

Especially for practitioners working with young children! 

A Place for Writing

Literacy-Rich Experiences

What is the practice?

Writing can be a special event for children ages 3-5 if they have their own writing materials and a special place for writing. Having a “writing box” is a great way for young children to see themselves as writers with their own ideas and all the tools they need to express them. A writing box puts different types of writing materials in one place so that they will be on-hand whenever a child gets the writing spark.

What does the practice look like?

Fill small plastic bins or similar containers with a wide variety of materials that preschool children can use to draw, write, and create. You can have writing boxes that the whole class can participate in making and then share, or you can give each child the task of creating his own writing box out of an old cigar or tissue box. Place the writing bins in different, easily accessible places in the classroom such as the art and housekeeping areas. The writing bins should have materials that will interest your children and motivate them to write. These might include markers or pencils in bright colors or notepads decorated with popular characters.



How do you do the practice?

Your class's writing boxes depend on the children's interests and preferences. Getting children to help in their construction and maintenance is a great way to keep them involved and excited about writing as part of their everyday classroom experiences.

- Take an ordinary plastic bin that is large enough to hold papers and writing tools. Your children can help decorate it using stickers, bits of ribbon, and other trims.
- Fill the bin with many different types of writing materials—small packs of crayons, wide-lined paper, construction paper, sharpened pencils, recycled paper, small writing notebooks, washable markers, and erasable colored pencils. Adding cellophane tape, envelopes, stickers, and other materials to the box can enhance their writing experiences.
- If children are making their own individual boxes, give them a chance to pick out some of their supplies and to make choices about what materials they will use.
- Using small sets of pencils, markers, crayons, and paper will keep the children from becoming overwhelmed with choices and items to clean up. Extra stationary, old greeting cards, or used papers with a blank side can also be used. Crayons that don't roll, extra-thick pencils and markers, and child-sized safety scissors with rounded tips work well for preschoolers who are developing fine motor control.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Do your children spend time using the materials in the writing box?
- Do they show you books, cards, papers, or other writing that they have created?
- Have your children shown interest in trying to write with different tools, or are they exploring new uses for writing?

Take a look at more places for writing

Our Own Errands List

Five-year-olds Angela and Latoya play together in the housekeeping center of their preschool classroom. Angela pretends to be the mother and Latoya is the child. Using her "mom" voice, Angela tells Latoya, "We have to go to the bank and then we'll go to the store." She gets the play checkbook and puts it in a purse. "Oh, where's our list? We have to have a list." She puts the purse down and takes out a pencil and sheet of paper from the writing bin the teacher keeps in the housekeeping center. Angela sits down with Latoya and asks, "What do you want for dinner, daughter?" Latoya answers, "Pizza and ice cream!" Angela writes random letters on the page and says, "OK, and what else do we need? Milk. And eggs. And cookies." She writes each of the words on the page using invented spelling, as Latoya looks over her shoulder. When Angela is finished writing, she gets the purse and the girls pretend to go to the bank and the store.

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"I miss you, Grandma"

At circle time, three-year-old Mira tells her peers and early childhood teachers about her grandmother's visit to her house over the weekend. Later that morning, she tells her teacher, Miss Anna, that she misses her grandma. "Would you like to write her a letter and let her know you want to see her again soon?" Miss Anna asks. Mira nods and the teacher suggests she get some paper and things to write with from her writing box. Mira chooses some colored pencils and soon is busy drawing short lines and squiggles on the paper. Then Mira reaches for a crayon and colors on the paper. "Oh! That's a nice letter," comments Miss Anna. Mira hands her the paper and she pretends to read the writing. She puts it in an envelope and places it in Mira's cubbie for her mother to take home to mail. "Your grandma will be so happy to get your letter," the teacher tells Mira.

Greeting Card

Four-year-old Ava has a developmental coordination disorder that affects her fine motor skills. Her occupational therapist is ill and she tells her mother that she's going to make her a card. Ava takes her writing bin from her dresser and pulls out the thick markers and crayons that her therapist explained to her parents would be easy for her to grasp. Her mother clips a large sheet of paper onto a writing board so that the paper will stay in place. There are some large-sized animal stickers in the box and Ava puts the stickers on the paper. She uses the markers and crayons to draw and color a flower. The crayons are non-rolling, so Ava can set them down and retrieve them with ease. She asks her mother how to spell "get well" and her mother patiently sounds out the letters and waits as Ava slowly writes each one. When she is finished, her mother puts the letter away to give to the OT when they next see her.



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Keyboarding with Kids

Literacy-Rich Experiences

What is the practice?

Research shows that by age three, most children are cognitively ready to start learning how to use computers. Computer-based learning is one way that young children can develop their literacy and language skills. Children ages 3-5 who use computers, in addition to other activities off the computer, gain language, reading, and writing skills.



What does the practice look like?

Experiences with computers need to be appropriate to the child's age and should give him opportunities to manipulate words, sounds, or characters, experiment with different activities, and discover new things. The software programs used should have characters and topics that interest the children that you work with. The activities should match their age range and skill level. Research has shown that children learn better from software programs that let the child control the activities and make decisions, use clear instructions, and have increasing levels of difficulty. Keyboards made especially for young children have large keys, color-coded command keys, and other features that make typing easier for pre-readers. They can be used in place of a traditional keyboard.

How do you do the practice?

When selecting software programs for preschool children, it is best to select programs that allow the children to work independently. The programs should use familiar objects and words. You can help young children use computers for gaining language and literacy skills in their daily routines:

- Place the computer within children's easy reach, on a low table or cart at the appropriate height for the children.
- Select a low-traffic and well-lit area for the computer center, away from direct sunlight, to avoid glare on the screen.
- Keep software organized in some way, such as a CD album, so that the children can easily flip through the programs to select the one they would like to use.
- Provide several software choices that feature animated activities and sound effects and that have characters that interest children.
- Sit with the children and show them how to do simple computer tasks, such as keying the letters to copy a word of the child's choice or using the mouse to press a button on the screen.
- Encourage collaborative work at the computer. Computer games can be a great opportunity for young children to practice taking turns and working together.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Do your children spend time using the software programs?
- Have they progressed in level of skill difficulty?
- Do they use more vocabulary or recognize more words?

Take a look at more keyboarding fun

Super Approach!

Five-year-old Michael's preschool teacher has noticed his interest in superheroes, and found a computer program for children in which they interact with superheroes. The first time that she shows the program to Michael, she helps him use the computer mouse to explore the different activity options. Michael chooses an activity that lets him pick different options to create his own superhero. "Okay, first we have to pick a special power," says the teacher. "What should it be?" Michael quickly chooses to be able to fly. The teacher helps Michael guide the mouse to select that choice. Michael continues making choices until the hero is complete. "Now he needs a name," says the teacher. Michael enthusiastically says "Michael!" "What letter comes first in "Mmm-Michael?" asks the teacher, emphasizing the first letter. "M is for Michael" he says proudly. "That's right!" says his teacher. "Can you find the letter M on the keyboard?" She waits patiently for Michael to locate and press the key. "Great! You found it!" says the teacher. "Now let's figure out the next letter." She helps Michael identify and locate each letter in the name, then lets him take the lead in creating adventures for Michael the Superhero.



Picture-Word Software

Four-year-old Maria goes to the computer center in her early childhood classroom and flips through the software case until she finds a picture of the reading rabbit that she likes. She takes the CD from its pocket under the picture, and her teacher helps her load the program. Maria moves the mouse until the cursor on the screen is over an activity picture that she wants. Then she clicks the choice. She begins to play a game in which she clicks on pictures which then animate and display the spelling of their label. "Cat" says Maria, as the cat on the screen meows. "That's right, very good," says her teacher, "Those letters spell the word *cat*." Maria smiles and clicks another picture. "Cookie," she says as the cookie image rolls. "Yes, those letters spell the word *cookie*," the teacher agrees. "Both of those words start with the letter C. It makes a Ccc sound. Do you see any other words that start with the letter C?" Maria looks and clicks another picture. "What is that word?" asks the teacher. "Cake!" says Maria excitedly as the cake image dances around and the word is displayed. "Good job!" says her teacher as Maria continues to "read" the rest of the words.



cat

Listen Up!

Three-year-old Anton, who has visual impairments, loves to have stories read to him. His interventionist gave his parents a software program that will read stories aloud. The interventionist made tactile cues on the computer mouse and showed his parents how to help Anton learn to move the mouse on a pad that has raised edges to keep the cursor in the screen area. When Anton moves the mouse over the icons on the screen, the computer reads the titles aloud. By stopping the mouse when he hears the story title that he wants, Anton can use the tactile cues on the mouse to click and start the story. Anton enjoys climbing into one of his parents' lap and snuggling while the story he picked is read to him. He laughs at the different voices and sound effects that the computer makes as it tells the story.

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Words Everywhere

Literacy-Rich Experiences

Preschoolers need lots of exposure to words and printed language to get them ready for reading and writing. Teachers can help by making environmental print a significant part of their preschoolers' classroom experience.

What is the practice?

Environmental print can include handwritten labels on furniture and walls, posters, and children's own scribbling or writing. Including environmental print in your classroom is most effective when it is read and "used" throughout the class's daily routine.

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What does the practice look like?

A teacher writes down a story dictated by a small group of 4-year-olds and posts it, along with their drawings, on a bulletin board. The cubbies and hooks are labeled with the children's names and pictures, and the shelves are similarly labeled to help show where toys go. The teacher regularly refers to this print by asking children to "find their names" and providing opportunities for them to add to the printed messages around the room.

How do you do the practice?

There are lots of ways to incorporate environmental print into your classroom. The important thing is to make it relevant and use it as part of a daily routine to familiarize your preschoolers with all the uses of print.

- Start with children's names, which are often the first words they are interested in and recognize. Label cubbies, tables and coat hooks. Encourage them to use these labels as models to write their names on their own work.
- Show the importance of environmental print by referring to it. Take opportunities to point out posters with learning center labels, and handwritten or typed labels on shelves: "Please put the blocks where it says 'blocks,' on the second shelf," or "Let's go sit under the 'Reading Corner' sign to look at this book."
- Encourage children to add to the environmental print themselves. Let them scribble or write stories, write their names on their work, and create classroom decorations for special events.
- Use environmental print in group time by pointing out the words on posters showing songs you're singing, and by writing key discussion words on a whiteboard or large pad. Refer to these words later when you use them in conversation or future lessons.
- Create a bulletin board by inviting children to find and bring in labels and logos from favorite places, like McDonald's, Chuck E. Cheese's, and local fun spots. Children often are able to recognize labels and logos before they can actually 'read' the words. They learn to connect the words in the logos to the place or object itself. This helps focus their attention on characteristics of letters and words.
- Including stop signs and street signs in the blocks area is a natural way to incorporate environmental print into children's play. The iconic nature of these signs—such as red, eight-sided "STOP" signs—makes them easy for children to identify.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Do children in your class attend to environmental print?
- Are they learning to recognize more words and symbols?
- Do they understand the uses of environmental print?

Take a look at more words everywhere

Focus on Print

Noelle's preschoolers have helped create their own literacy-rich classroom environment. Noelle invites the 4-year-olds to bring in pictures from magazines, food and beverage labels, and other kinds of environmental print. The children pick their favorites for a rotating bulletin board of labels and signs. They refer to the display at group time. Pictures of signs from the neighborhood, magazine print, etc., are displayed around the classroom where they make sense. For example, street-sign pictures are in the blocks center and a photograph of their public library sign is in the book center. This project has helped Noelle's preschoolers focus on print—even when they are not in the classroom.

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Growing Confidence

In Marco's class of 3-year-olds, he makes a regular effort to engage his children in creating environmental print for the classroom. He encourages them to write or scribble their names on their own work, and to use alphabet stamps, stickers, and sponges to create artwork with letters and words. For special occasions, Marco will often write a simple message on a large piece of paper (i.e., "Happy birthday!" or "Welcome to our class!") and have the children decorate the paper while talking about the words and letters and what they convey. The children in Marco's class enjoy these activities, and have grown in confidence in themselves as writers.

Wonderful Word Walks

Every week, Sarah takes her inclusive preschool class on a "Word Walk" in the school's neighborhood. Some children walk holding hands with each other or the teachers, while others who have limited mobility ride in wagons or wheelchairs. The goal of the walk is to notice all the words they can find. Some children "write" the words down on their clipboards using scribbling and invented spelling, while others sign the words for Sarah's camcorder or speak them into audio recorders to remember for later. The words can be on signs, buildings, even trash. Once they get back to their room, the children use their recorders, video, and clipboards to add to their ongoing list of words that they've seen outside.

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