doing with the book-making process. Challenge them to celebrate what their child has accomplished. Spelling, sentence structure, and reading will all fall into place with time and shouldn’t be judged in early writing.
* Give the child as much time as possible to complete a book project. Every child’s process timeline may be different. Allow as much freedom as possible with the timeframe. It is usually more beneficial to the process to allow a child to complete the project she has started, rather than insisting she begin a new one with other members of the class.
* Do not write on a child’s book without permission (and even then, only if absolutely necessary). You don’t want to give the impression that the project has to be ‘fixed’ by you in order to be valued.
* Make sure the books are shared often.

References

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