

Written by the
Ministry of Education
Republic of Vanuatu



Literacy Development in the Vanuatu Kindergarten

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Literacy Development

Overview

In recent years, extensive research has focused on how young children develop language and literacy skills. The results of such studies are important because the beliefs and understanding about how children learn are the foundation of teaching methodology. This document will include both references to the research and suggested teaching strategies and activities based on that research. Modifications may need to be made according to the age and skill levels of the children and the materials or resources that are available in specific classrooms, but it is important that the teaching methodology suggested here be implemented.

A successful literacy program should be flexible, catering to children of different ages. It must also support the varying stages of children's social and physical development, as well as their interests and levels of readiness for school. Research indicates that the environment in which children learn affects the development of positive values, essential knowledge, and the strategies acquired as they mature in reading and writing. A literate environment refers to a home, classroom and school in which literacy is seen as important and is, therefore, nurtured. Providing a safe environment and modeling appropriate reading and writing behaviours encourage a child's desire to learn. It is also important to balance specific teaching strategies with independent opportunities for children to practice their skills in meaningful ways.

Children need an atmosphere in which they are free to spend time with books or stories; to share their thoughts on what they read or write, and value the thoughts and opinions of others. A positive attitude on the part of the teacher and the atmosphere of acceptance created let all children know that they are free to take risks. High expectations are set and with the scaffolding of a caring teacher, all children can reach their potential and move along the language continuum. The teacher plays a pivotal role in the development of children's language and literacy skills. It is difficult for young children to fluently read, understand or write about topics with which they are not familiar. For young children, then, the foundation of reading and writing must be oral language, taught in the context of a range of related topics. Built on this oral language foundation, reading and writing are reciprocal – what is learned in reading is applied to writing and vice versa.

Reading and writing should be taught together both at the skill level and at the level of understanding so that young children can begin to think as authors. For example, children may start to consider such questions as: Was this word a good choice? How would the story have been different if this character was a girl? The author did not tell us about Joe's feelings in the story so how did we know that is how he felt?

Cambourne's Conditions of Learning

It is important to look at the research into effective ways to teach literacy. An Australian researcher, Brian Cambourne, conducted a significant body of research on literacy development. He focused his research on the environment in which humans learn language. The learning of language appears to be a seamless and uncomplicated process for most children so the focus of Cambourne's research was on determining what conditions exist that allows this seemingly automatic learning to occur. These key conditions should then apply to the development of reading and writing skills. He identified the following conditions for oral language development to occur and the implications of these same conditions for learning to read and write.¹

Cambourne's Conditions of Learning

- *Immersion*
- *Modeling*
- *Expectations*
- *Application and Practice*
- *Responsibility*
- *Independence*
- *Approximations*
- *Feedback*
- *Engagement*

Immersion

Humans are surrounded by language from birth. Families talk to infants even though they know the child will not understand or respond to words. The baby hears people talking and singing around him as family members go about their daily lives. This immersion in language allows the child to absorb how language is used and to attune their ears to the rhythm and nuances of language.

In the early years literacy classroom, learners should be immersed in all forms of oral language, reading and writing. The number, variety, and quality of the texts that students experience have a profound effect on literacy learning. Children do not have to be fluent readers before being surrounded by a wide variety of print. This might include simple texts children have printed, stories written by the teacher, published

books, brochures, magazines, signs, instructions, etc.

Modeling

Families do not specifically teach children to speak but by carrying on conversations around infants, they provide models of how language works, how and why language is used to communicate with others, and how words work together to form ideas.

Literacy learners need continuous modeling and explicit demonstrations of reading and writing strategies in order to understand how successful readers and writers construct meaning from a

¹ Cambourne, Brian. *The Whole Story: Natural Learning and the Acquisition of Literacy in the Classroom*, 1988.

text. Teachers can provide powerful models of what effective readers and writers do and think as they read, as well as models of why and how reading and writing are used in our daily lives.

Expectations

Teachers must ensure that an appropriate learning environment is provided and sustained. They must believe that their students will develop literacy skills and provide the necessary teaching for this to happen.

Families expect that their children will learn naturally to speak and communicate with others. Unless the child is physically challenged this expectation is realistic.

Consequently, families act in natural and relaxed ways as they help infants develop their language and do not set up specific lessons to teach specific skills.

What can educators take from this to help create realistic literacy expectations for children? Since all learners are powerfully influenced by expectations, teachers must convey the same high expectations to all students. Literacy learners need to believe that they

will learn to read and write. Teachers must understand that they are expected to succeed in teaching reading and writing and that their role is to be there to guide children through the process.

Application and Practice

Infants are given time to develop their language skills. Because children develop at their own pace, there is no timetable for the development of the specific skills related to learning to communicate. Generally, families do not worry that a child who is late in developing words and sentences will not develop the skills in their own time.

Literacy learners need time and opportunities to engage in reading and writing activities, where they can apply new skills and practice and extend their developing control of reading and writing. Reading and writing opportunities for young children should be authentic. That is, the child must be able to choose the material, topics or purposes for reading and writing that are important to them. This is part of a natural learning process where the teacher follows the lead of the children rather than directing the learning in a formal and prescribed fashion.

Responsibility

Little ones learning language learn at their own pace and in their own way and we offer them the responsibility to choose the sounds and words that they choose to copy first. They are not told: *You will be hearing a lot of words in your environment, and these are the ones that you should say first.* Nor do we limit the number of words the little child hears so that they can focus on repeating only those words and then begin to add new words to their listening vocabulary in measurable increments. Children often surprise their families with the choice of words and expressions that have meaning to them. That is the fun of listening to a new language learner.

Is this the same approach taken for children who are learning to read and write? Children who are surrounded by literacy in their early years classrooms want to learn how to communicate in

written fashion. They find real purposes for reading and writing that make sense to them and to their own environment. It is the teacher's responsibility to provide a positive environment and create appropriate opportunities for literacy learning. Literacy learners have the responsibility for taking advantage of the opportunities provided to them.

Independence

Young children are not told when and where to babble or talk. They choose when they are ready and those around them simply try to provide the stimulus to get that started.

Literacy learners need to acquire effective strategies for reading and writing independently. When young children understand that reading and writing are interesting, useful and productive activities, they have been given a lifelong gift and it is important to provide appropriate literacy texts that meet their independent interests and needs.

Approximations

Young children are allowed the freedom to take risks as they learn to communicate with others. They are not expected to be able to pronounce words accurately so we respond to the sounds or proximity to words that they do say. When a young child points to something with which they are familiar and makes a sound that resembles speech, adults act as though they know exactly what the child has said and respond accordingly indicating that those sounds are to be understood by others and form a base of communication. This encourages children to form words in a developmental way.

The acceptance of word approximations is crucial to literacy learning. Children develop the necessary confidence to take risks or 'give it a try', if they know that their efforts are valued, encouraged, and supported. When a young child picks up a book and tells the story based on the pictures, this is an example of a literacy behavior that should be encouraged. This approximation is an important step on the way to traditional reading. Similarly, the emerging writer must be allowed to scribble, or write strings of letters that represent ideas to the writer but are not necessarily recognizable by others. This approximation should be accepted as a form of writing and the child, with thoughtful teaching, soon develops as a writer in the traditional way.

Feedback

Babies receive considerable feedback from others when they attempt to communicate. Families laugh, hug, and respond to the first sounds a baby makes. As the child grows, family members help her to develop more accurate sounds and simple words by providing the words in simple ways or by stretching out a word or sound and encouraging the child to make that sound. This specific and ongoing feedback allows the child to make tighter and tighter approximations of sounds and words and to develop their language skills authentically.

When given specific feedback to reading and writing attempts, children begin to incorporate new ideas into their set of literacy skills. For example, someone could help a child to stretch out the individual sounds of a word they are attempting to write so that more individual sounds are heard and, therefore, written. Similarly when children are telling a story, without actually

reading the words of a text, the words they are saying could be pointed out in the text so the children can see the connection between their talking and their reading. By receiving helpful feedback children begin to use this knowledge to expand their repertoire of literacy strategies.

Cambourne's conditions for learning provide teachers with a foundational guide to teaching and form the basis for teaching most skills in a positive and encouraging atmosphere.

Engagement

Babies are actively engaged in their own language acquisition. They lie alone in their beds and practice making sounds. They use sounds when they are excited or when they want to communicate with others, often in a moment of need or desire. This active engagement is very important in developing their interest in learning and in providing many authentic opportunities for practice.

Active engagement is essential to learning. Literacy learners must be mentally engaged in literacy processes and need a great deal of practice for learning to take place. Engagement is more likely to occur if learners understand the relevance of the learning, and if conditions of responsibility, approximation, practice and feedback are also present.

Literacy learners must receive relevant feedback from teachers and others to reinforce their ongoing learning. Feedback must also help students make connections between new learning and what is already known.

What Do We Mean by Literacy?

Literacy is a complex set of abilities that is needed to understand and use the dominant symbol system of a culture – sounds, alphabets, numbers, and visual symbols – in order to communicate with others. This includes specific signs or symbols that are found in local community environments as well as those that are more broadly recognized and used.

*What we **think** about we can **say**.*

*What we **say** we can **record**.*

*What we **record** we can **read**.*

*What we **read** we can **think** about.*

In this growing technological society, literacy extends beyond the functional skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening to include multiple literacies such as visual literacy, media literacy and information literacy. These new literacies focus on an individual's capacity to use and make critical judgments about the information they encounter on a daily basis.

Without the ability to discern between what is logical and what is an advertising gimmick; to know what and whom to believe when working in an online environment, or to communicate effectively with others around the world in meaningful ways, children are often at a dangerous disadvantage if they have not been taught to be critical thinkers. Critical literacy, the ability to reflect on what is read or heard, is a skill that must be taught at the same time that children are taught to read and write.

Regardless of how a culture defines it, literacy touches every aspect of individual and community life. It is an essential foundation for learning through life, and must be valued as a human right.

Therefore, it is important to understand the interactions and interdependence between the various aspects of literacy development. This means that what we think, we can say; what we say, we can record through writing; what we write, others can read; and what we read, we have to think about. The skills learned in one area of literacy can also be applied to other areas of literacy. For example:

- a listening skill involves isolating the sound a specific letter makes, such as (*mmm*) in *man*;
- a writing skill allows us to record the letter *m* for the word *man*; and
- a reading skill allows us to use our knowledge of the sound (*m*) to predict or read the word *man*.

Children who are developing their literacy skills also need to know that when they read, the story should make sense to them – authors write thoughts, ideas, facts that simply represent what they would say orally to others. When young children are reading or writing, teachers must ensure that they understand this idea.

The Development of Oral Language

Language acquisition develops through meaningful interactions with others in a variety of language rich activities. Young children need to learn how to express their feelings, to share their thinking, and to use language to think critically. Vocabulary development has been shown to be one of the most influential differences between children who are literate and those who struggle with reading and writing.

The early years, from birth to about age six are critical years in terms of the development of the brain. The wiring of the brain that happens within this timeframe sets the capacities for the rest of a person's life. There are windows of opportunity in which this neural growth occurs and then, like the length of legs or body height, growth is suspended. The most important period of growth for developing the language areas of the brain is from birth to about age six. During this time optimal development occurs when young children hear a great deal of language being used in speech, songs, and conversations and they make many attempts at communicating with others. Kindergarten teachers have a unique opportunity to affect children's language development so language must be a very significant component of an early years program.

Young learners need time to talk and to process information in ways that are meaningful to them. They need to be able to participate in new experiences and should be encouraged to talk about what they are doing and learning through this experience. Going out for an exploratory walk, bringing items into class that are perhaps unfamiliar, and providing opportunities for children to replicate common adult activities such as cooking, all provide a shared experience

***Phonemic Awareness** is our ability to manipulate the sounds of oral language. It allows us to hear distinct syllables and sounds within words and to blend isolated sounds together to form words.*

***Phonics:** builds on the foundations of phonemic awareness by helping students to connect the sounds they hear with the print they see on the page. Phonics instruction focuses on the relationship between letters and the spoken sounds.*

for the students to talk about. It is important for children, at a young age, to understand that writing and reading are simply ways of sharing the thinking and learning of others. When the teacher records on chart paper, in a class big book, on the chalkboard, etc., thoughts and information about an activity they have shared, children can easily see how the process works. Their words come alive and they can share the story again and again. Development in any one area of communication – reading, writing, or oral communication – is tightly linked to development in the others.

Rich oral language activities provide children with a sense of how words and sentences work. They build sensitivity to the sound system so that children can acquire **phonemic awareness** and **phonics**. It is also the process by which children demonstrate their understanding of the meaning of words and written materials. From the moment of birth, humans begin learning language, learning about language, and learning

through language.

Before age 5 or 6 children have generally mastered most of the conventions of oral language. They know the sounds in their language, its sentence structure, and the meanings of many words. They also are acquiring knowledge about language rules that govern different social situations. For instance, their use of language is different at mealtime than on the playground. These remarkable accomplishments provide the foundation for language and literacy learning throughout life and facilitate the learning of a second or third language.

The most important aspect of young children's language development is learning how language works. The language used is not important. It is about developing a solid language base. Once a child has a solid understanding of how the system works in one language, they can layer a second or third language (i.e., vocabulary) to the base. They should be encouraged to use their first language while layering the words of the second language at school.

The Role of the Teacher

Talk supports the thinking process. By providing many opportunities for children to talk and express their ideas, teachers should also encourage students to develop higher levels of thinking skills. To ensure that all students strengthen their oral language skills and find their own voice in the classroom, teachers should provide opportunities for them to participate in a variety of rich oral language activities.

Teachers can give students the opportunity to talk by providing activities as suggested in *A Guide To Effective Instruction in Reading* (2003)²:

² Ontario Ministry of Education. *A Guide To Effective Instruction in Reading: Kindergarten to Grade 3*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. 2003. Pg. 3.11 – 3.12

Roles and Responsibilities of Teacher and Students in Building Oral Language Skills

<i>Teacher:</i>	<i>Students:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaches frameworks (step-by-step procedures) for various types of oral interactions including discussions, questioning, brainstorming, interviewing, story retelling, and giving oral responses to reading, book talks, conferences, and small-group work. The teacher models and teaches the procedures, skills, and strategies needed to participate actively in these interactions; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learn modelled procedures, skills, and strategies and practice them in order to participate effectively in discussions, questioning, brainstorming, interviewing, story retelling, giving oral responses to reading, book talks, conferences, and small-group work;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaches and promotes “active listening”; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participate in “active listening”;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaches students how to speak and listen to one another respectfully; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> listen and speak respectfully to others;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaches students how to engage in effective student-led discussions for a variety of purposes; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lead discussions or participate in discussions led by other students;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaches and models language used for different purposes (e.g., to express ideas, reflect on understandings, and explain, compare, predict, interpret, summarize, and analyse thoughts and information); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use language to express ideas, reflect on understandings, and explain, compare, predict, interpret, summarize, and analyse thoughts and information;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explicitly and implicitly teaches vocabulary; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> practice using learned vocabulary;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> models correct oral language structures and grammar; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> practice using and anticipating learned language structures and grammar;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> models how to use tone, volume, and expression to enhance meaning; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> practice using appropriate tone, volume, and expression to enhance meaning;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fosters a safe, supportive environment that encourages students to take risks; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> take risks and participate to the best of their ability;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides time for focused, meaningful student talk; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop an understanding of the importance of effective speech and develop the confidence to participate in oral language activities;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides prompts, cues, and sentence starters to encourage and guide students’ participation in oral language activities; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use the modelled language structures and the prompts and questions provided by the teacher to reflect on and talk about their thinking and what they have read and learned;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fosters the development of higher-order thinking skills (e.g., models how to reflect on thinking and talk about learning, and provides opportunities for students to practice these skills); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> understand the relationship between oral language and reading;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> helps students make connections between oral language and reading (e.g., asks “Does that sound right?”); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> understand that oral language skills apply across the curriculum.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> makes cross-curricular links (e.g., teaches vocabulary from other subject areas); 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> makes ongoing observations and assessments of students’ progress. 	

Children are naturally curious and they need time to explore and talk about the world around them. Through this exploration, they gain a deeper understanding, learn more vocabulary and make sense of the world in which they live. This prior knowledge is a foundation on which future learning is built.

The most effective learning environment for children includes:

- A solid connection between home and school;
- Classroom teaching strategies that are appropriate to the age and developmental needs of the students; and
- Ongoing monitoring and assessment of the learning by the teacher.

The role of the teacher in an early years classroom includes:

- Acting as a model of language - using appropriate vocabulary, demonstrating critical thinking, and participating actively;
- Providing open-ended questions to expand thinking skills beyond “right and wrong” responses;
- Sparking children’s curiosity by framing open ended questions and making connections to what children already know;
- Providing a variety of opportunities both in and outside of the classroom (e.g. visit local artists, taking a community walk) that help to expand children’s vocabulary;
- Assessing development on a regular basis;
- Planning focused observations that will guide instruction;
- Expanding experiences for children by inviting parent volunteers or family members to come in and share life experiences; and
- Providing immediate positive feedback on the children’s reactions and responses.

Oral language is the foundation of all reading strategies and activities. Strong language skills enable students to express their responses to texts they have read. Reading activities often begin with a conversation about the book that helps them to predict what it is going to be about and they end with a discussion of student responses to the book. Each of the key instructional approaches implemented with early readers – read-alouds, shared reading, and independent reading – provide opportunities for oral language instruction and practice. Other key areas of early reading instruction, such as phonemic/phonological awareness and word study, are also grounded in oral language.

Oral language skills are critical for effective reading. Students need these skills to build reading

Open-ended Questions are those that do not have right and wrong answers but cause the student to consider the situation and respond in different ways, according to various points of view.

Closed Questions are ones that can be answered in only one way to be considered correct. The answers are usually found directly in the text and require memory but not thinking.

For example:

Closed Question:

Where was the girl going?

Open-ended Question:

Should the girl have been going there? What might happen to her if she goes?

Closed Question:

Who was the author of this book? Did you like the book?

Open-ended Question:

What did you like about this book? Why do you think this author wrote a book about this topic? What has she done to make this an interesting book? Why did the illustrator draw the pictures instead of taking photographs? How would that have made the book different?

and writing skills. For example, when students understand the structures of oral language, they can anticipate similar language structures when they are reading. In other words, they are able to use their knowledge of how words are put together orally to check that what they are reading “sounds right” (using syntactical cues). A student who is familiar with the conventions of oral language (e.g., knows that a sentence that begins with the word “why” is going to pose a question, or is able to use linking words such as *because*, *so*, or *and* in conversation) can use this knowledge to decode and understand written text. When children understand that books are just ‘written talk’ they begin to unravel the mystery of the printed page.

A Focus on Oral Language

Students use oral language for a number of purposes. A teacher may observe and assess a student using language to do the following:³

- **Self-maintain:** The student communicates needs and wants (e.g., the student may say, I am not feeling well today.)
- **Give directions:** The student gives directions to others (e.g., while at the **home** centre with a partner, the student may say, “Tell a story to the baby while I make dinner?”)
- **Report on past and present experiences:** The student discusses an **experience** by relating, comparing, and analysing events and information. The student may also reflect on experiences (e.g., in a classroom discussion, the student may say, “I have one of those at my home too. I know how to use it.”)

³ Adapted from Toronto Observation Project. *Observing Children Through Their Formative Years*, 1980. P.1.

- **Reason:** The student explains a process, identifies problems and solutions, justifies judgments, and draws conclusions (e.g., during a math lesson, the student may say, “I wasn’t sure how many wheels there are on two carts but I drew a picture and I figured it out.”)
- **Predict:** The student anticipates what might happen, identifies potential problems and possible solutions, and predicts the consequences of actions. (e.g., when listening to a favourite story being retold a student says, “I know what happens next.” or “I know why that happened.”)
- **Project:** The student projects the feelings and reactions of others (e.g., when engaged at the blocks centre, the student might tell the teacher, “Hamilton’s mad because James won’t share the crayons.”). The **student** may also use projection to remember past experiences or envision new ones (e.g., the student may say, “I want to be a teacher one day. I think I will be good at it because I like to read.”)
- **Imagine:** The student creates imaginary situations that may have a basis in real life or that may be pure **fantasy** (e.g., the student may say, “I am the teacher. Read this chart while I point to the words.”)

We Use Language To:

- *Self-maintain*
- *Give directions*
- *Report on experiences*
- *Reason*
- *Predict*
- *Project*
- *Imagine*

Creating an Active Oral Language Environment

It is important that the classroom atmosphere supports oral language development by providing children with frequent opportunities to speak with and listen to adults and other children. Quiet seatwork does not afford the teacher the ability to know what the child is thinking or how the child is processing new information. By providing a safe environment for sharing their thinking orally, the teacher is more aware of children’s learning needs. This helps children to develop their thinking skills as they share ideas with others and use language effectively for different purposes. All of these conditions, while significant for language development, are also critical for reading and writing development.

When Working at Learning Centres

When children are busily engaged in play at a centre there should be a constant hum of conversation. Young children like to think out loud and to share their ideas and their thinking with others. By setting up learning centres in the classroom, the teacher provides children with a valid and enriched opportunity for oral language use. These centres might include a home centre or a doctor’s office, a water table, a building centre, a creative art space or opportunities to retell stories. All are important in that they provide children with active problem solving opportunities.

When Reading or Telling a Story to Children

Children love to have stories told to them but when this is also accompanied by a picture book the experience is different. The illustrator of the book has been able to bring his or her perspective to the text and has created some images for the reader. These images often help to tell a more complete story. The setting of the book is often not described in words but is illustrated through the pictures, For instance, the faces of the characters show how they are feeling, and small hints in the pictures often help to tell what is going to happen next. Teachers may choose to create their own books for the class and share these books with colleagues to provide a variety of texts. These texts would better reflect the environment and the reality of the children.

When a group of children all hear the same story there are wonderful opportunities to extend the thinking of the children. Three strategies - *retell*, *reflect*, and *relate*- are simple ways to allow children to actively engage in higher levels of thinking about the story they hear together. Teachers ask the children to:

- **Retell** the story, or significant parts of the story, in their own words:
 - to re-experience the story;
 - to recall vocabulary, ideas, information, and concepts;
 - to bring together or synthesize ideas from the story.

Prompts for retelling:

- This story is about . . .
 - I enjoyed the part where . . .
 - I noticed that . . .
 - This is what I remember from the story . . .
- **Relate** characters, places, events, and ideas from the text:
 - to your life;
 - to other things you know;
 - to other books you have read or stories you have heard.

Prompts for making these connections:

- I remember when I . . .
 - That reminds me of . . .
 - It was different from . . .
 - I read another book that also . . .
- **Reflect** on how they were affected by the text:
 - to examine the feelings the story aroused;

- to explore questions and ideas raised by the story.

Prompts for thinking and wondering:

- I wonder if . . .
- I wonder why . . .
- I felt . . .
- I can picture . . .
- I realize . . .
- I was surprised . . .
- I didn't understand . . .

Even at a young age children can become critical thinkers about the texts they hear or read. They can:

- **Review** elements of the text and the techniques used by the author to understand:
 - what made you feel the way you do;
 - what helped you to understand the story.

Prompts for critical thinking:

- The author is trying to . . .
- One of the main characters . . .
- The problem at the beginning . . .
- How does the . . .⁴

When Working in a Whole Class or Small Group Experience

When working with a group of children there are a variety of activities that can be implemented to increase and expand the oral language opportunities for children. These activities include:

1. Think, Pair, Share

This is an activity where the teacher asks students to interact with a partner to share ideas about a specific topic. First, each participant is asked to *think* about a topic without saying anything, then *pair* up with a partner and *share* their ideas about this topic. At the beginning of the year when students are still learning to interact with others, the activity could be simple and then become more complex as the year progresses. (For example, children may start by telling their partner their name and later

⁴ Ontario Ministry of Education. *A Guide To Effective Instruction in Reading: Kindergarten to Grade 3*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. 2003. Pg. 3.17

in the year they could talk about family members, interests or story ideas.) At the beginning of the year, it is important to explain clearly how this activity works and to provide the children with a signal or cue that you are going to use each time such as *Find an elbow partner*. (Children should choose the person whose elbow they can link to and who is, therefore, right beside them.) *Find a person beside you that you will talk to*. *Find a partner for think, pair, and share*. It is essential that the children have the opportunity to practice this process a number of times so they can find their partner quickly and independently. Once they understand the procedure, this is a very easy way to initiate children's thinking on a topic and allows all children to share that thinking with another. Rather than asking only one or two children to share, this approach encourages more participation in oral language and is much less intimidating for shy or reluctant speakers.

This simple activity is an excellent way to keep children active and attentive to the lessons and allows them time to activate and share their thinking. Before reading a book or telling a story, a teacher should discuss with the children what the book is going to be about. For example, if a book is about *monkeys*, children should be asked to think about what they already know about monkeys, be given time to think privately and quietly, and then share their knowledge and thinking with a partner. A few children may share their thoughts with the whole class.

2. Echo Chant/Song

In this activity, the teacher chooses a text such as a poem, song, or chant (preferably written on a chart or chalkboard). The teacher introduces the words orally first and later shows students the words written down. The teacher reads or recites the whole poem or song and then returns to the first line, reads or recites it and asks the children to repeat. This is a great opportunity to teach the conventions of language such as rhythm and rhyme. Singing songs about feelings can also incorporate an understanding of how facial expressions and gestures convey feelings and how these can be recognized in others (inference). This activity models language in a fun and exciting way that keeps the children focused and engaged.

Examples:

- a) **Simon Says** –The teacher is 'SIMON' and the children perform the action only if the teacher says "Simon Says" first. *Simon says jump on one foot*. If the teacher does not say "Simon Says", the children "freeze" (remain still). If a child acts without the teacher saying "Simon Says", that child sits down and the game continues until someone can be declared the best listener of the day. This game encourages careful listening and the ability to follow directions. Additionally, this activity forces children to control their actions even though they may wish to copy the movement of the leader.
- b) **Song Variations** – Choose a familiar song, then change the words in the song to meet some other academic purpose such as alphabet, counting, shapes, patterns, colours, emotions, body parts, positional words (up, down, under,

over) or the children's names. Substitutions may also include the names of the children in the class as well as various concepts being taught.

- c) **Alphabet Songs** - Create an original song by thinking of relevant connections between letters and objects such as A for animal, B for banana, C for carrot, etc... Once the children have settled on a particular version, a follow up may be the creation of a wonderful new big book for the class.
- d) **Name Games** – These games involve using the children's names to chant out syllables in a fun way, or move their body to keep the beat. For example, the name *Rennick* has two (2) syllables so children could, for example, clap once for the first beat and pat their knees for the second syllable.

3. Oral Storytelling / Legends

In oral storytelling, the teacher models a story using the students' names and incorporates a lot of gestures and vocabulary to enhance the story. These stories might support a specific concept being taught or recount an adventure. These stories may also be legends that have been passed down from generation to generation. Children can then respond to open-ended questions about the story, create new variations of the story such as a new ending, or retell the story using props or gestures in their own way. This is an opportunity to bring elders into the classroom to share their own childhood stories so that everyone understands the traditional nature of storytelling. This is a rich opportunity for children to understand narrative story structure, to develop vocabulary, to develop listening skills, and to hear how language works.

4. Oral Language Interactions

Ways of getting the children to be involved orally:

- *Discussing* – group talk about a common topic
- *Questioning* – seeking information, asking open-ended questions which allow for more possibilities, using problem solving skills
- *Brainstorming* – collaborative sharing of the groups' ideas about one topic, usually written down

When Working at Centres

The Water Centre

Since experiences at the Water Centre involve working with others, there are many opportunities for children to use and expand their oral language. Teachers cannot just set up the experience and then stand back and not interact at the centre. While teachers know that it is important to let the children discover on their own, it is also important to understand that the teacher is a vital part of the community of learners. Teachers can and should enter the play of children frequently but should be careful not to take the play away from the children.

By watching and listening to the children at play, the teacher is able to identify and take advantage of appropriate situations to interact and engage children in dialogue. The teacher's questions/comments need to promote thinking, help to construct new knowledge, and expand vocabulary, rather than have children simply respond to questions. Teachers need to encourage all language learners to explore and express ideas in their first language to support the development of thinking and new concepts.

Using comments similar to the provided examples, the teacher can⁵:

- **Acknowledge** what children are doing in order to help sustain their interest (especially for young learners)

I see that you have the water running through the tube into the big bucket.

- **Support** children as they work through a process

I see you found a way to sink the leaves. By putting a stone on them, the leaves sink to the bottom.

- **Reaffirm** vocabulary children use

*You're right. The bucket is **heavy** when it is filled with water.*

- **Introduce** new vocabulary informally

*Look at the way the paper **floats** on top of the water. or How did you get the play dough to **float**?*

- **Challenge** children's thinking with questions such as:

How did you know? Why did you decide...?

- **Prompt** children to **retell** in different ways (label, identify, describe, summarize)

What happened when you poured all that water through the funnel into this bucket?

- **Guide** children to make **connections** (compare, contrast, apply)

That's the same as ... What does this make you think of?

What happens to the water when you put other liquids in it?

How To Develop Language

- *Acknowledge*
- *Support*
- *Reaffirm*
- *Introduce*
- *Ask*
- *Challenge*
- *Prompt*
- *Guide*
- *Lead*

⁵ Adapted from Toronto District School Board 2001 *Water in the Kindergarten Program*. Pg 7

- **Lead** children to reflect on experiences (encourage questioning, further wonderings, and inferences)

I wonder what would happen if...

I wonder why ...

I wonder how ...

Why do you think that happened?

The Dramatic Play Centre

Since most dramatic play experiences in the classroom occur in social situations, there are many opportunities for children to use and expand oral language. Although play is essentially child-directed, the teacher has an important role in play – to listen in, observe, interact, and even participate in the play at appropriate moments.

The teacher’s questions and comments to children need to promote thinking, help them construct knowledge, develop language, and expand current language use, and elicit more than simply minimal responses.

Using comments similar to the provided examples, the teacher can:

- **Acknowledge** what children are doing in order to help sustain interest (especially for young learners)

I can tell you are selling something. You have even written down what your customer has bought.

- **Support** children as they work through a process

I noticed you are working well together to tell the story with the puppets you made and everyone is getting a turn.

- **Reaffirm** vocabulary used by children.

*Oh, Mere is the **customer** this time? Do you have to give any money back to your **customer**?*

- **Introduce** new vocabulary informally

*It looks like your baby has a **fever**. I think you should take her to the clinic today to see the doctor. She can take your baby’s **temperature** to see if she is okay.*

- **Ask** for clarification, elaboration, or justification

Literacy is not for the fortunate few. It is the right of every child. Teaching children to read is not the responsibility of a chosen few. It is the responsibility of every teacher, every administrator and every parent.

(Bouchard and Sutton, 2001. Pg. 3)

Research indicates that students benefit academically, socially, and emotionally when they are encouraged to develop and/or maintain proficiency in their first language while they are learning English or French.

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003. Pg. 3.10)

During reading ask; *Why do you think the fish said that? What would you have done if that had happened to you?*

You made a pattern with the beads. Tell me about your thinking.

- **Challenge** children's thinking with questions:

How will the customers know how much this is going to cost?

- **Prompt** children to **retell** in different ways (label, identify, describe, summarize)

Tell me what happened first in the story.

How did this story end?

- **Guide** children to make **connections** (compare, contrast, apply)

That's the same as ... What does this make you think of?

What happens to the water when you put the soap in it?

- **Lead** children to reflect on experiences (encourage questioning, making inferences and further wondering,

I wonder what would happen if...

I wonder why ...

I wonder how ...

Why do you think that happened?

Emergent Reading

Introduction

Most children are surrounded by print in their environment. They see signs inside and outside stores, labels on food containers, bill boards, books, newspapers, etc. Some children have had few opportunities to see how print is used in our everyday lives and will not understand the importance of learning to read. When a child's environment is lacking in print rich materials, the school plays an even more vital role in the development of literacy skills.

An effective reading program is complex and is made up of many facets. Children take an active part in their learning and the program ensures that they develop and apply reading strategies that allow them to access a wide range of reading material. An effective reading program encourages children to think about reading and to respond to and reflect on what they have read, even at the youngest of ages.

*A Guide To Effective Instruction in Reading, 2003*⁶ identifies three main goals of reading instruction:

- **Comprehension** is the ability to understand, reflect on, and learn from text. Effective reading instruction builds on children's prior knowledge and experience, enhances their language skills (expanded vocabulary) and encourages children to think deeply about what they are reading.
- **Fluency** is the ability to identify words. This involves fast, accurate, and effortless identification of words.
- **Motivation to read** is the most important element in engaging children actively in the reading process and ensuring lifelong interest in reading. Children need many and varied opportunities to read and to see themselves as effective readers.

All children come to school with their own unique understanding of language, and with varied background knowledge and experiences. Teachers must take this into account as they plan a program that meets the needs of students. There are broad categories that cluster the skills that readers are actively using. Children in kindergarten classes are usually considered emergent readers. **Emergent readers** imitate and practice the reading process by acting out reading behaviours and by pretending to read. Through frequent repetition of simple texts, children engage in the reading process but have really memorized the words. However, they become familiar with highly frequent words and letters, and learn that some words rhyme or sound the same at the beginning or the end. They begin to understand conventions of reading (that words are read from left to right and from the top of the page to the bottom, for example), and they learn that spoken words can be written down in a way that allows the words to be read and understood by others. In other words, they learn how reading works and

⁶ Ontario Ministry of Education. *A Guide to Effective Instruction in Reading* 2003. Pg.2.4

their reading success is built on this fundamental understanding. Young children need to become involved in the thinking processes that fluent readers use. They need to consider whether the text makes sense, whether what they are reading is fact or fiction, and how new information confirms or conflicts with their prior knowledge.

Teachers can support emergent readers by:

- reading to them often;
- providing them with opportunities to share their ideas and responses to texts in a variety of ways;
- explicitly teaching basic skills such as phonemic awareness; and
- using simple texts that help young readers to transition to more complex texts.

Applying Cambourne’s Conditions of Learning as previously outlined in relation to the Emergent Reader, it is the role of the teacher to set up appropriate conditions for reading to happen naturally in the classroom in a way that is encouraging and rewarding for the young reader.

The Knowledge and Skills Required for Reading

The knowledge and skills that students need to develop and use in order to read with understanding and fluency is not isolated elements taught in a specific sequence but is interrelated components that support and build on each other in the context of a supportive learning environment.

- **Oral language skills.** Through experience with listening and speaking, children build the skills that form a foundation for reading and writing:
 - **Vocabulary.** Children cannot read and understand a text made up of words with which they are not familiar.
 - **Awareness of specific language structures.** A child who knows how to use the grammatical structures of a language knows to ask himself, “Does this sound right?” when reading.
- **Ability to activate prior knowledge.** Children enter school with a variety of background experiences and knowledge so their experience may differ considerably from those of their classmates and/or teachers. Regional differences figure very prominently when making broader decisions about texts and illustrations that are appropriate to the youngest readers. Teachers need to be aware of these differences in order to

The Knowledge and Skills Required for Reading

- *Oral language skills*
- *Ability to activate prior knowledge*
- *Understanding of concepts of print*
- *Phonemic awareness*
- *Understanding of letter-sound relationships*
- *Vocabulary*
- *Ability to use comprehension*
- *Ability to apply thinking skills strategies*

(Ontario Ministry of Education. 2003. A Guide To Effective Instruction in Reading. Pg. 2.7.)

provide appropriate instruction and engage all students in learning to read. They also need to encourage children to use that knowledge to understand the material they are reading in order to predict words and content and to make connections between what they already know and what they are reading.

- **Understanding of concepts of print.** When children first encounter print, they are not aware that the symbols on the page represent spoken language or that these symbols convey meaning. By observing experienced readers, who draw their attention to print, children develop an understanding of concepts like directionality (knowing that in this language text is written and read from left to right and from top to bottom of the page), differences between letters and words (words are made of letters, and there are spaces between words), awareness of capitalization and punctuation, diacritic signs (accents), and common characteristics of books (front/back covers, title, author).
- **Phonemic awareness.** Phonemic awareness is the understanding that the words we say or hear are made up of individual sounds or phonemes. Children with phonemic awareness can hear, identify, and manipulate the sounds in oral language. They are, therefore, well prepared to match letters to sounds in order to decode words in print and to record those sounds. Research supports the importance of phonemic awareness in helping students learn to read by providing a critical foundation for word solving. Phonemic awareness can be taught and is a crucial skill for children to develop.
- **Understanding of letter-sound relationships.** Phonics instruction teaches children the relationships between the letters of written language and the individual sounds of spoken language. Children learn to match sounds to letters and to match letters to sounds.
- **Vocabulary.** Children need a broad vocabulary that they understand and can use correctly to label their knowledge and experiences. Oral vocabulary refers to words used in speaking or recognized when listening. Reading vocabulary or sight vocabulary refers to words recognized or used in print. It is a tremendous challenge for students to read words that are not already part of their oral vocabulary. Therefore, the teacher must ensure that children are exposed to new vocabulary orally through discussions, or through listening to a wide variety of texts including those written with and for them. This is particularly significant for children who are learning a second language.
- **Ability to use comprehension strategies.** Students must be taught the skills they require to understand stories or information and also the skills they require to reflect on what they have read or heard. The ability to think about our thinking (metacognition), plays a significant role in comprehension and in our ability to acquire knowledge. Teachers model this behaviour by thinking out loud while reading to children: *I wonder why the turtle did not want to be his friend anymore? I think it is because he lied to frog about where he was going to play so frog would not be included. How would that have made you feel?*
- **Ability to apply thinking skills.** By applying thinking skills, students are able to draw more meaning from what they read and apply their learning in different ways. Teachers promote creative thinking by ensuring the children have the following knowledge skills in place that can be applied to their reading:

- Prior knowledge of a given subject;
- Understanding of the story's meaning; and
- Problem solving skills.

Approaches to Reading Instruction

1. Read Aloud

Read Aloud is a teaching approach in which the teacher reads a text aloud to students (usually the whole class) and encourages them to respond to it. It is an opportunity for teachers to model what good readers do. As the most teacher-centered approach to reading, the Read Aloud is a major component of a kindergarten literacy program.

First select the book to read. If you are unable to access a variety of books that are appropriate for young children you may choose to create the text yourself. Before reading begins the children are encouraged to make predictions about the content, based on the cover and the pictures. The book is then read in an interesting and expressive way. Show the pictures to the students, and comment briefly on details of the text. At one or two critical points in the text, reading is stopped and the children are given the opportunity to stop and reflect on the ideas in the book such as: *This book cannot be a true story because animals do not talk*. Afterwards, as a class, the content and ideas introduced in the text are discussed, predictions reviewed, and issues that emerged during the reading are clarified.

The Read Aloud instructional approach serves several purposes. It provides opportunities for the teacher to:

- Develop a love of reading in students;
- Model fluent, expressive reading;
- Expose students to different text types; and
- Model and teach reading strategies to the class.

Some suggestions for guiding students in their use of reading strategies include the following⁷:

Strategy	Prompt
Set purpose for reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading this may help you to learn about... • This may connect to your interest in... • The title makes me think that this is going to be about...
Make predictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wonder if... • I think that this book will be about...
Connect personally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is like... • This reminds me of... • This could help me with...
Visualize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In my head, I can see... • I have a picture of... • I see...
Monitor comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is (not) making sense because... • This is (not) what I expected because... • This connects (or does not) to what I already know because...
Use “fix-up” strategies to address confusion and repair comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe I’d better read on to see if... • Maybe I need to (reread this word/review what I read before about.../ask for help)

In order to encourage children to think about what they are reading ask children questions that are answered directly in the text as well as open-ended questions. For example:

- Why did he go there?
- What else could that character have done?
- What would you have done ____?
- What do you think might happen next?
- How did you feel when ____?
- Why do you think the character ____?

⁷ Ontario Ministry of Education. 2003 *A Guide To Effective Instruction in Reading* pg. 4.7-4.8

Choosing Books for the Read Aloud

The texts read aloud to the class become models of different types of materials readers encounter and writers create. For example, when fiction is read, such as traditional tales, students gradually absorb knowledge about the organization of narratives and the conventions or features of such tales – characters, setting, problem, events, climax, and resolution. Children learn to expect a similar organization each time they listen to or read a new tale and, as a result, these tales become more predictable for them and therefore easier to read. They can also use their knowledge of the texts to create their own stories.

By listening as the teacher reads non-fiction, young students gain experience with such text forms as descriptive reports, comparisons, procedures, and instructions. They learn about text features such as a table of contents, headings, glossaries, labels, maps, timelines, and diagrams. This helps them to understand, from a young age, how to read non-fiction texts and to develop strategies for their own non-fiction writing. It also provides opportunities for children to have models of texts that they can use in their own independent writing.

2. Shared Reading

Shared reading is a teaching approach where the teacher reads aloud to students from a text they can all see and invites them to join in as they become familiar with the text. The texts used for shared reading include specially made big books; songs, poems, messages, or stories printed out onto chart paper or a chalk board; or books with large print. Read aloud sessions provide students with a fully supported reading experience whereas shared reading progresses gradually from a teacher supported reading experience towards one in which students take over increasingly more of the reading task as they develop reading strategies. It is very supportive of the reader because control of the reading is not released until the students are ready.

Shared reading is the main vehicle for teaching young children how to read.

With young learners, shared reading is the main vehicle for teaching and reinforcing print concepts (the words carry the message; there are spaces between words; text is read from the top to the bottom of the page and from left to right). It is important to revisit the teaching of print concepts often in kindergarten classrooms and the texts used for shared reading should be read and reread many times for different purposes. Kindergarten students are more likely to demonstrate early print tracking behaviours with familiar texts.

Shared reading texts are in a large-print format (e.g., either Big Books or songs, poems and chants written on chart paper or a chalk board) This allows all students clear access to the written language. Rereading these texts frequently – sometimes on consecutive days, interspersed with other Shared Reading texts, and again after a few weeks or months helps students develop increasingly confident reading behaviours. Frequent readings also serve to build a body of familiar texts, which becomes a rich resource for teaching reading strategies.

During the first reading of a text, the focus should always be on comprehension. In addition to exploring the meaning of the text, the features of the text such as illustrations, labels, and

boldface type may be highlighted. Identifying these features and those of non-fiction material help children develop an understanding of print conventions and how they help us as readers. The second and subsequent rereading, reinforce comprehension, but also introduce reading strategies including word recognition, phonics, self-monitoring behaviours (knowing when and why a word has been read incorrectly) and a recognition of text features. In other words, shared reading provides a common text for the demonstration and practice of reading strategies.

Stimulating general language development is another important goal of shared reading. During the multiple readings, students listen to the patterns and rhythms of language and model those patterns and rhythms when they join in. They learn new vocabulary and become aware of some differences between spoken and written language. They also use oral language to respond to what they have read during shared reading.

Although shared reading is usually a whole class activity, at times it is necessary to have additional sessions with small groups of students in order to tailor the instruction to individual needs. This may be of particular importance for students with advanced reading skills or for those who require more time and support.

Purposes

Shared reading is an important part of a comprehensive emergent reading program. It provides opportunities for students to:

- **Enjoy Reading:** By reading a wide variety of texts with expression and discussing these with enthusiasm, the teacher conveys a love of books and the reading process to students. When teachers demonstrate their pleasure of both rereading well-loved books and exploring new ones, students absorb the intrinsic message that books are vitally important to everyone.
- **Listen to a Fluent Model:** Shared Reading gives the teacher opportunities to demonstrate important literacy concepts and messages and additionally, to have the children model this behaviour themselves as everyone reads together. Through expressive reading, the teacher not only demonstrates fluency but also models positive attitudes and emotions, giving students the message that reading can be a pleasurable, exciting, and informative experience.
- **Focus on Comprehension:** It is vitally important that students understand that comprehension is the most important goal of reading. To emphasize this point, the focus of the first reading should be on understanding the text by asking questions and making comments to enhance student comprehension. The teacher can delve deeper into meaning during subsequent readings by encouraging inferential thinking and making connections to students' own experiences and/or other texts. Comparing related texts can also enrich comprehension.
- **Build Confidence:** Participating actively in the reading process is a vital part of becoming a reader. Having students join in and read patterned or rhythmic texts with an experienced reader, facilitates their active involvement; increases their

engagement; gives them confidence in their ability to solve problems, and helps them feel successful as developing readers.

- **Learn Book Handling and Print Concepts:** Shared reading helps young readers understand how print works. Those students with rich preschool literacy experiences will already have a strong working knowledge of how to handle books, frame a word, and track print when they begin more formal reading instruction. Since the whole class is generally involved in Shared Reading sessions, these demonstrations must cover a wide range of instructional needs. For students who need to be made aware of the starting point and directionality, for example, the teacher may point to the first word on a page and say, *Here's where we start*, and then track along the line with a finger or a pointer. For more advanced readers, an examination of when we use a question mark or quotation marks that indicate dialogue may be more appropriate.

Because kindergarten readers demonstrate knowledge of print concepts most confidently when dealing with familiar materials, rereading is an important strategy. This knowledge is acquired gradually and, therefore, it is important to anticipate that some readers may not initially learn the print conventions. Their confidence will increase, however, as those texts become familiar, and eventually their knowledge of print concepts will transfer to new texts as well.

- **Understand Text Features:** Understanding text features (aspects of a text that require interpretation by the reader such as reading bold text with more emphasis) helps readers comprehend text content more fully. Some text features, such as the title and author's name, occur in all books and are quickly understood; those that occur less frequently, including many visual features such as captions or a glossary, need to be learned and practiced. When exploring such features as the title; the author and illustrator; the back cover text, and the pictures on the front and back covers, readers must be shown how to look at all of the information available before they read a book.

If a student comments on a particular text feature, a natural opportunity for discussion emerges. If not, it is the teacher's role to point it out and help the class understand its purpose. Once students have discussed that feature, they may notice it in other books they encounter and may decide to include a similar text feature in their own writing.

- **Use Strategies for Working with Words:** It is important to provide reading opportunities that offer rich examples of how to work on sounds, letters, and words in authentic contexts. During multiple readings of these texts, the focus must be on the word-solving strategies students need to learn.
- **Learn About Different Text Types:** Fiction and non-fiction texts read with students during shared reading lessons provide important models for many different text types that readers encounter and writers create (e.g., narrative stories, descriptive reports, procedures, instructions). Students learn about text layouts that include headings, tables of contents, illustrations, labels, and glossaries.

Offering Extra Support

Emergent readers have limited book experiences so some need more individual support to develop reading concepts than whole group shared reading provides. Occasionally it is appropriate to work with students in a small group. Reducing the size of the instructional group allows the students' needs to be met by:

- Focusing their attention during book reading sessions;
- Developing their understanding that the print, in addition to the pictures, holds the message;
- Allowing them to handle a book (knowing the front of a book and how to turn the pages from the front to the back cover); and
- Showing them how print works and how a reader needs to decide where to start reading, to track print from left to right, and to move on to a new line.

A small group allows the teacher to present a shared reading lesson, focusing the concepts taught on the needs of the group. Using familiar Big Books or other large texts offers a high degree of support and permits the teacher to demonstrate strategies that the group can see. Using familiar shared reading texts means students will have had some additional exposure to the texts.

Shared Reading Sessions

A shared reading session follows a series of steps similar to those used for read aloud, but also includes several readings, takes place over several days, and involves more intensive teaching of reading strategies.

The first reading or first few readings, focus mostly on comprehension, but each reading also highlights other teaching goals such as: building confidence, demonstrating print concepts and text features, and teaching word solving strategies. Each additional reading allows the teacher to focus on an increasing number of reading strategies, based on students' needs.

Planning:

- Identify a skill to be taught;
- Select or create a shared reading text in a format that allows every student to see the words (e.g., Big book, chart, poem, song) that contains appropriate language and allows the focus to be on the specific teaching strategy identified;
- Read the complete text to develop a greater familiarity with it;
- Check the text organization and features;
- Create a teaching plan; and
- Make notes to know where to stop to highlight ideas, vocabulary, and text features during the first reading, and which strategies to highlight during each subsequent reading.

Before Reading:

- Read and talk about the title, author, and illustrator;
- Discuss the front cover illustration, then read and discuss the back cover text;
- Elicit students' background knowledge by encouraging them to make connections to personal experiences or knowledge or to other books;
- Invite predictions about the book's content; and
- Ask students to identify the book as a fiction or non-fiction text.

During Reading:

- Model the reading process by reading the text in an expressive way, making sure that everyone can see the accompanying illustrations;
- Follow the words smoothly using a finger or a pointer during the reading so that students can follow along, and invite them to join in when they are ready;
- Question, comment, or clarify as necessary to help students comprehend the content; and
- Pause at challenging words to explore their meaning. Think aloud to highlight print concepts (e.g., illustration captions, graphics) to assist with comprehension.

For further reading sessions the teacher may:

- Review what was learned in the previous reading session;
- Consider a new, relevant teaching point; and
- Ask open-ended questions that cause children to consider the reading strategies they are using:
 - Cover a predictable word and ask children to tell what word they think is hidden. Ask them to explain their thinking.
 - How did you know that word said dog and not puppy?
 - What did you notice about the spelling of the words *and* and *sand*?
 - These two words sound the same at the end of the word. We say that they rhyme. What other word rhymes with them?
 - This mark is a question mark. It tells us that the speaker is asking a question. What does our voice do when we ask a question? Let's read this line together and make sure our voices go up at the end of the sentence.

After Reading: *Following each reading, the focus of discussion should be on comprehension.*

- Discuss students' pre-reading predictions and ask what different ideas they have after reading the text.

- Make further connections/comparisons to other books and topics and/or to students' lives.
- Provide specific prompts/questions to generate thinking.
- Ask students to share their personal reflections about the text (e.g., what they liked or disliked, what they found interesting, what they want to learn more about).
- Consider ways for children to extend their thinking about the book by, perhaps drawing a picture to tell a similar story.
- Encourage further sharing in such forms as story summaries, oral retellings of selected parts, drama, or art.

3. Independent Reading

Children at this stage of development require a great deal of practice to become good readers. They need opportunities to read and reread the texts that they have read with the teacher in shared reading – the charts, daily messages, poems, songs, or books. They develop their ability to read these texts as they read with the teacher and their classmates, but it is the opportunity to read the texts on their own that sets them on a firm foundation for future learning. They become confident in their abilities and are ready to try something new as they apply their developing skills to unfamiliar texts.

Teachers can ask children to:

- look for and read signs in their environment;
- create signs for them to read that are significant to their surroundings;
- add signs and labels to items of interest in the classroom (*Doctor's Office* at the Doctor Centre, *Make a pattern* at the bead centre).

Emergent Writing

Introduction

The introduction of writing to the Kindergarten curriculum is a significant vehicle for the development of literacy. When reading and writing are introduced at the same time, young children have the unique opportunity to see how these two forms of communication work

It is important to note that although forming letters and printing neatly are necessary skills, they are fine motor activities and not the premise of writing. Handwriting is related to the physical domain and is affected by small muscle strength and dexterity.

together. They learn that thoughts, feelings, stories, songs, and poems can be recorded so that others can read them. The process of learning this code is made much easier when they are taught from both perspectives. They learn that others are interested in reading about their ideas, just as they are anxious to read the stories of published authors.

It is important to differentiate between writing development and printing in the early years classroom. **Printing/writing** is the physical act of putting letters on the page and involves a set of fine motor skills. It is important that children learn to form letters so that others recognize them, however, long periods of time spent copying and repeating random and unrelated letters is not the best use of children's time.

Writing, as identified in this document, is the complex task of recording individual thoughts. It involves the mental creation of the text, the analysis of how to translate

the thoughts to print, and the actual printing of the text. It is a creative process and should not be confused with the copying of words or letters.

Children need time and multiple opportunities to write to become a writer.

Writing is a powerful tool that allows children to express their thoughts, their feelings and their thinking. They can write about their own personal experiences or they can create ideas from their imaginations. Writing is an opportunity for children to experiment with ideas and communicate ideas in different forms. There is a strong connection between writing and reading and both are taught simultaneously and reciprocally. Before becoming writers, children need to see adults going through the writing process so that they have a model of what a writer thinks and does. Teachers should show clearly in small, simple steps how to come up with an idea, illustrate the concept, think about the story, and review it orally. The teachers' goal is to help children see themselves as writers and to feel that they can write.

The five steps of the writing process (planning and researching, drafting, revising, editing, and sharing and publishing) represent those typically taken by experienced writers as they progress through a piece of writing from conception to completion. Kindergarten children are not expected to use all of these steps, but may often engage in thinking about what they want to

say (planning); may try recording their ideas with pictures or labels (drafting); and may talk about their writing attempts with classmates (sharing). The role of the teacher is to provide opportunities for the children to learn about and from these steps over time.

When thinking about the five steps writers use, it is important to remember that any work on the writing process needs to be developmentally appropriate for kindergarten students. For example, planning can be simply drawing a picture on a topic and the child's purpose for writing can be "to tell the teacher I have a new sister." Similarly, a draft writing attempt can be a combination of drawings, scribbles, and letter-like forms and may not progress to the revising, editing, and sharing and publishing stages in kindergarten. The five steps should be considered guidelines to work towards through the many writing demonstrations that are offered through Modelled and/or Shared Writing.

Writing may first emerge as scribble or letter-like forms in random order over a page, and progress from left to right scribble and letter-like forms, before it evolves into letters and words. These are all approximations of writing and are considered developmentally appropriate for young children. Referring to Cambourne's Conditions of Learning,⁸ it is clear that the teacher's response to the writing is important. Children are encouraged to repeat and build on the process when the teacher responds to the scribbles in a positive way and in a way that signifies understanding of the communication. Watching the teacher model writing, engaging in Shared Writing, and being constantly exposed to print will assist students in gaining control over letter to sound correspondence, directionality, spacing, and form, and help them to develop purposes and appropriate content for writing.

When writing, children need to talk about their ideas first, record them using pictures, then have an opportunity to talk about the story they are creating and, later, attempt to print labels on the picture. The labels are letters or words that describe what is happening in parts of the picture. At the beginning of the school year, some students may know very little English or French so it is important that they be allowed to communicate in their first language in order to express themselves. As these children learn to speak English or French, they do not need to rely on communicating only in their first language. Writing samples can then be used as teaching tools when they are posted in the classroom environment.

Instructional Approaches

To ensure that children progress along a writing continuum, it is recommended that the teacher use a series of approaches. Children need to see someone writing and hear the writer think aloud the process they are following to record their thoughts. By gradually releasing the responsibility for writing from the teacher to the student, the child is given specific support that gradually diminishes.

⁸ Cambourne, Brian. *The Whole Story: Natural Learning and the Acquisition of Literacy in the Classroom*, 1988.

To ensure that children progress along a continuum of writing development, it is recommended that the following instructional approaches be used:

- Modelled writing;
- Shared / Interactive writing; and
- Independent writing.

1. Modeled Writing

Through the process of modeled writing, the teacher writes as the children watch. The teacher holds the pen or chalk and controls what is going to be written. The most important aspect of modelled writing is that teachers express the thinking behind the writing by talking aloud as they write in front of the class. This helps the children to understand some of the complex concepts that are involved in being a writer. In the Kindergarten classroom the writing of a daily message to the class using a simple sentence is an easy way to show children how to think of an idea and write it down. If the same sentence stem i.e., *I like ...or Today we are going to* is used for a few days, the children begin to follow along with the text. As they memorize the text orally they are able to match the spoken word to the printed word and begin to pay attention to details of a text. They begin to understand that a text is simply talk written down. For second language learners this provides an additional opportunity for learning language structures as well.

At the beginning of the year, the teacher decides on the sentence she is going to write but thinks aloud the writing conventions that are needed to record that sentence. *'I am going to tell you about what I like to bring to school for a snack. I am going to start my story with I like. My story will say I like apples. I am going to start printing my story in this corner of the paper (point to the top left corner) and then I am going to write across the page. (sweep hand from the left side to the right side of the paper or chalkboard) The word I is an easy word to print. It is written just as it sounds. (The teacher prints the word I) To show the difference between one word and the next word I am going to leave a space. Listen to the sound at the beginning of the word like. LLLL What letter makes the LL sound? Yes, the letter l makes the LLL sound. (Teacher writes the letter l and writes the rest of the word with no conversation.) Let's stretch the word apples so we can hear all the sounds I need to print- aaaa, ppp, llll, sss. Watch how I write those sounds to make the word apples. (The teacher prints apples.) Now I have to make a period to show that I have finished my sentence. Who would like to make the period for me? Let's read my sentence about what I like to bring for my snack.*

To create a modelled text:

1. Select a topic. Choose a topic and a writing form that is appropriate for the needs of the children. It can be as simple as a morning message that tells the children one thing that will happen in the class that day with a comment about it. For example, the text might say: *Good morning. Today we are going to read a book about an elephant. I wonder if it is going to be a true story or a make-believe story?* Another effective form of writing is to recount an event in which all children participated or

the steps taken to complete something together. This demonstrates to children that there are many writing forms that they can use to communicate effectively.

2. Introduce a range of writing concepts in the demonstration. The teacher could offer information on content, the purpose for writing the audience, sentence construction, letter formations, or spelling. It is important to focus on those concepts that meet the needs of the class at any particular point in time.
3. Think aloud while writing. This is the most important aspect of modelled writing because it allows children to hear what a writer is thinking at the same time that they see the text being created. Teachers must choose a focus for the think alouds that matches what the children are ready to learn. This might be saying a sentence and counting the number of words that have to be written, stretching out the individual sounds of a word in advance of printing it, or considering interesting verbs to use in that sentence.

2. Shared Writing

In shared writing, the teacher and children talk about the topic and create the sentence together. The adult is holding the writing tool so controls the spelling and the ideas that are recorded but asks capable students to volunteer to write some of the letters (and later words) or punctuation marks. The children are sharing the pen or chalk with the teacher. With the adult supporting the students during all of these writing tasks, children clearly see how the writing process works and will begin to attempt to write independently mimicking the patterns the teacher has written. The following is an example of a shared writing activity.

Today it is Mera's turn to tell us her news. Mera, what would you like to tell us about today?

Child answers: I have a new baby at my home.

Teacher responds: Let's write a story about Mera's new baby. Let's write: **Mera has a new baby.** Mera, you know how to write the first letter of your name so you come and write the letter M for us and I will write the letters you do not know how to write. Now I have to leave a space before I write the next word so we know where it starts. Let's think about the word *has*. Listen to the first sound in *has*. *Hhhh* What letter makes that sound? *H* makes the *hhhh* sound. *Has* is spelled *h-a-s* (teachers stretch the sounds as they write each letter.)

Teachers work with different groups of children - sometimes the whole class, sometimes a smaller group of children and sometimes one student at a time. Groups should be flexible and based on a common specific need. If children are grouped together because they have the same writing needs, the members of that group must change when the needs of the group change. When demonstrating how to think of an idea or teaching them sound symbol work, teachers work with the whole class or at least a large group. Smaller groups are effective when helping children with specific skills such as learning to print their name or writing about an event or observation that the small group shared together. Small group instruction is more skill-based and specific than large group instruction.

Shared writing allows teachers to:

- Support the connection between oral language and written language;
- Provide a model of how a piece of writing develops, while incorporating ideas from the students;
- Share the thought processes of a writer from the conception of an idea to a completed piece of writing;
- Highlight important writing conventions;
- Produce a completed piece of writing that can act as a model for the students' writing and a familiar text for them to read.

3. Independent Writing

Young children develop confidence in their growing writing skills as they engage in a variety of self-chosen, independent writing opportunities. These activities can be as simple as drawing a picture of their home; a labeled diagram to show the parts of a plant, or a labeled poster to show what they are selling an item in the dramatic play centre.

Following a modeled or shared writing experience, the children discuss how they might choose to write in the same form when they go to the learning centres. Once the children know where the writing materials are, and that they are always available for them to use, they will begin incorporating writing into their play. The teacher's response is critical in ensuring that the students feel confident in their developing skills and know that their efforts are appreciated and understood.

Independent writing allows the teacher to give students opportunities to explore writing on their own and to encourage students to integrate instruction from the modelled and shared writing lesson to their own writing. Students should be encouraged to consider their own reasons for writing and to develop their own ideas. This is very different from asking all children to complete a sentence from a common sentence or story starter. For example, based on a common experience, the children may choose to write about the experience as a recount of events, as an explanation of what happened, or as a procedure of steps involved in completing a task. Children should be encouraged to share ideas and questions as they work through the process to gather ideas from others to decide how and whether to incorporate those ideas. The teacher can offer advice and answer questions but is not there to ensure correct spelling and sentence structure. These writing conventions are too difficult for children at this stage of development but, by considering the sounds they hear and by following conventions that have been modeled for them, they begin to move toward that stage. The idea is to encourage children to use writing to express their ideas, whether through letters, words, labels or signs.

When working with children who are learning a second language, the purpose of the writing process is somewhat different. Children learn about the language structures and vocabulary as they learn to record language. For these children the models of the teachers' writing play an even more critical role in the writing process. Children should be encouraged to talk with their friends in their first language as they build and expand their stories. When they talk about the

picture that depicts their thinking, they can then begin applying the English or French vocabulary. Songs and rhymes that are set to music can help to teach new vocabulary. As children learn more English or French, they write the letters that represent the sounds they think they hear. If the child picks the wrong letter, it is important to help him to sound it out. Telling a child he is wrong and insisting the correct letter be recorded may be stressful for the child and it may discourage self-confidence. Consequently, the child may not want to take a risk next time. The teacher tracks those letters the children need more help with, and incorporates them into the next lesson. In order to encourage written communication, the teacher should teach what the children need to learn as identified by their writing; build on what they remember; observe and assess what students are doing and tell them when they are doing well. Offering children descriptive feedback on a regular basis, allows them to focus their attention and blossom as writers.

Forms of writing that are appropriate for young learners:

- Class story of events that have happened to the children
- Procedural writing (list of steps needed to complete a task (hand washing), do a craft etc....)
- Familiar songs
- New verses to familiar songs
- Signs for use in the classroom
- Books that follow a pattern, or big books for the classroom
- Letters written to family members
- Labels for a diagram (for example, parts of the body)

Materials that may be used for writing:

- Chalkboards – large and individual ones are ideal
- Paper of various sizes and/or colours
- Staples, tape, scissors and string to bind the books together
- Local artists, volunteers, or older children who are invited to create illustrations for published writing

Pre-writing and Writing Activities

- Follow up the reading or telling of a story. Ask the children to:
 1. Visualize the story and share with a buddy.
 2. Illustrate what was significant or important in the story.
 3. Record a favourite part of the story.
 4. Show connections between their lives and the story.

- Talk about a picture or shared experience. The children talk with a buddy or a small group and then share their ideas with the whole class. After this brainstorming session, the teacher writes down the words the students use to describe what they saw. This is an opportunity to demonstrate that writing is simply talk written down.
- Practice making alphabet letters.
- Build letters using found materials
 - Use fingers to trace in the palm of the other hand (or a leg) to make the letter formations
 - Use finger to draw letters in the air
 - Use only water with a paint brush, to paint letters and pictures on the wall
 - Draw and label in the sand or on chalkboards
 - Create rhyming word charts that can be added to by listing the rhyming words they encounter in their reading
- Construct predictable pattern charts like *I see a _____* where the children have the opportunity to attempt to write by filling in the blanks. The teacher can model how to write the child's verbal response.
- Play the Mystery Letter Game – sitting behind a partner, use your finger to draw a letter on your partner's back and have them try to guess which letter.
- Create a class book that represents an event or activity they have all experienced or a story with which they are all familiar. Invite local artists, or parents to work with the children on the illustrations.
- Produce repetitive songs – write out the lyrics of songs with which children are familiar in a way that they can all see the words. Create and record new versions of familiar songs.
- Story Illustrations – Children listen to an adult read a story and then draw a picture to demonstrate their understanding of what happened in the story.
- Construct a “sign in” board using chalkboards or a sheet of paper on which the children sign their name upon arriving at school. This provides a simple opportunity for ongoing assessment of their ability to write their name over time.
- Play Writing Games – simple word games such as the following - the child thinks of a word, the teacher draws dashes on the board to represent the number of sounds. Children take turns guessing letters and eventually reading the word. If they guess right, print the letter; if they guess wrong draw a part of a picture (for example, a sun that is a circle with 8 rays coming out from it). The object of the game is for the children to correctly guess the word before the picture is completed. This game works well with trying to spell students' names.
- Label the environment – using pieces of paper, the children can help to label the important things in the classroom in the context of a sign (*Keep the **door** closed*)

- Go on a museum walk. After each child or a small group of children have had time to 'write' a story (using pictures, symbols, letters and/or words) go on a museum walk. A museum walk involves the students walking with their hands behind their back and looking at the work of others (without touching it). Having their hands behind their backs reminds them not to touch and to be respectful of the property of their peers.

The Writing Process

Writers typically follow a series of five steps, but even proficient writers do not necessarily follow the five steps of writing in sequential order. The explanation of the five steps that follows shows what these steps look like in kindergarten.

Planning and Researching

- **Selecting a Topic**

Often children select a topic that is of personal interest to them or something that they have experienced personally. The teacher can help children to make decisions about writing topics when modeling writing (talking aloud about how this topic was chosen) or shared writing (engaging children in a discussion about choosing an appropriate topic for their writing).

- **Deciding on a Purpose**

Students need to experience many writing demonstrations before they understand that writers have a purpose and an intended audience for their writing and that it is this combination of purpose and audience that helps to determine the form their writing should take. This understanding comes from discussions during modeled and shared writing. Children can learn, for example, that they might want to write a story about something they saw their mother do at home or they may wish to explain the steps required to do something that is familiar to them, such as playing a game. The purpose determines the writing form - from narrative to expository texts (explaining a procedure). This becomes an easy thing to teach when it is addressed on an ongoing basis and will be extremely helpful to children as they progress through the school grades.

- **Collecting Ideas**

In kindergarten, the research portion of planning may happen as students think about their own experiences or discuss their topic with a classmate. If more information is needed they should know whom they could ask for help.

- **Organizing Ideas**

During modeled and shared writing the teacher can show students how to organize information when many ideas are generated. For example, if there are a number of steps to be written down, they could be printed on strips of paper that can be organized and reorganized to show how the order of the ideas affects the story.

Drafting

In Kindergarten, drafting is the main step in the writing process. Young children draw, scribble, and write words or letters to draft their thoughts. Any of these forms is acceptable at this stage in children's development. The idea is that the child is aware that what they say and think can be recorded and interpreted by others. Asking children to "read" what they have written reinforces this idea. They need to feel that any attempt at recording is valued.

Students draft ideas once they have seen demonstrations of the drafting process. As the teacher models the drafting process and engages students in sharing ideas for content through shared writing, children gain the confidence to express ideas on their own.

Revising

Revising refers to the process of rereading the text and making changes to it. The ideas are changed, added to, and reorganized. For kindergarten children, most revisions occur during demonstrations by the teacher through modeled and shared writing. Modifications made to a class-made text should be simple but important changes that improve the readers understanding of the text. **It is not an expectation that kindergarten children will revise their own writing.**

Editing

Editing involves correcting spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization in preparation for sharing the writing with others and publishing a finished version. **It is not a step that is useful for kindergarten children who are just emerging as writers and focusing on recording their ideas.**

Sharing and Publishing

Sharing is an important step in kindergarten writing. Students are encouraged to show their writing to classmates and to read their ideas aloud, showing their pictures during the readings. Sharing their writing with the teacher is important so that they can be offered support, feedback, and suggestions for further writing. At first, it is common for children to show a picture and tell one story the first day and a different story the next day. Eventually, children understand that once a story has been written down, it remains the same over time. The teacher should recognize this shift in understanding.

It is important that children understand that what they say orally can become written text and that the meaning of these words stays the same whether oral or written. Teachers should write down ideas for the children and re-read them so that children understand that writing sends a message. Children need opportunities to experiment with writing. Encouraging them to work with a partner provides support for their developing skills as they share and talk about their work. This is an important step for writers at any stage of development.

Volunteers

Having adult volunteers actively involved with the teacher's program can be very helpful in providing young children additional time and attention necessary when running an active

learning program. Volunteers must have some training on the purpose and methodology of the activities as well as on classroom management techniques. They can be given small but important tasks that are clearly explained by the teacher. This way, the volunteers feel as though they are being useful. It is desirable to publicly or privately recognize the volunteers' contributions.

How can volunteers help? They can:

- Work with a small group to model how to print simple stories or letters.
- Listen to the children as they talk about what they have drawn.
- Assemble blank books, or sew pages together to make bound books
- Paint, sew, or otherwise create murals or cloth wall hangings depicting the alphabet, important vocabulary, etc.
- Observe children writing using pictures and words, taking note of important observations for the teacher.
- Prepare the printed sentences for groups to read.

Assessments

When working with small groups of students or one child at a time, a teacher makes observations about how each student is doing. The teacher will not be able to work with each student every day. This is okay. Valuable information can be gained when working with smaller groups of children – even if it is for a few moments. Teachers can, for example, collect a sample of the child's printed name each month and compare the samples over time. Additionally, writing samples or comments about observed writing samples might be gathered and kept in a folder for analysis at a later time. Gathering writing samples from each child over time is known as portfolio assessment. These pieces of work are important because they are authentic samples of what each child has learned from the lessons taught in modeled and shared writing and has, independently, applied them to authentic pieces of writing. These portfolios are often shown to parents.

When actively engaged in a balanced writing program, young children learn a great deal about vocabulary, language structures, communication, reading and writing. Learning in one area of literacy development assists the development of other language skills.

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