

How Can I Create A Meaningful Classroom Environment to Increase Consistency in Positive Writing Opportunities?

Brenda Follington



Brenda Follington with her Grade 1 class

Biography

Brenda's passion for teaching in the elementary division began 28 years ago. She has spent most of her career teaching Grades 1-4. The best five years of her teaching career were in a Family Grouping class (Grades 1-3) at Agnes Hodge School in Brantford. The enthusiasm and the support of the parent community, students, principal and staff were so positive. She has also had experience as an Early Literacy Teacher for the Grand Erie District School Board (GEDSB). This was an excellent professional opportunity to work with staff and students throughout the GEDSB. Brenda is presently teaching Grade 1 at Bethel – Queen's Ward in Paris. This is her first Action Research project.

Abstract

When I was approached by Deb Opersko, Primary Consultant, Simcoe School Support Centre (SSSC), to participate in an action research project, I began to seriously think about how five, six and seven year olds discover writing experiences in Grade 1. I believe ages five through eight are wonder years. That's when children begin learning to study, to reason and to cooperate. Young children learn best through active, hands-on teaching methods. Children develop at varying rates and we have to allow for these differences through a variety of instruction.

The past two years of my teaching career were spent in Grades 3 and 4. I realized the importance of meaningful print in early primary grades as children learn to communicate ideas and thoughts through oral and written language. As I was entering a new grade level this year, I chose to focus on writing in Grade 1. Through professional reading material, I began to see that early literacy was the backbone in achieving positive success in writing and reading experiences. My children exceeded my expectations this year. Upon entering my class this year, many of the children had no recognition of sound-letter relationships. By December 2003, some of the children were writing short sentences and reading patterned books. By the end of the year, each child published a story. They were so proud of their efforts. I was so excited for my students! My background knowledge as a former Early Literacy Teacher and acting Lead Teacher in Early Years Reading helped me in investigating this question: How can I create a meaningful classroom environment to increase consistency in positive writing opportunities?



What are my Beliefs about Children and Learning?

Each child in my classroom is unique and is surrounded by a nurturing, positive learning environment. Children should be given the opportunity to learn how to learn using four skills of learning: Initiative, Organization, Communication and Independence.

I need to act as a facilitator and initiate confidence and self competence in each individual. The child's first few years in school could be threatening unless we nurture each child's needs. The teacher modeling and the Gradual Release of Responsibility are so important in a young child's beginning in school.

In my classroom, each child learns organizational skills to help him/her develop good work habits. Organization by all those individuals involved (child, teacher and parent/ guardian) is crucial in a learning environment. Routines are learned quickly through modeling and careful planning.

Children learn to speak, read and write using constant and consistent forms of communication. Read aloud, shared reading, reader's theatre and problem solving techniques all accent the oral communication which is necessary even before a child can print letters on a page. When children discover the patterns and sounds of language, it is so exciting and meaningful.

Teaching children to be independent is a crucial part of early primary education. As we plan for their future as lifelong learners, we acknowledge their ability to communicate with one another. Children are experts in experience.

Children learn through their own play and discovery of adventures and through their personal manipulative experiences. Each child needs to experience the discovery stage in order to develop appropriate independent behaviours.



How Do I Gradually Release Responsibility?

Children experience the manipulation of letters through an activity that involves Working with Words. The goal of this activity is to develop fluency in recognizing and spelling high frequency words and to teach children to look for patterns in words to help decode and spell. Initially, the pattern is as follows:

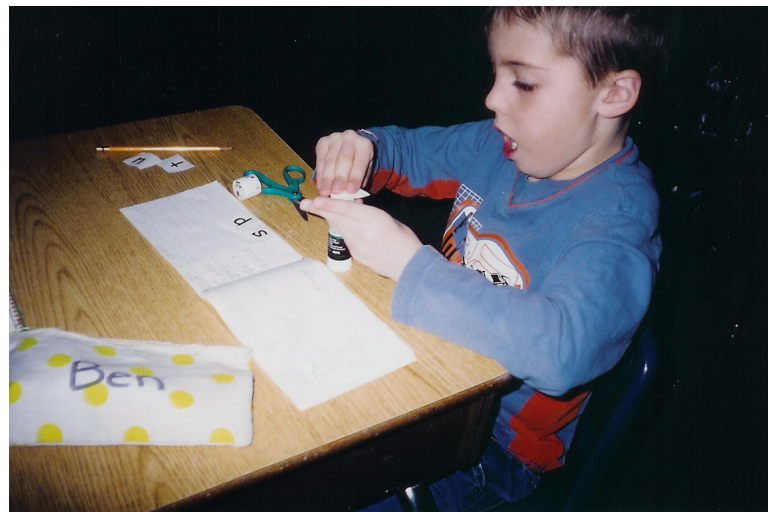
1. I Do. You Watch.
2. I Do. You Help.
3. You Do. I Help.
4. You Do. I Watch.

I select five or six letters (one of the letters is a vowel). I use large alphabet cards so that the children are able to visualize the letters more clearly and precisely. Each letter is held by a student in front of the large group. The letters are scrambled up so that the children have to manipulate the letters to create a new word. Initially, I model the process for the children. I move children around to create a simple two or three letter word. We try to find sounds that we know or even smaller words and chant the sounds or chunks of words together. We record that word on chart paper to keep a running record of words that we make together. Next I ask for volunteers to create a word. I select a child to make a word with the scrambled letters. The chosen child will move each person around to make a new word. We repeat the process over and over to create a list of new words. The children love this activity because even if the word doesn't make sense, we try to work together to add or delete letters to make a word.

Our next step is to organize our own words from the scrambled letters in our notebooks. We repeat the same process together for the first few words. A child tells us in words which letters to manipulate on our desks. After the word is made and read aloud by the class, we print it in our books. Then each child works independently to make the remainder of the words. Finally, we make a word using all the letters. We print the word and glue the letters at the bottom of the page. Sometimes we can illustrate the final word but not all the time.

In summary, Working with Words, is a great activity to reinforce the exploration of letters and sounds. Almost all children enjoy making marks on a page. To children writing can be as exciting and rewarding as singing, painting

or modeling with plasticine. They should be able to enjoy it as a means of expression and exploration, as a natural and purposeful activity. As children develop the essentials of language and feel the confidence and self esteem of printing independently, fluency in writing develops and spelling develops.



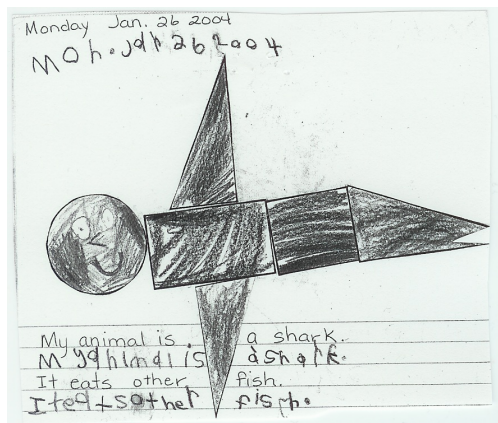
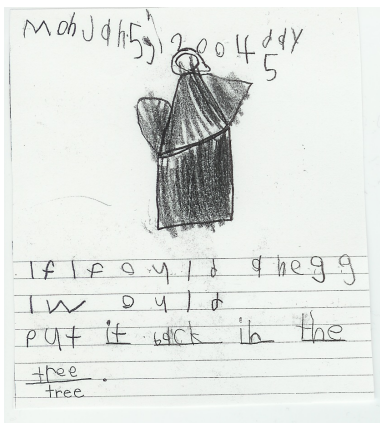
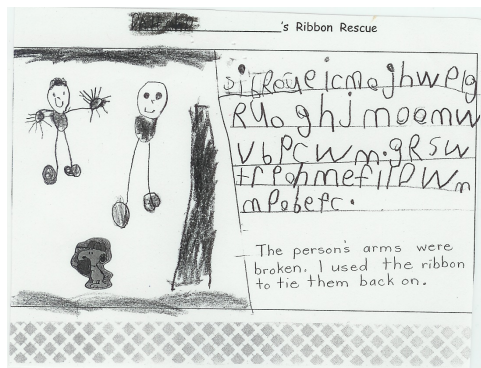
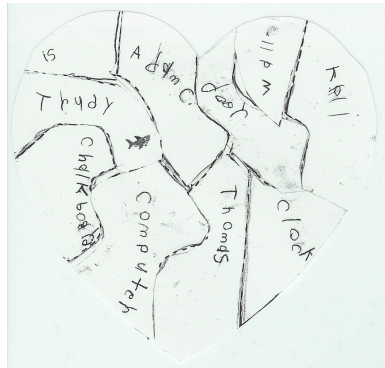
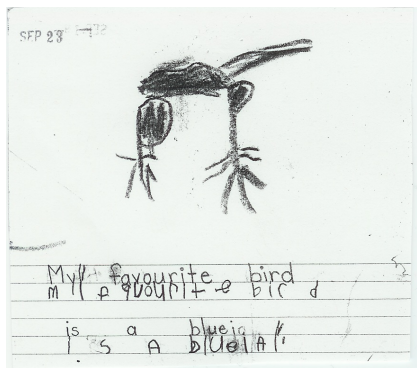
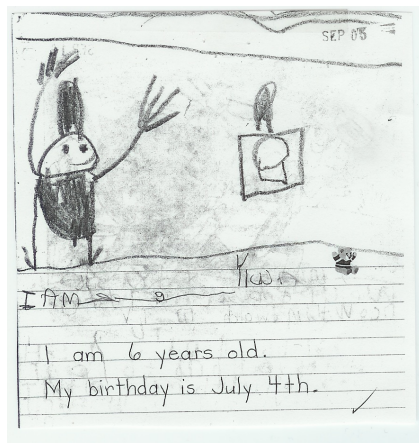
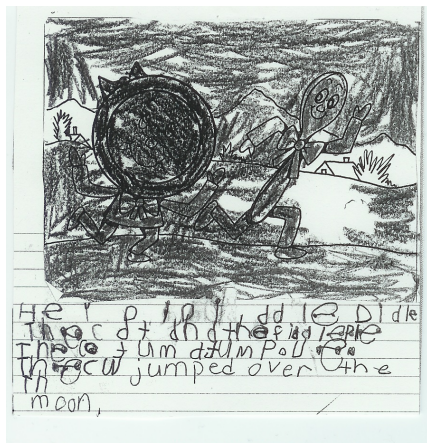
What Did I Observe in the Early Writing Process?

When the children were involved in the early writing process, I realized that my class was very diverse in their writing abilities. As an experienced teacher, I had to decide on a variety of literacy strategies to enhance my program. I had to support my children in active learning experiences. We used Chalk and Sock activities with small chalkboards, magnetic letters, word wall games, and interactive writing. Children are excellent observers, manipulators and creators. A nurturing, caring environment helps the steady growth patterns to blossom continually.

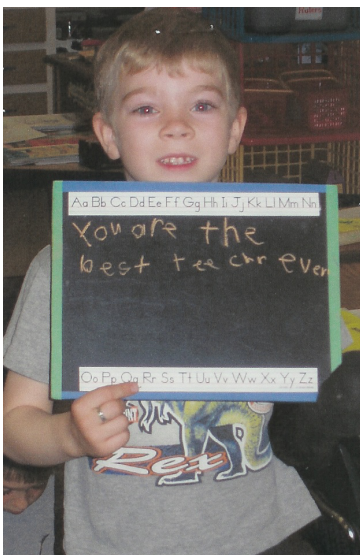
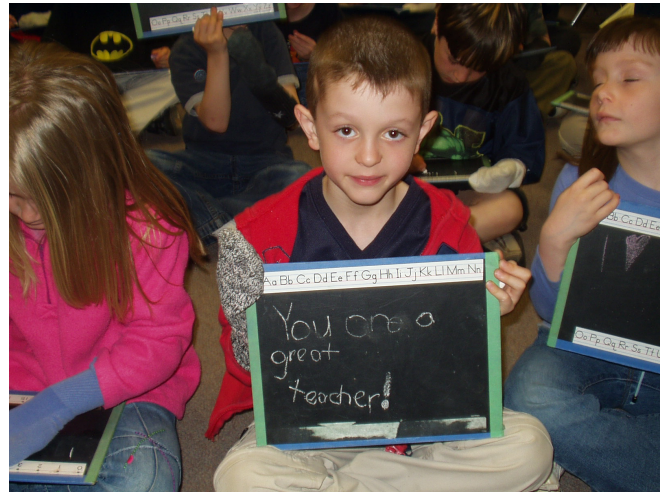
In September, a student in my class was having great difficulty adjusting to a full day away from home. He was very emotional on a daily routine. He cried consistently that school was too hard. He was also experiencing parental

withdrawal. Through daily positive discussions with mother and child along with consistent routines, he began to feel comfortable knowing that he was in a nurturing environment.

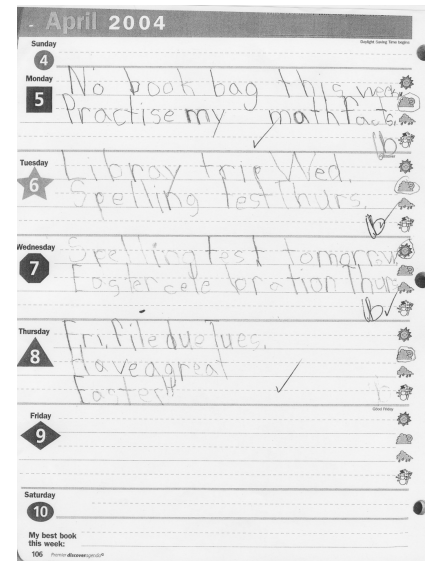
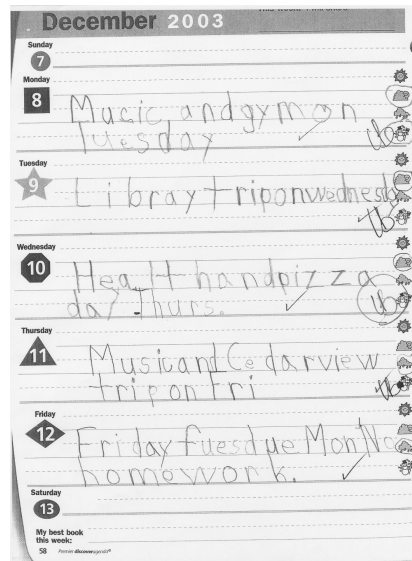
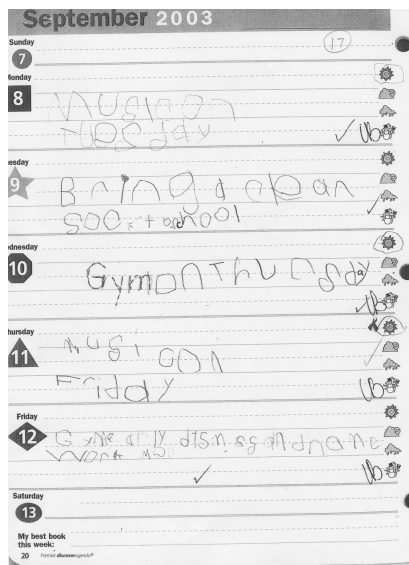
Through the support of classmates, myself, an Educational Assistant, a Learning Resource Teacher and parent volunteers, he would participate in most activities. He had no penmanship qualities or phonemic awareness skills. Many downhill battles outweighed the positive leaps. He was exploring the language with many manipulatives but there were no connections between sound and letter relationships. The Learning Resource Teacher assisted in Handwriting Without Tears – a program devised to encourage children to focus on the proper pencil grip and small motor control of a specific group of letters. I was attempting to use hand over hand printing and having him trace dotted letters. Peer teaching and small group activities were beneficial for him. The Educational Assistant worked with the Jolly Phonics program. A peer partner relationship was beneficial for him to gain some self esteem and learn by doing. Through many daily morning visits with his mother, she could see some improvements in his printing. I was so excited when I didn't have to model dotted letters anymore and he could print most letters independently. The SMILE on his face and fewer tears from both mother and son were definitely signs of positive success.



Activities using Chalk and Sock and Magnetic Letters and Trays



Work Samples of Agenda Printing



How I Use Creative Educational Play in my Classroom?

Manipulative materials, teachable bulletin boards and a variety of literacy centres are some examples of an exciting and enriching environment for children. I feel it is so important to model repeatedly and experience the world of the child as well as acting as facilitator and leader. Eye contact, facial and voice expression and verbal communication are important factors for creative play to take place consistently. Specific goals need to be established in the classroom so that each child can achieve success.

As we model behaviours and participate in the child's play, each child becomes a unique, respected individual. Play is what a child does best! There are no right or wrong formulas for discovery learning. Academic skills are learned through play. The teacher is the guide or facilitator who has thoughtful input into a child's learning experiences. The teacher provides support and develops curriculum goals in the classroom.

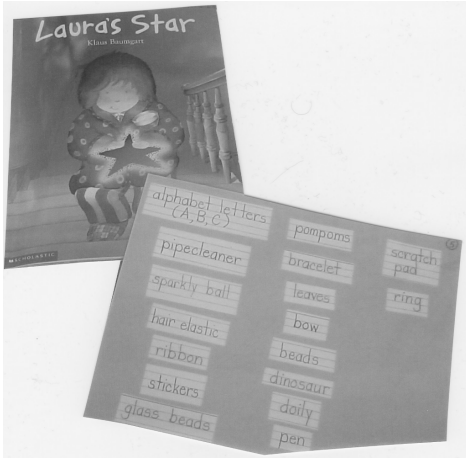
Many skills are developed in the planning process – thinking, oral and written language, social and emotional skills, and physical skills. Careful observation and planning time are essential factors in discovering problem solvers and nurtured human beings. Children organize and use thinking skills through their own discoveries.

Children learn by listening and imitating peers and adults. Language is an ongoing process in every subject area. Co-operation, sharing and independence take on a special meaning in my classroom. As the children become physically active in literacy centres, they discover and practice new and rewarding learning experiences. Play is discovery learning.

One of the best ways to demonstrate creative play is to share two stories that I used in creative play centres near Christmas. The books were entitled "Laura's Star" and

"Laura's Christmas Star". The story "Laura's Star" is about a little girl who wants a friend. A twinkling star fell to Earth and Laura picked it up. A point of the star had broken off so Laura repaired it and took the star to her room. Finally, she found a special friend. She has many adventures with her new friend.

This story was one of the best that I have read. This story made me think of many cross – curricular connections. In math, I could create lessons about sorting and classifying and graphing. In science, I could include the "twinkling objects" into the Matter and Materials strand. In art, I could include lessons or collages using various sparkling



items. In language, I could establish many writing opportunities for story starters including reasoning, communication and conventions of language.

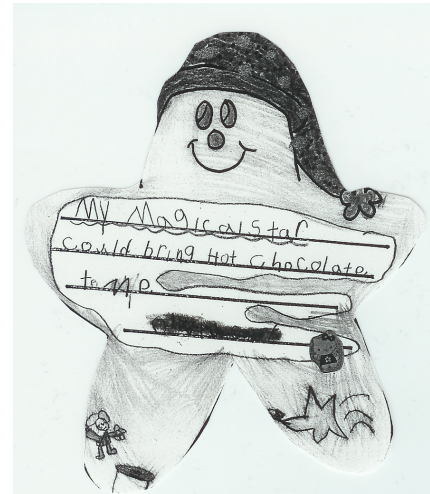
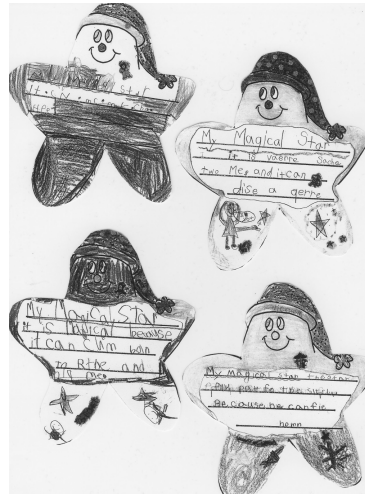
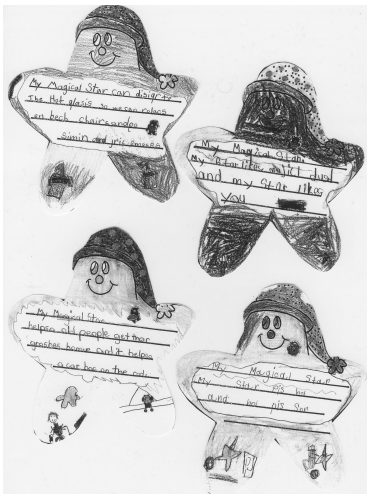
I decided to create literacy centres about “twinkling objects”. It was a terrific success! Before reading the text, I asked the children to brainstorm ideas about twinkling things. The chart shows their ideas and their personal pictures. The children were so excited to share and draw pictures of their ideas. I had created a variety of sparkling gift bags containing shiny objects. Each group had time to explore and discover the contents of the bags. They couldn’t wait to pour out the contents and get started. The sparkle in their eyes was absolutely beyond belief! They would come to me sharing the special trinkets that they had found. One of my students who has difficulty expressing herself orally couldn’t stop talking about trinket after trinket. I almost cried, I was so excited for her! Her classmates were overwhelmed when she got to share later in the activity. An eagerness and a love to learn through play and discovery were very evident in every group.



Writing is best learned when it is actively used in meaningful contexts. In “Laura’s Star”, the little girl retrieves the star after it had broken a point. I asked the children to brainstorm orally how they would repair the broken point on the star. Their ideas were very creative and reasonable. I have included some samples of their ideas in written form. Writing develops best in an environment that encourages experimentation. These children expressed a concern to repair the broken point through communication with the reader.

- Star 1: My Magical Star can disappear to the hot places so we can relax on the beach with chairs and go swimming and drink smoothies.
- Star 2: My Magical Star likes magical dust and my star likes you.
- Star 3: My magical Star helps old people get their groceries and it helps a car back on the road.
- Star 4: My star plays hockey and soccer.

Hey there, awesome teacher!
I LOVED being in your room yesterday. There are lots of "things" twinkling in your room... and I'm not talking about the things in your sparkly bags either. Those kids are very lucky people.



Star 1: It can make my family happy.

Star 2: It is very special to me and it can disappear.

Star 3: It is magical because it can come down to Earth and help me.

Star 4: The star fell out of the sky because he can fly home.

Star1: My Magical Star can bring hot chocolate to me.

It is so interesting to watch the children achieve success when they have a purpose for writing. When I praise the children, it develops self-confidence and makes them risk takers. I feel that a miracle has been accomplished.

According to Dr. Donald Laing,

In the cognitivist view of language acquisition the major impetus behind language development is a desire to make sense of the world. Language provides children with a means of developing and organizing a representation of the world, and serves as their major method of integrating new knowledge with that which they already know. Language is the child's principal tool for learning. By attempting to formulate knowledge in our own words we soon find out what we understand and what we do not understand. Writing in our own language lets us take personal possession of new and difficult ideas. Writing enables us to reflect, to reconsider, to find connections we never saw before, to discover the resources of our own minds, in short, to learn. (Laing, 1980)



How I Involve Parents in my Programme through the Bookbag Activities?

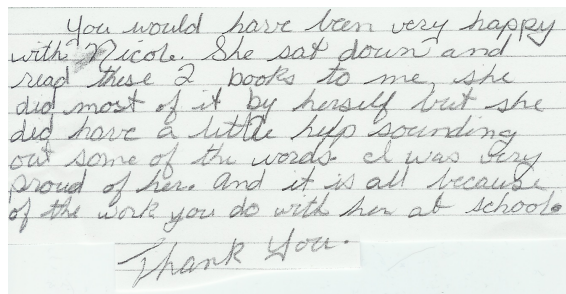
Hearing children read is essential to reading development. Once they have learned to identify the letters and corresponding sounds, words begin to take on a specific meaning. Part of the importance of this activity (friendly homework or my home bookbag programme) is the opportunity it provides for the child to enjoy the uninterrupted time and attention of an adult. Since such time is very precious, it needs to be used so that the children really benefit from the experience.

On-going communication and positive reinforcement go a long way in keeping the parents / guardians of my children happy in my homework bookbags. I tried these suggestions with my class and I achieved tremendous support from the families.

- sent notes of appreciation home
- spoke regularly to my parents to discuss the programme
- let parents/guardians know that their opinions count
- notes and information about helping their child at home
- reward the children for a job well done
- sent parent questionnaires home
- said "thank you" very often

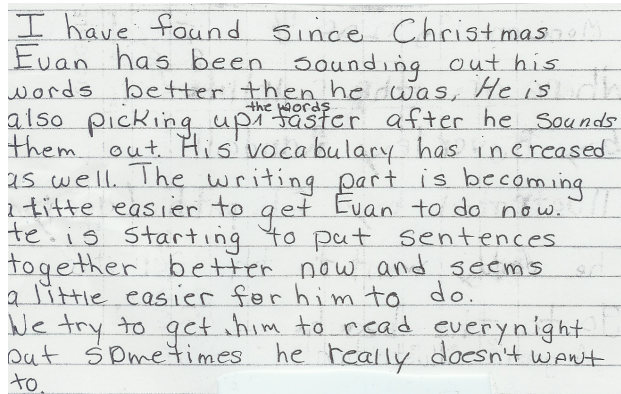
I have included the letters and information for parents so that you can see the organization of the programme. I have also included some of the letters from parents / guardians to show the appreciation of the families. (see appendix #4)

Letters from Parents/Guardians



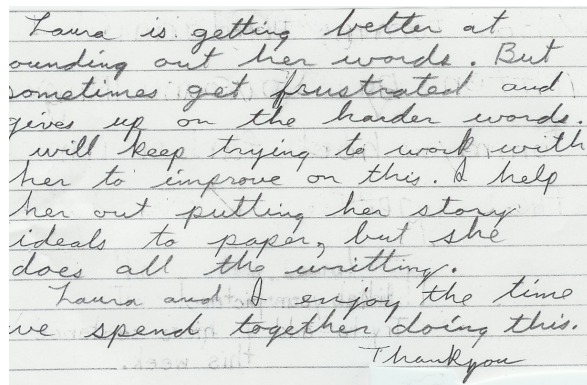
You would have been very happy with Nicole. She sat down and read these 2 books to me, she did most of it by herself but she did have a little help sounding out some of the words. I was very proud of her and it is all because of the work you do with her at school.
Thank You.

M.B. Jan. 2004



I have found since Christmas Evan has been sounding out his words better than he was. He is also picking up ^{the words} faster after he sounds them out. His vocabulary has increased as well. The writing part is becoming a little easier to get Evan to do now. He is starting to put sentences together better now and seems a little easier for him to do. We try to get him to read every night but sometimes he really doesn't want to.

J.W. Jan. 2004



Laura is getting better at sounding out her words. But sometimes get frustrated and gives up on the harder words. I will keep trying to work with her to improve on this. I help her out putting her story ideas to paper, but she does all the writing. Laura and I enjoy the time we spend together doing this.
Thank you

L.B. Jan. 2004

One family was having great difficulty juggling all of the extra curricular activities with bookbag activities. After a lengthy discussion with the parent, we organized a new schedule and all went well. I have included both letters to prove that on-going communication is so important to achieve success and positive reinforcement in a homework programme.

In summary, writing is best learned in an environment that provides frequent opportunities to write. My children write everyday in all subject areas. They carry over this passion for writing at home in projects and regular homework activities. They are amazed when their fellow classmates write short stories and read them from the

Author's Chair. When a child sits in the special Author's Chair, all anxieties disappear and a stream of interesting ideas echo throughout the classroom.

Mrs. Hollington,
 Since our meeting, the book bag work has been much easier. Having the freedom to choose our own books to respond to has been wonderful. Also, knowing we have an extra day to complete the work if we need to, has relieved a lot of pressure. Thank you so much for your understanding and willingness to accommodate special needs. The boys have played well together while reads. He has adjusted bedtime a little bit so he can draw and print while his brothers go to bed. This new arrangement seems to be working quite well.
 Thanks again.

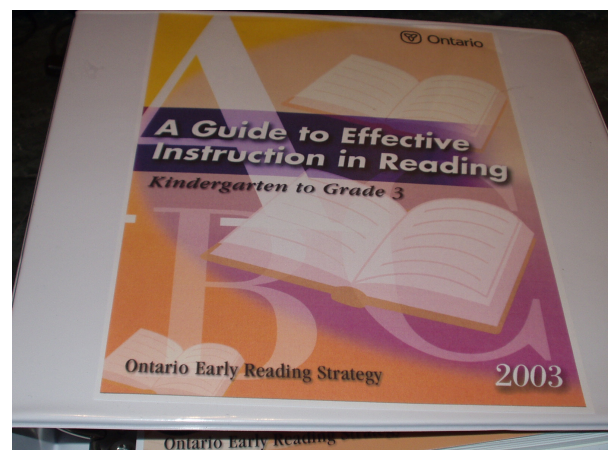
H.W. Nov. 2003

How has the Role of Lead Teacher in Early Reading Encouraged me to Change my Instructional Practice?

The technical guide entitled “A Guide to Effective Instruction in Reading: Kindergarten to Grade 3” was developed by a team of reading experts who developed research-based resources and materials to assist teachers in the primary division. It is intended to support best practices in effective reading instruction. Teaching reading is one of the most essential and challenging tasks of an early primary teacher. Reading strategies represent actions students can take when they encounter an obstacle during reading.

How has this project changed my instructional practice?

In teaching Grade 1 this year, two beliefs from the Early Reading Resource were the most important to me as an early primary teacher – Belief #2 : Early Success in Reading is critical for children and Belief #3 : The teacher is the key to a child's success in learning to read. From the early emergent level in reading, children explore and experiment with oral and written language through role play and letter recognition. In using the key components in the resource: read alouds, shared reading, guided reading and independent reading, many opportunities for literacy development play significant roles in developing a child's love of reading. My passion for teaching language has encouraged all of my students to become risk-takers and demonstrate a willingness to build a strong foundation for learning. Allowing children to participate in oral language through chanting, rhyme or role play create a stimulant for learning and a scaffold from which many opportunities can develop in literacy. I make learning in my classroom meaningful, motivational and most of all fun.



How has it improved student learning?

Children in my class are so eager to volunteer and participate in “reading the room”, daily agenda news and literacy centres (even at a very emergent level). They sometimes groan when they don’t get a turn to participate. It brings tears to one’s eyes when the eyes sparkle with that special gleam or when the children applaud another student or myself for a job well done. This year, as well, I am participating in an Action Research project with Deb Opersko and Diane Morgan about writing development in Grade 1. The children are writing independently as I have modelled exemplary practices in storywriting activities. The Gradual Release of Responsibility is an important factor in early primary reading and writing.

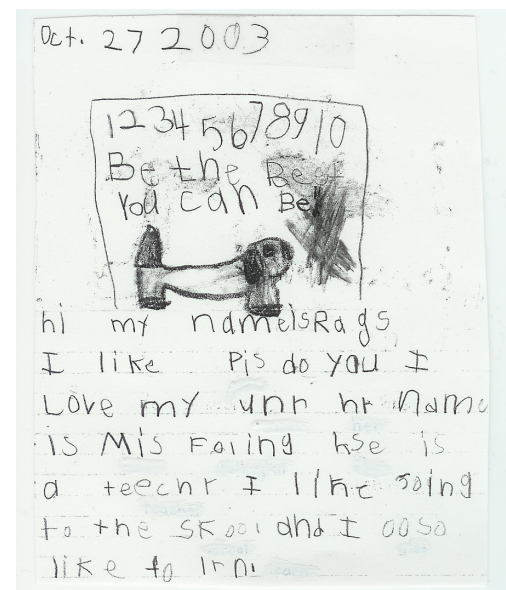
Factors that have influenced success in student learning.

1. word walls
2. personal dictionaries – give it a go pad
3. Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA’s), by Pearson – leveling reading ability
4. Slosson Oral Reading Test
5. cross curricular connections – spelling - lists
6. parental feedback / fellow staff feedback

Summary

“Be The Best You Can Be “ is a sign that I have in my class. My children often refer to it for various reasons – writing, reading, and communication. Using this resource and my background as a parent, grandma, teacher, Family Grouping Grades 1-3 teacher and Early Literacy Teacher, has definitely helped me to achieve my goals – be a key character in my childrens’ love of learning.

Hi! My name is Rags. I like pies. Do you? I love my owner. Her name is Mrs. Follington. She is a teacher. I like going to school and I also like to learn.



Writing Excerpts – Grade 1 (Directly Transcribed)

I lik to Hors Bak rid I was luning the chrot and I asadetle did the galu and I flof.

(Nov.2003)

(I like to horseback ride. I was learning the trot and I accidentally did the gallop and I fell off.)

My star can fly around the wrld. (Dec.2003)

(My star can fly around the world.)

My animal is a Bird. It lives in a nest. It eats wrms. It can fly. It Lays eggs. (Feb.2004)

(My animal is a bird. It lives in a nest. It eats worms. It can fly. It lays eggs.)

Faya Ba yBL anFaOoF Dan (Dec.2003)

(They wibble and wobble and they don't fall down.)

Dast hken BLX SOM ann (Jan.2004)

(It can put dust on me.)

My animal is a BRD. It lives in a nis. It eats a yRm. It can FiA. (Feb.2004)

(My animal is a bird. It lives in a nest. It eats a worm. It can fly.)

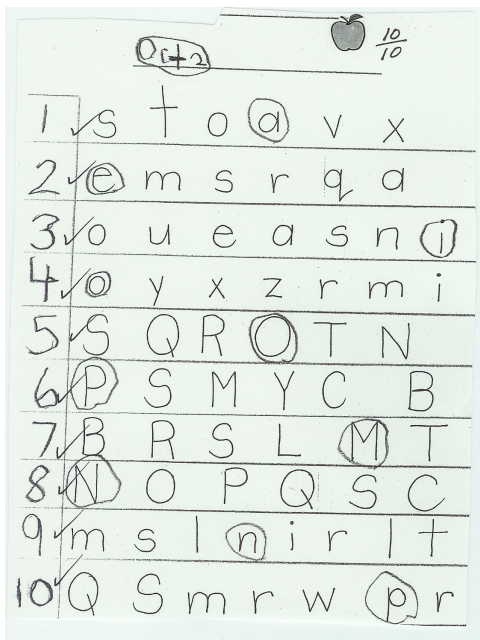
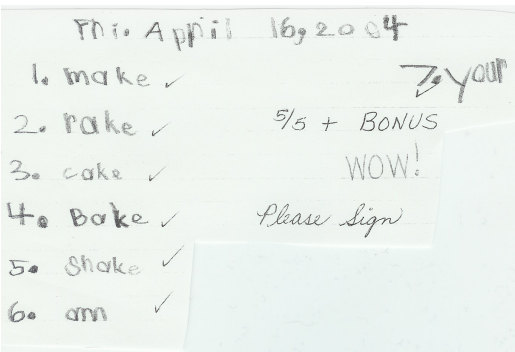
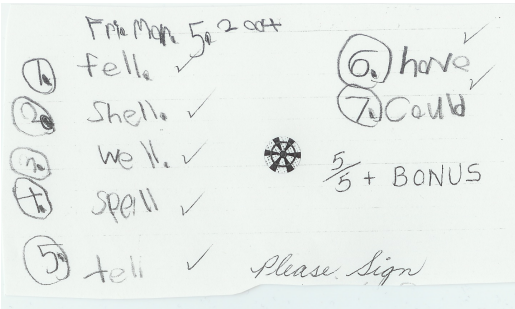
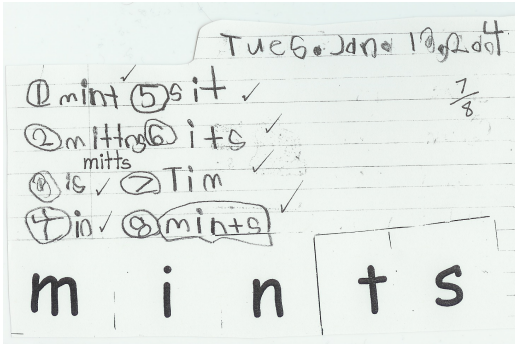
Parent Excerpts

1. We are really pleased with our son's progress in reading . We think the bookbag activity is a wonderful idea. We also try to do lots of reading at home using his choice of books. We are trying to encourage him to do more writing. Thanks for all of your hard work. He looks forward to reading your comments in his book responses. Literacy is a gift (the most important gift) that your students will always have from you. Thanks for that! (T.H. Jan. 2004)

2. She is very proud of her constantly developing reading skills. She is always very enthusiastic and tries her best. She said, " Mom, I want to be an illustrator when I get big." She shares her storywriting book with her friends and relatives and enjoys the sticker rewards. She also always checks for her teacher's comments. (V.S. Jan. 2004)

How has spelling impacted the writing process?

Through the integration of phonics and spelling, children become better risk takers in his/her personal writing experiences. Learning to spell is a gradual process in my room. A display of colour words, number words, days of the week, months of the year, alphabet sequence and names of the children in the class on the word wall are essential components of bulletin boards in my classroom. I also have the room labeled so that the children can "read the room." I demonstrate how to read the room and model it in the beginning stages of writing in September and October.

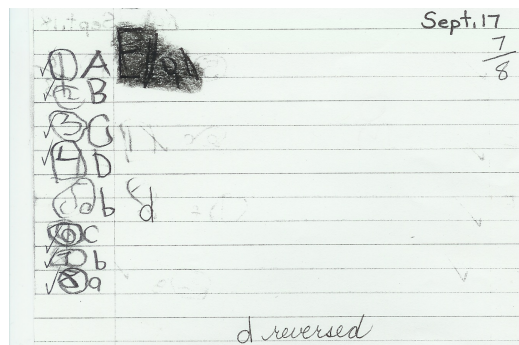


There will be many stages of spelling development in any classroom from no sound-symbol correspondence to having most words spelled correctly. Children in my class hear, see and write sounds and words repeatedly in any lesson. As they become more familiar with the letters and sounds of the alphabet, more words appear on the word wall.

My rule is: if the words are on the word wall, spell them correctly at all times. For some children, this takes a lot of practice. My children have ?Give It A Go? notepads which are used to try and spell an unknown word. When they have attempted to print the word, they bring the pad to me along with their personal dictionary. I look at the attempted spelling and then print the correct spelling for them in the dictionary. The children also have to find the correct page before I will print the word. It's a great skill for alphabetical sequence. Once a child has learned a word pattern, reinforce it through the use of many manipulatives – magnet letters, foam letters or chalkboard activities. I have seen a great improvement in my class since I started actual spelling quizzes in February with word families. I included two words from the word wall which they could find, read and copy into their dictation book. They really love the challenges and it helps the children to attempt to reach the next level in their personal work. I have included a sample of the spelling development that I have used in Grade 1 this year. (Journal entry March 2004)

How do I allow children to become architects of their own learning?

It's never too early or too late to sow the seeds of learning to love books! Let the children lead the way to literacy with a variety of choices and some mentoring through scaffolding the path to success and positive self-esteem. Language and literacy is developed through everyday experiences that children have while exploring their envi-



ronment. Each opportunity to develop a child's understanding of his/her world is an opportunity for growth.

I have included a variety of strategies that I use in teaching writing from the early emergent levels to independence in writing. I use a variety of teaching strategies before the children feel comfortable in using pencil and paper. I find that modeled and shared writing develops concepts about print. Interactive writing provides opportunities for the teacher and student to plan and construct text. Guided writing provides instruction through mini-lessons in the writing process. Independent writing allows the students to develop multiple uses of writing experiences.

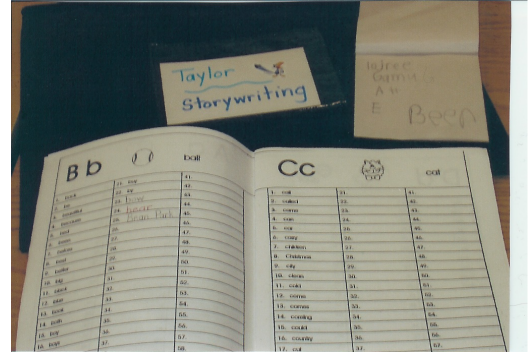
The strategies that I have listed below are intertwined among all these stages of the writing process. It's fun to experiment with new strategies. If the strategy works, I add more flexibility to it. If the strategy doesn't work, I rethink the steps used and try again. Remember that we learn from our mistakes. Try a few and have fun!

- provide lots of opportunity for self-expression using crayons, cut and paste, paint, plasticine, etc.
- read big books to allow the children to see print and pictures
- provide a writing centre with lots of blank paper of various sizes, textures, colours and various writing instruments – pencils, markers, crayons
- allow lots of dialogue before beginning an activity
- provide an alphabet centre where children can manipulate letters (wooden, magnetic, flannel, tracers, stampers, chalk and chalkboard) and practice printing words and phrases
- compile co-operative story charts, big books and create models of conventional print
- label the room with words for use in “reading the room”
- immerse children in print, make word lists, create a word wall, use pictures to illustrate instructions (icons as seen in Grade 3 Ministry booklets)
- provide many genres of reading materials in a reading centre
- create a bookbag activity so parents are involved in homework activities
- provide a “make your own book” centre which allows children to use story starters to create bookmarks, shape books, poetry, story maps, etc.
- provide a listening centre where children listen to stories or poetry on tape
- provide a puppet centre where children can experiment with materials to create personal puppets; use the puppets to experiment with the voice of a character

In conclusion, literacy centres gave my students an opportunity to be engaged in meaningful literacy activities while allowing myself to work with individuals or small groups. Once my centres have been set up, it's easy to change the materials to suit the program through individual subject areas or theme approached activities.

How did I use assessment in my research?

I began a written journal of my project from the very beginning to help me reflect on each day's activities, record specific children's responses and remember important details during meetings. It was very helpful when writing my action research information.



I also sent home a letter to parents/guardians to inform them of the action research project. It included a permission form to video, take photographs and audio the children. I had 99% participation. Many of the parents/guardians were very excited and interested in the project as well. Later in the year, I sent home an information page in the journals of the bookbags which asked the parents/guardians to respond about his/her child's reading and writing progress. These responses were used in my presentation to the Grand Erie District School Board in March 2004.

Since I had First Steps Writing training, I was fortunate to use many of the assessment tools used in the program. It helped me to organize my class on the continuum to see where the strengths and weaknesses were located. First Steps also includes great tips for parents to assist in the writing process at home.

I also had my Learning Resource Teacher, Mrs. Graves, assist me in completing the Slosson Oral Reading Test. We did the test three times during the year and saw improvements in most of the children. It was a great tool for helping to accommodate the weaker students and encourage next steps in my above average students. If my children couldn't read the vocabulary, they couldn't write at their appropriate writing level.

Each child had a portfolio of written work collected to use as a resource for report card assessment. It was also sent home for parents /guardians to peruse and see the level of achievement for his/her child. It was very exciting for each child to see the growth in printing, picture making and organization of ideas.

Being a lover of scrapbooking, I kept an up to date scrapbook of pictures which included events throughout the year in my class. It was my first attempt at using a digital camera. It was so exciting! It was so interesting to reminisce when looking back at this year's success of my class. It was shared by staff and class members and families. It's a great way to share a year's work of intriguing, positive and meaningful achievements.

Personal Final Thoughts

Children learn to read and write through experiences and background knowledge, knowledge of how language works, knowledge of letter-sound relationships and real reading experiences. Throughout my literacy program, I have noticed a great improvement in my childrens' writing experiences.

At the beginning of the year, many of the children were struggling with the recognition of letters and sounds. Through the use of read-alouds, Jolly Phonics, interactive writing and various literacy activities, I was able to meet the needs of the children so that we could move along to more challenging exercises. In using a variety of assessment data, literacy centres and writing opportunities, the class achieved success in various ways – some children were only drawing pictures and scribble writing; some children were printing symbols; some were printing patterned sentences; and others were attempting to use inventive spelling to retell a story.

At the end of the year, most of the children could use a story planner or organizer to draw pictures and print key words or phrases. When I completed the writing exemplar task with the class, the children were organizing their thoughts on a story planner with detail and imagination.

I feel confident when I look back at the stages of the writing process in my class. It was a positive learning experience for everyone! I have planted the seeds for growth in my classroom. The seeds were tended by many caring hands in order for the seeds to sprout and grow healthy and strong. Once the seeds sprouted even taller, they continued to flourish in our meaningful classroom environment. The seeds will continue to grow and become unique individuals, with care and continued support from all of those caring hands.

Appendix

1. Letter of Permission to Families of my Grade One Class

October 15, 2003

Dear Parents/Guardians,

During this school year 2003 - 2004, I will be involved in an Action Research project with the Grand Erie District School Board to explore growth in student writing in Grade One. Our team consists of 5 primary teachers and 1 primary consultant. We will be meeting approximately six times during the year to discuss storywriting in Grades KP to 3. With the support of my principal and fellow colleagues, I will be answering a question related to the writing process in Grade One and how I can encourage the children to take responsibility for their own writing. At the end of the year, my research along with other teachers in the GEDSB who have been involved in "Action Research" will be published in a Board document.

As part of my research, I will need to collect data from parents and students to include in parts of the project. This data includes digital and video pictures of the students and their work samples; audiotapes of children reading aloud and observations and comments from students, colleagues and parents/guardians.

The final report on the studied research will contain excerpts of the data listed above. Only first names will be identified and all the collected data will be kept confidential. As part of this process, I will need written permission to use your child's work samples, take photos of your child, audiotape your child and video parts of the reading program.

Would you please fill out the permission slip below and send it back to school by Fri. Oct. 17, 2003? If you have any questions, please call me at school.

Mrs. Follington

I give permission for Mrs. Follington to use visual, audio, comments and work samples of my child for her Action Research project.

Student Name _____

Parent / Guardian Signature _____

Date _____

2. Bookbag –Parental Feedback Letter

January 2004

Dear Parents / Guardians,

As part of the action research in the language programme in our Grade One classroom, I have noticed an improvement in recognizing letters, in making letter - sound associations and in recognizing new vocabulary. This week in your child's reading journal, I would like some parental feedback on your child's reading and writing experiences. Please include your comments below this letter. Remember that this is an optional activity. Thanks for your support.

Sincerely,
Mrs. B. Follington

3. Slosson Oral Reading Test Results - October 2003, January 2004, April 2004

NAME Grade 1(03/04)	GR	SORT	GR	SORT	Gr	SORT			
	1.0	0.1	1.5	1.0	1.8	1.9			
		0.8		1.2		2.6			
		0.2		0.4		0.5			
		0.8		1.9		3.1			
				0.4		0.7			
		0.4		2.0		3.3			
		0.1		0.5		1.4			
		0.4		2.0		1.4			
		0.0		0.0		0.2			
		0.0		0.0		0.0			
		0.3		0.9		2.0			
		0.1		0.3		1.0			
		0.2		1.2		2.8			
					1.7	0.8			
		0.1		0.3	1.8	0.6			
		0.2		2.0		3.1			
		0.0		0.2		0.5			
		0.7		2.1		4.0			
		0.0		0.3		0.8			
				4.2		4.8			
				1.1		2.4			
		0.2		0.9		2.4			
		0.8		2.9		4.0			
		0.6		1.3		2.8			
		0.6		3.0		4.9			
		0.1		0.5	1.7	0.8			
		0.6		1.1	1.8	2.3			
		0.4		1.3		2.2			
		0.3		1.2		2.2			
		0.1		1.0		2.0			
		0.1		0.6		1.4			

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