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## Supporting emergent writing in the kindergarten classroom

Marianne M. Hussey

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California State University

San Bernardino

✓ SUPPORTING EMERGENT WRITING

IN

THE KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM ✓

A project Submitted to

The Faculty of the School of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the

Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Education: Reading Option

By

Marianne M. Hussey, M.A.

San Bernardino, California

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APPROVED BY



Advisor: Dr. Adria Klein



Second reader: Dr. Kathy O'Brien

## SUMMARY

The emergent literacy perspective has evolved from research on how young children make sense of printed language around them. The theory that young children are active participants in the language process before formal schooling necessitates the alignment of kindergarten curricula to reflect this knowledge. The processes of reading, speaking, and listening are valued as important components of the kindergarten language arts curricula. However, in order to strengthen the match between theory and practice, emergent writing needs to be included as an integral part of literacy learning.

Supporting emergent writing in the kindergarten classroom can be achieved through examining the qualities of the home-based and school-based learning opportunities. Bridging the home-based and school-based literacy events serves as the basis for providing an instructional model which is relevant to the child, and builds on prior experience with language. It is necessary to design and implement developmentally appropriate strategies which

incorporate the child's knowledge of writing behaviors within a supportive instructional environment.

The traditional reading readiness approach fragments language learning, and requires the child to be an observer of written language, rather than an active participant. However, when the child is encouraged to participate in the writing process as a natural form of language expression, then relevant learning can be achieved.

In order to align theoretical base and practice, three areas can be evaluated: the role of the teacher, the characteristics of emergent writing behaviors and the learning environment. The role of the teacher is that of facilitator. Through the careful observation of each child's participation in the written language process, steps to facilitate and support literacy learning can be designed. It is essential that teachers are familiar with the characteristics of emergent writing, and recognize the child's journey through the those stages as indicators of growth and development. Journal writing is an effective instructional strategy which allows the child to

participate in the writing process reflectively, regardless of developmental level, or primary language.

As children engage in the writing process, a sense of authorship emerges. The child's voice in writing reflects personal feelings, opinions, experimentation with new ideas, and ingenious methods of conveying an important message.

Through the inclusion of the emergent writing perspective into the kindergarten classroom, the child's voice is heard.

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Through the process of writing this project, I have become keenly aware of the importance of supporting the writing process, and the author, regardless of age!

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## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The classroom is bustling with activity. Children are signing in, handing me notes, greeting friends, and choosing favorite writing implements. Some will choose scented markers, some will choose crayons, others will choose pencils with substantial erasers. Soon all are involved in writing. The entries made in their journals are as individualistic as the authors. I note that Vanessa is beginning to leave her angular arabic emergent print in favor of a more rounded print. Shannon is copying the word "cloud" from a classroom poster. There are huddles of children asking each other how to spell, what a letter looks like. Some children have chosen to work alone, engrossed in their entries.

As I begin to write my day's journal entry on an overhead projector, squeals of disapproval surface. Rachel is the first to notice that I'm not writing about the baby hummingbird as discussed yesterday. And I'm not. I'm writing about the cloud formations I had noticed during the morning. More children notice that my journal entry is not about the hummingbird. I ask for time to finish my entry, then will discuss the

change with them. As I finish my entry, I smile. The children are not only involved with their writing, but are involved with my writing. The involvement is an integration of the listening, speaking, reading and writing processes. These kindergarten children have joined the "literacy club" described by Frank Smith (1985).

On reflection, I need to comment that three years ago I was opposed to the use of journal writing in the kindergarten classroom. It was my observation that young children needed more unstructured invitations to engage in the writing process. I viewed journal writing as a strategy that had been "down-shifted" from older children to younger children as a result of "whole language" zealots. Inviting an entire class of kindergarten children to participate in the same curricular activity did not fit my philosophy of providing for individual developmental levels. I believed that when a child was ready to write, it would happen. Journal writing seemed to be an activity that pushed emergent writers into hurrying a process. Perhaps the factor that was most critical to my resistance to journal writing was that of purpose.

What purpose did journal writing serve in a classroom where children were encouraged to explore written language through oral dictation, word banks, and language experience activities?

As I have worked through this question, a new perspective on how children make sense of the writing process has changed my attitude toward the value of encouraging kindergarten children to participate in the writing process. That transition for me began when I discovered that kindergarten children wanted to participate more in the writing process, but were becoming increasingly dependent on me for their voice in writing. Word cards, dictated stories, and patterned frames were not sufficient. Kindergarten children wanted their own voice in the classroom.

My journey through child centered learning brought me to the realization that writing is inseparable from language development. However, kindergarten curricula ignores the value of emergent writing capabilities of young children. Writing process is often equated with teacher controlled activities. Children are encouraged to stand on the side lines and observe language being used by an adult. Group stories, word cards, word

lists, and the voice of the child are in the hands of the teacher.

The dilemma of what constitutes appropriate curricular experiences, particularly in the process of written language is frustrating at the kindergarten level. The historical significance of the kindergarten class within the framework of public education is a beginning source of frustration. Kindergarten is traditionally viewed as a preparatory drill to the authentic learning ground of first grade.

Regardless of theoretical position, the kindergarten children in the state of California deserve the right to be included among those described in the English-Language Arts Framework (1987) as children who benefit from the statement that:

While in the past we may have been tempted to reduce knowledge to microbits and see education as the learning of parts, current studies have taught us much about how goal-oriented language use is. We know that human beings use language in these ways:

1. Constructively, when they create new meaning by integrating new knowledge with old

2. Actively, when they become involved with learning enough to relate it to their own goals and purposes

3. Interactively, when they communicate what they learn to others

4. Strategically, when they plan language to suit their purposes and perform a task effectively

5. Fluently, when they approach each new reading and writing task easily and confidently.

(p. 5)

The beginning of this process is not in first grade; the beginning of this process is in the early attempts of the young child to communicate. This process begins in infancy and is a process which should be identified, assessed and nurtured during the first formal year of schooling, kindergarten. Each child brings to the kindergarten experience a wealth of knowledge and an incentive to integrate the literacy processes of listening, writing, and reading on an individual experience base.

Supporting the emergent writing process of kindergarten children is a critical component in the

acquisition of authentic literacy learning. Therefore, the goal of this project is to present a handbook which will provide teaching strategies and assessment guidelines, designed to support the teacher in implementing a writing program which will nurture and expand the voice of the child within the framework of literacy instruction. This project is written to reflect the socio-psycholinguistic model of reading. This project also aligns with a whole language philosophy of education.

It is my belief and experience that through the writing process kindergarten children are actively involved in literacy learning. However, in order to successfully engage children in appropriate and meaningful writing events, care must be taken in providing an atmosphere supportive of risk taking and experimentation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergent literacy perspective has evolved from research on how young children make sense of the printed language around them. The theory that young children are active participants in language learning long before the transition from home to school calls into question the reading readiness theory that underlies the curriculum in many kindergarten classrooms. The purpose of this literature review is to examine current research which supports the theory that young children are aware of the function of print, and are actively involved in the acquisition of language processes before formal schooling begins. The placement of emergent writing needs to be validated and supported within the framework of appropriate kindergarten curricula. The need to develop authentic assessment procedures which will reflect the growth of the child's language awareness is a critical aspect of this approach.

### Emergent Literacy Perspective

Language is the integration of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Literacy is the ability to use the process of language in order to

effectively communicate with society. Emergent literacy is the perspective that young children are actively engaged in language process learning long before formal schooling introduces the language processes as fragmented subskills (Goodman 1986, Smith 1985). Research on how children make sense of language processes began as a result of the downshifting of curricula during the sixties.

Prior to the 1960's kindergarten curricula reflected the interest of society in the socialization of the young child. Today, the kindergarten reflects a more wholistic philosophy. Big books have replaced readiness workbooks. Shared reading during whole group instruction time has replaced the drill on isolated alphabet instruction. Pocket charts hold sentence strips and rebus pictures instead of phonic instruction cards.

Kindergarten is in transition. Yet is this emphasis on shared reading, scaffolded language experience, and immersion into literature enough? Has the emergent literacy perspective reached the kindergarten classroom? Are kindergarten children invited to participate at their level of experience in



the integration of reading, listening, speaking, and writing? Or is the focus of kindergarten language curricula still locked into a subskill approach to language learning?

In order for the kindergarten to align with current theories on how young children make sense of language systems, the emergent literacy perspective needs to be examined carefully. Although the shared book experience, language experience and deemphasis of isolated phonic instruction are components of the emergent literacy perspective, they alone do not constitute effective literacy instruction. The integration of the written language process must be included. Kindergarten children need to be allowed to explore the written element of language actively, constructively and within a meaningful context.

Emergent literacy research has gone further in its depth of study. Literacy is not skill-based instruction. Literacy and literacy learning are complex socio-psycholinguistic activities. Therefore, the social aspects of literacy must be explored (Sulzby, Teale, & Kamberelis, 1989). In order to explore the social aspects of language learning, it is

necessary to observe the child within the context of language usage. For the very young child, that world is home.

From birth, children are in contact with written language. Literacy rich homes provide children with contact and awareness of printed language. Infants and toddlers are read to in a supportive environment.

Studies by Harste, Burke and Woodward (1984) demonstrate that children as young as three years of age can connect meaning with signs, logos, and labels which are seen frequently in their homes .

Similarly, children in literacy rich environments are in contact with written language. Children observe those around them engaged in the process of writing language. Even the scribble-like behavior of young children takes on characteristics of that child's culture (Harste, Woodward, Burke, 1984).

Therefore, research supports the theory that literacy learning begins before the child enters public school. The child is actively involved with the process of language learning early in life. Early writing behaviors coincide with early reading behaviors (Hall, 1987; Sulzby & Teale, 1985).

It is easy to view this perspective if one considers how a child decodes print which brings a pleasurable experience into play. For example, a child decodes the word "Mc Donald's". There is no sounding out. There is no phonic drill. Parents have not had to provide extensive drill on the decoding of initial phonic letters, or association of letters to pictures. The child has connected the configuration of the letters in context with the pleasurable association of food and fun.

The emergent literacy perspective necessitates the rethinking of traditional learning theories. The value of traditional skill-based reading readiness becomes questionable. It is imperative that classrooms of young children bridge the experiential knowledge of home with relevant and supportive instructional opportunities which will recognize and build upon the child as an active participant in learning.

If a teacher at the kindergarten level continues to structure a language arts program which values the reading readiness model, the children will remain locked in a skill-based framework. However, when the emergent literacy perspective is valued and implemented

as a curricular basis for instructional decisions then writing will be included as an integral component of language acquisition.

When the kindergarten experience is viewed as a transitional bridge between the home and school connection, then the structure for a relevant emergent literacy program can be achieved.

Before the transition can be made, it is necessary to define the characteristics of home and school-based literacy events. Home-based literacy events are meaningful, child initiated, and child directed there is a partnership quality to the adult-child relationship (Schickedanz, 1990). Children are in charge of their decisions about what to learn and how to go about it. The parent and child enter into a partnership of trust. The parent facilitates the child's actions.

Harste, Burke, and Woodward (1984) describe the key condition to early literacy learning as the ready accessibility of writing and reading materials to young children, and the involvement of children in the natural day to day usage of these materials. However, accessibility of materials is not the only factor.

There is an interaction between parent and child that cannot be ignored. Although language acquisition can be viewed as a natural learning process, it does not happen without the interactive relationship between individuals.

It is the interactive relationship between parent and child in a natural teaching situation which can give focus to the relationship between teacher and child. Sulzby, Teale and Kamberelis (1989) caution that there is a danger for teachers influenced by emergent literacy perspectives to teach more directly than parents. Classrooms may appear on the surface to be child-centered and unstructured, yet teachers are focusing on the direct instruction of emergent literacy behaviors. Teachers risk the danger of pressuring children into developmentally inappropriate learning situations. Bridging home-based instructional experiences and more formal school-based experiences becomes the challenge of the kindergarten teacher.

#### Home-Based Literacy Events

Research on literacy education has focused on the experiences of the child in the home. Homes alive with literacy rich experiences have given evidence to the

value of open ended invitations which promote child initiated participation in language events (Sulzby, Teale & Kamberelis, 1989; Schickedanz, Sullivan, 1984). Literacy education is an interactive process between parent and child which incorporates not only reading, speaking, listening, but also writing.

If the theory that children are involved with the decoding of print before formal education is accepted, then the theory that children are involved with the process of written language must also be considered. Reading and writing "develop concurrently and interrelatedly for the young child" (Martinez, Teale, 1987, p. 444). Frank Smith (1985) argues that the separation of reading and writing activities not only interferes with literacy growth process, "it impoverishes any learning that might take place"(p. 127).

Strengthening the emergent literacy program in kindergarten is dependent on bridging the literacy connection between home and school. Implementing instructional strategies which focus on early reading behaviors is not sufficient. It is necessary to implement developmentally appropriate instructional

strategies which incorporate the child's knowledge of writing behaviors within a supportive instructional environment.

Consider the supportive environment of a literacy rich home. The young child observes her mother as shopping lists are generated, notes are written, letters and cards addressed, checks written. Written language viewed by the child in the home is meaningful, purposeful and uncontrived (Schickedanz, 1990). Written language has a valuable placement within the daily routine. As the child observes, she is likely to participate in the written process. She "plays" with written messages, modeling behaviors of those adults, and siblings around her.

The child does not simply become involved in the writing process by viewing modeled behavior. There is a factor of interpersonal communication between parent and child as the child explores the stages of writing. The child is supported in her efforts. Her writing is accepted in its present form. When the child has a question about the function or form of written language, help is immediate. Multi-modal forms of expression are accepted by the parent as valid and

meaningful expressions of thought. The child is encouraged and supported to explore written language freely within a purposeful context.

### School-Based Literacy Events

As the child makes the transition from home to school, literacy learning often does not. Home-based purposeful experiences are often replaced by fragmented subskill approaches to learning. The child is required in many situations to move from participant to observer. Teachers are instructors of language learning, models of language learning, but seldom participants in language learning. Literacy learning becomes language experience with the teacher holding the pen. In order for literacy learning to move ahead within the kindergarten it is critical to provide the child with a supportive environment which encourages further exploration of written communication.

However, the classroom is not the home. The teacher is not the parent. Often times, the primary language of the child is not the language of the teacher. While the parent interacts with one child, the teacher is faced with as many as thirty-two emergent writers. Teachers are faced with



administrators and parents who demand a more skill-based approach to learning. Yet, denying the young child of the opportunity to work through written language experiences at her level of interest denies the child the right to literacy learning.

#### Curricular Implications

Restructuring the kindergarten curricula to include the integration of emergent writing in an appropriate and meaningful context is dependent on the knowledge that "written language learning occurs through written language use, and that written language literacy is central to school success, reading and writing should be highlighted in all classrooms, including the preschool" (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984, p. 204). Therefore, school success is particularly dependent on the alignment of the emergent literacy theoretical base and practice. In order to align theoretical base and practice, three areas can be evaluated: the role of the teacher, the learning environment and the characteristics of emergent writing behaviors.

### The role of the teacher

The kindergarten teacher is provided with the resources for assessing the beginning level of reading, speaking, and listening. However, written language is the component of the literacy perspective which is often ignored. The acquisition of written language is assessed in terms of form. Can the child write her own name? Can the child form alphabet letters within appropriate standards? Can the child trace on a line? Can the child copy from the board? More importantly, the teacher does not ask "Does the child reflect or ask for guidance in her attempt to communicate through written symbols?".

There is the question of what constitutes written language acquisition. Written language acquisition is not outlined in the teacher's manual. The emergent language perspective is viewed as big books, group discussions, and whole language instruction. When does the child begin to write? Perhaps the critical question is what does the teacher do with emergent writers?

The first step is to observe the relative placement of each child within the context of emergent

writing. This assessment can be done as early as the first day of school. When the child is provided with an opportunity to "sign in" or generate a page in a journal the teacher is provided with an opportunity to observe the young child's experience with printed language (Hood, 1989). Once the child's emergent writing is observed and assessed in a variety of contexts, then the interpersonal relationship between written language experimenter and the facilitator can begin to bond.

The teacher is more than a facilitator of language. The teacher is the choreographer of an intricate educational ballet, who rehearses with the troop; choreographing the literacy experiences of individual children with diverse backgrounds, the needs of those children, and the application of appropriate curricular strategies which will support growth requires a trusting partnership. The parent's willingness to allow the child to participate in her thinking needs to be matched by the teacher's willingness to allow the child the same participation in involvement (Shickedanz, 1990).

### The learning environment

The distinction between parental and teacher roles in literacy education is focused on the element of natural versus organized methods of instruction. While the parent focuses on what the immediate purpose or goal of learning is for one child, the teacher is focused on the long range goals and purpose of instruction for a group of children. Consequently, many instructional moments within the kindergarten classroom are intentionally geared for the global range. Shared book experiences, group language experience charts, story telling, and music experiences lend themselves well to the global audience. Child initiated writing does not. However, when the distinctions between the stages of emergent writing are recognized, and accepted, and open-ended instructional strategies are implemented, then emergent writing can thrive within the framework of emergent literacy instruction. I agree with Jerome Harste's (1990) statement that:

Classrooms must be places where children can see others using language for real purposes. It is important that children be put in situations

where they can see the strategies of successful written language use and learning demonstrated. Teachers should write with their children as well as invite parents, administrators, professional writers, and other into the classroom on a regular basis.

A literacy curriculum should help children expand their communication potential through the use of language as well as art, music and other sign systems. There are many forms of authorship. Learning in one sign system supports learning in another (p. 318).

In order to move towards this goal it is necessary to understand the stages of sign systems that the emergent writer explores.

#### Characteristics of emergent writing

Research on emergent writing suggests that children explore stages of writing (Clay 1975, Hayes & Cherrington, 1985; Hipple 1985, Sulzby Teale, & Kamberelis, 1989). Although researchers use slightly different terms, those stages can be termed as scribble, drawing, nonphonetic letter strings, phonetic spelling and conventional spelling (Hipple, 1985). Although these stages of representative signs systems

suggest a developmental sequence, the child utilizes the stages without a set sequence.

Scribbling is generally the first recognized attempts of the child to make meaning. Harste Woodward, and Burke (1984) argue that scribbling is not random marking, but "organized and systematic reflections of decisions...made about how the written language and artistic systems are organized" (p. 32).

Similarly, drawing is viewed as an alternate communication system. Drawing can further represent thought place holding for the young child before the alphabetic principles of print are in place.

As alphabetic awareness grows, the child begins to replace scribble and drawing with nonphonetic associated letter representation. Strings of letters hold thoughts as the child moves freely through her writing.

Graphophonic awareness brings the child closer to approximating the relationship between print and sound-symbol association. The child continues to try out hypothesis, and works towards a more accurate approximation of conventional spelling.

However, these are stages in a complex process. The child does not progress in a predictable sequence (Hall, 1987). The child seems to move in and out of stages as the need arises. There are peaks and valleys in the emergent writing journey. A child may seem to regress, before skipping past a stage and entering a new one.

Sulzby and Teale (1985) provide a concise synthesis of the principals assigned to emergent children's writing patterns by Marie Clay in 1975. Those principles are defined as:

1. the recurring principle--understanding that English writing contains patterns and shapes that are repeated over and over again.

2. the generative principle--understanding that the writer can create new meanings by reorganizing a limited set of units, particularly the letters of the alphabet;

3. the sign principle--understanding that print stands for entities that are not print; and principle related to page arrangement, including word boundaries.

4. the inventory principle--children's tendency to inventory or list and name items they can write. In

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working through this principle, young children actually create their own practice in writing (p. 10).

Another perspective on writing development is presented by Ferriero and Teberosky (1982). Ferriero and Teberosky propose that children construct knowledge about written language principles in a developmental progression based on prior experiences. In contrast, Harste, Woodward and Burke base their characteristics of children's progression on risk taking, organization, intentionality, and generativeness linked by social action (Hall, 1987). The Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) perspective on the components of children's writing behavior is reflective of a socio-psycholinguistic model of emergent literacy, and can be used as a framework for curricular decisions.

Consequently, the effectiveness of an emergent literacy program is linked not only with effective methods for identifying and facilitating emergent writing behaviors, but also with a social community which responds to and interacts with the author. The social interaction within the kindergarten classroom provides the incentive for the young child to pursue active literacy.



### Supporting Emergent Writing in the Classroom

Kindergarten curricula which acknowledges developmental and cultural diversity among young children and provides a socially supportive environment for reflective and generative thinking will value the placement of emergent writing as a curricular strategy. Strategies which are effective for the support of emergent writing include journal writing, shared writing experiences, open-ended opportunities for children to engage in writing and the inclusion of quality literature to provide a model for good writing (Hayes, 1990).

The strategies described in this review are offered as possible tools for encouraging young children to become involved in writing.

#### Journal writing

Journal writing in the kindergarten classroom is an event which "provides a tool that allows children to communicate effectively, with all their developmental inconsistencies and within the framework of a large class" (Murray, 1987, p. 111). Children are invited to "write" about their interests, concerns, thoughts, or feelings. Unlined paper is provided and individual

stages of emergent writing are accepted. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the child's attempt at expressing her ideas. The teacher responds by commenting "Read me what you wrote". The emphasis is clearly on the intent of the child's message. The teacher can then respond to the child's message verbally, or with a written response.

In the beginning stages of journal writing, the sessions are kept brief to sustain interest. The journal is an important tool in establishing the bonding between adult and child. Just as writing characteristics change and grow, so does the journal experience. Journals are a fascinating reflector of the child.

Journal writing can be utilized in various forms. Learning logs (Harste, Short & Burke, 1988), dialogue journals (Hall & Duffy, 1987), and literature response journals are variations of journal writing which can be used successfully in the kindergarten classroom. The personal reflections recorded in the journal allow the child the opportunity to "explore writing for personal growth and reflection" (Harste, Short & Burke, 1988, p. 280).

### Community environment

Literacy learning is not an isolated personal reflection when viewed from the socio-psycholinguistic model of language acquisition. Research by Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) supports the theory that young children, when asked to write, "make markings which reflect the written language of their culture" (p. 82). Therefore, the psycholinguistic characteristics of emergent writing outlined by Ferriero and Teberosky (1982) and extended by Marie Clay (1975) are based on the sociological experiences of the child (Wray, D., Bloom, W. & Hall, N., 1989).

Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) describe language learning as a "social event" (p. 91). Within the classroom, the social context of language learning is dependent on the interaction between the child, peers, and adult facilitators to present ideas, explore concepts and to expand active learning. The role of the teacher is to provide relevant models of writing experiences, on a daily basis, which will share many of the characteristics of home-based literacy events. For example, in literacy rich homes the bed time story provides a highly rewarding opportunity for

young children to participate in reading behaviors (Holdaway, 1979). Helping the parent to label boxes, compose letters, and to write grocery lists actively involves the child with the writing process.

Similarly, when the young child observes and participates with the classroom teacher during the process of writing stories, labeling shelves, composing notes to parents and responding to quality literature, a parallel to effective literacy learning is made.

Meaningful opportunities for literacy events occur daily within the routine of the classroom (Schickedanz, 1990). Children can be asked to "sign up" for jobs, record their attendance, list their name to participate in an activity. Thank you notes can be written to classroom guests, "Get Well" cards can be composed for sick friends. Reasons to write can be incorporated into all learning areas of the classroom. Writing materials can be provided for children to record messages in the play house. Writing materials can record child drawn maps in the block area. Teachers can serve as the scribe when group responses necessitate the support of a "recording secretary". Reflecting on the interaction between parent and child in the home setting, the child

needs not only the opportunity to participate and observe relevant writing, but the opportunity to question and respond to writing events.

Social interaction generates the motivation to engage in learning. Learning motivates the generation of ideas and the intrinsic need for sharing those ideas with others. Through the process of writing, reading, listening and speaking those ideas become real to the participant. The learner has ownership of knowledge.

#### Conclusion

The voice of the child is heard through emergent writing. The encouragement of emergent writing allows the child to engage in authoring. Authoring is defined as a "form of learning" (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1988 p. 9). For the kindergarten author, the writing process is not always the story with a clear cut beginning, middle and end. Emergent writing reflects personal feelings and opinions, experimentation with new ideas, and ingenious methods of conveying an important message.

As the child grows in her perception of herself as an author, so does her confidence in valuing the

writing she encounters. Print becomes a conveyor of meaning, and through meaning knowledge is attained.

Within the classroom, it is difficult to listen to thirty-two voices talking at once. However, when children are supported and encouraged to continue with their exploration of the writing process, thirty-two voices can be heard. The insights about the feelings and learning processes of the child is critical in the implementation of a child-centered learning environment that supports literacy learning. Through the inclusion of the emergent writing perspective into the kindergarten classroom, the child's voice is distinctively heard.

### GOALS AND LIMITATIONS

The transition from skill-based to literature based instruction within the framework of schools has necessitated a revision of instructional methods. While the integration of listening, speaking, reading and writing has been stressed in the language art framework, emergent stages of language development has not been a priority. Because of this, many kindergarten classrooms still reflect a reading readiness model.

The primary goal of this curricular project is to provide teachers with support in the integration of writing within the kindergarten classroom. Current research on emergent writing development, effective classroom strategies, and assessment procedures will be provided as a resource for the teacher. The project is intended to strengthen the language arts program at the kindergarten level.

Although this project is written for kindergarten teachers, it can be used as a resource for administrators, and other support personnel who are involved with curricular planning, and the inservicing of teachers. The handbook is designed to answer

questions which are often asked by teachers who are interested in strengthening their language arts program. The questions presented are those that I had as a kindergarten teacher while working to align my language arts program to the language arts framework. My personal goal is to share the research and strategies that I found to be helpful in that process. The project is written to support primary language acquisition and growth. English as a Second Language is a critical component. Although the project does address the need for ESL support, it is limited in scope.



## EVALUATION

Evaluating the growth of emergent writing is an important part of the curricular alignment process. If language growth is to be measured, then the assessment of writing behaviors is necessary. The evaluation of emergent writing behavior is a challenge to the classroom teacher. How does a teacher translate scribbles, letter jumbles, and drawings which represent authentic literacy events into an evaluative tool for measuring growth, and assessing instructional strategy needs? The dilemma is further complicated when administrators, or parents expect the more traditional approach that the reading readiness model outlines.

However, by utilizing assessment strategies which align more closely with the way young children learn, the teacher will be able to effectively evaluate the young child's progression through literacy learning. In order to effectively assess the literacy learning of young children, the methods of testing isolated basic reading readiness skills need to be abandoned. Assessment procedures can be defined as an accumulation of information to satisfy diverse evaluation needs (Teale, 1988).

The question for educators is what kind of assessment procedures will be appropriate for assessing the literacy learning of the young child, and what needs to be assessed? In order to answer these questions it is critical that the educators of young children become aware of the process that children go through in the emergent stages of literacy. It is critical to emphasize that literacy learning involves both the cultural and developmental processes (Teale, 1988). Assessment procedures should closely match the informal activities that support literacy learning at home and in the informal classroom. The regular use of performance samples and observation will give a more representative picture of a child's strengths and weaknesses.

It is imperative that assessment methods be aligned with the learning processes of the young child. Research on the emergent literacy perspective has shown that literacy learning begins early in life. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing develop concurrently and interrelatedly (Teale, 1988). Therefore, the most appropriate and useful assessment measure for emergent learners should be based on the

observation of the following areas: knowledge of the function of written language, emergent reading behaviors, writing strategies, and letter-sound correspondence.

The emergent literacy perspective has given insights into the way young children progress through language acquisition. Assessment methods should align with the findings. It is the responsibility of the educator to set up a learning environment which facilitates the observational process. This can be done by using various teaching strategies. Practical suggestions such as observing children as they work and play with print, the implementation of writing portfolios, allowing children the opportunities to explore print freely, and observing the interaction between children and literature are critical evaluation procedures.

Yetta Goodman (1978) refers to this informal method of assessment as "kid watching". Goodman states that "the basic assumption in kid watching is that development of language is a natural process in all human beings "(p.43). Through the observation of the child at work and play, it is possible for the teacher

to document behaviors which indicate that language learning is in process. Therefore, "kid watching" becomes a practical and authentic procedure for the assessment of early writing behaviors.

Within the kindergarten classroom, numerous opportunities exist for the implementation of observational assessment. Anecdotal comments can be recorded as children write notes to each other for the message center. How the child approaches writing events can be notated. Observational checklists can be used to track the child's process through the stages of writing. Monthly samples of journal entries can be collected to record the child's growth in fluency and graphophonemic awareness.

Through observation and the evaluation of how the child works through language experiences in the classroom, effective assessment is possible. It is critical for the teacher of the young child to become aware of the emergent literacy perspective and the implications within the classroom.

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**APPENDIX A: HANDBOOK**



## PREFACE

In my kindergarten classroom, journal writing was the opening activity. From the first day of school, children were invited to come in, choose a favorite writing implement, and write their thoughts in journals. While the children were engaged in writing, I often times joined in the process by writing my thoughts on the overhead projector. As a language arts specialist, I try to begin each day each day by joining the kindergarten children as they write in their journals. Engaging in the writing process with kindergarten children has been personally rewarding. Through the process of developing a classroom which supported emergent writing, I have gained insights on how children grow in language acquisition.

My journey into restructuring the kindergarten language arts program began when I became frustrated with attempts to engage kindergarten children in writing. Many of my students have a strong sense of phonemic awareness, had been dictating experience stories, and some were independent readers. Yet, when the children were asked to generate their own writing, would not attempt to try. The children were dependent

on word banks, dictionaries, or someone else to write words for them. When they did write, the imaginative story line of dictated stories was replaced by the shortened verse of what was safe to print.

Involving kindergarten children in the writing process has been a personal challenge. Initially, I was frustrated by the lack of practical information written for the kindergarten level. Resources such as Reggie Routman's (1988) Transitions, and Donald Grave's (1983) Writing: Teachers and Children at Work, began at the first grade level. The basal reading series provided little in theory, and less in practice for integrating writing in the classroom. Consequently, the challenge for me became the research, implementation and revision of strategies which would support emergent writing within the kindergarten.

The goal of this handbook is to share the experience with educators who are looking to stretch beyond the reading readiness model and to align the kindergarten curriculum with the emergent literacy perspective.

## THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Emergent Literacy Perspective

The emergent literacy perspective has evolved from the research on how young children make sense of the printed language around them. Literacy events in the home setting provide young children with the awareness that print conveys meaning. Children begin the literacy learning process through their interaction with environmental print. This learning continues as the child makes the transition from the home setting to the more formal setting of the classroom. An effective kindergarten learning environment will take into consideration the needs of the child, the ways young children learn, and then build upon this prior knowledge (Teale & Sulzby, 1989).

### How does the Emergent Literacy Perspective differ from the Reading Readiness theory?

The reading readiness theory is based on the assumption that there is a developmentally appropriate age for young children to make sense of the reading process (Goodman, 1986, Smith, 1985). Physical maturation is seen as a prerequisite for attaining the

skills necessary to write conventionally, track print, and master sound-symbol relationships. The reading readiness fragments language learning into subskill acquisition. When the young child shows mastery in isolated skill instruction such as alphabet recognition, auditory memory, and visual perception, then formal reading instruction is appropriate.

The reading readiness model further fragments literacy learning by focusing on three of the four language processes. While the reading, listening, and speaking processes are included in instruction, and evaluation, the writing process is not. The writing process is viewed as dependent on adult modeling. Dictation, word banks, and the copying of correct form are stressed. The child is an observer of written language.

What does the young child know about written language?

From birth, children are in contact with written language. Literacy rich homes provide children with contact and awareness of printed language. Infants and toddlers are read to in a supportive environment. Studies by Harste, Burke and Woodward (1984) demonstrate that children as young as three years of

age can connect meaning with signs, logos, and labels which are seen frequently in their homes.

Similarly, children in literacy rich environments are in contact with written language. Children observe those around them engaged in the process of writing language. Even the scribble like behavior of young children takes on characteristics of that child's culture (Harste, Woodward, Burke, 1984).

Consider the supportive environment of a literacy rich home. The young child observes her mother as shopping lists are generated, notes are written, letters and cards addressed, checks written. Written language viewed by the child in the home is meaningful, purposeful and uncontrived (Schickedanz, 1990). Written language has a valuable placement within the daily routine. As the child observes, she is likely to participate in the written process. She "plays" with written messages, modeling behaviors of those adults, and siblings around her.

The child does not simply become involved in the writing process by viewing modeled behavior. There is a factor of interpersonal communication between parent and child as the child explores the stages of writing.

The child is supported in her efforts. Her writing is accepted in its present form. When the child has a question about the function of form of written language, help is immediate. Multi-modal forms of expression are accepted by the parent as valid and meaningful expressions of thought. The child is encouraged and supported to explore written language freely within a purposeful context.

## SUPPORTING EMERGENT WRITING IN THE CLASSROOM

### Why should natural writing behaviors be supported in the classroom?

As the child makes the transition from home to school, literacy learning often does not. Home based purposeful experiences are often replaced by fragmented subskill approaches to learning. In order for literacy learning to move ahead in the kindergarten, it is critical to provide the child with a supportive environment which encourages further exploration of written communication.

Language is the integration of the speaking, reading, and writing processes. Young children need the opportunity to work through written language experiences at their level of interest.

### What are the characteristics of Emergent Writing?

Research on emergent writing suggests that children explore stages of writing (Clay 1975, Hayes & Cherrington, 1985, Hipple, 1985, Sulzby Teale, & Kamberelis, 1989). Although researchers use slightly different terms, those stages can be identified as scribble, drawing, nonphonetic letter strings, phonetic

spelling, and conventional spelling (Hipple, 1985). Although the identification of stages suggest a developmental sequence, the child utilizes the stages without a set sequence.

#### Scribble

Scribbling is generally the first recognized attempts of the child to make meaning. Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) suggest that scribbling is not random marking, but "organized and systematic reflection of decisions...made about how the written language and artistic systems are organized (p. 32) (See appendix B).

#### Drawing

Similarly, drawing is viewed as an alternate communications system. Drawing can further represent though place holding for the young child before the alphabetic principle of print are in place (See appendix B).

#### Nonphonetic letter strings

As the child's awareness of the graphophonemic system grows, the child begins to replace scribble and drawing with nonphonetic associated letter representations. Strings of letters hold thoughts as



the child moves freely through the writing process (See appendix B).

#### Phonetic spelling

As the child's knowledge of the sound-symbol association and text awareness grows, writing reflects a more accurate approximation of letter representations. Words can be represented by individual or clusters of accurate phonemic attempts as the child continues to hypothesize about the function of written language (See appendix B).

The stages of writing are representative of a complex process. The child does not progress in a predictable sequence (Hall, 1987). The child seems to move in and out of stages as the need arises. There are peaks and valleys in the emergent writing journey. A child may seem to regress, before skipping past a stage and entering a new one.

## PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

What are the components of a program which supports emergent literacy?

The effectiveness of a program which supports the emergent literacy perspective is linked not only with effective methods for identifying and facilitating emergent writing behaviors, but also with a social community which responds to and interacts with the author. The social interaction within the kindergarten classroom provides the incentive for the young child to pursue active literacy.

What is the role of the teacher?

The kindergarten teacher is provided with the resources for assessing the early reading, speaking, and listening behaviors. However, written language is the component of the literacy perspective which is often ignored. Written language acquisition is not outlined in the teacher's manual. The role of the teacher is to create an environment which supports emergent literacy learning, to provide instructional strategies which promote involvement, and to assess the growth and needs of students, individually and collectively.

Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) describe language learning as a "social event" (p 91). Within the classroom, the social context of language learning is dependent on the interaction between the child, peers, and adult facilitators to present ideas, explore concepts and to expand active learning. The role of the teacher is to provide relevant models of writing experiences, on a daily basis, which will share many of the characteristics of home based literacy events. For example, in literacy rich homes the bed time story provides a highly rewarding opportunity for young children to participate in reading behaviors (Holdaway, 1979). Helping the parent to label boxes, compose letters, and to write grocery lists actively involves the child with the writing process. Similarly, when the young child observes and participates with classroom teacher during the process of writing stories, labeling shelves, composing notes to parents, and responding to quality literature, a parallel to effective literacy learning is made.

How can meaningful writing events be incorporated into the daily schedule?

Meaningful opportunities for literacy events occur daily within the routine of the classroom (Schickedanz, 1990). Children can be asked to "sign up" for jobs, record their attendance, list their name to participate in an activity. Thank you notes can be written to classroom guests, "Get Well" cards can be composed for sick friends. Reasons to write can be incorporated into all learning areas of the classroom. Writing materials can record child-drawn maps in the block area. Within the dramatic play area, recipes can be written, phone messages recorded, shopping lists generated, invitations to parties written. Science observations can be recorded within the science area. Teachers can serve as the "secretary" when group responses necessitate the support of a scribe.

A daily schedule which allows children the opportunity to explore learning areas during a segment of the day, encourages children to communicate freely with the classroom community (See appendix C). During this time of exploration, the teacher can observe, facilitate, and support writing behaviors.

Is journal writing an appropriate activity at the kindergarten level?

Journal writing in the kindergarten classroom is an event which "provides a tool that allows children to communicate effectively, with all their developmental inconsistencies and within the framework of a large class" (Murray, 1987, p 111). Children are invited to write about their interests, concerns, thoughts, or feelings. Unlined paper is provided and individual stages of emergent writing are accepted. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the child's attempt at expressing her ideas. The teacher can respond to the child's writing by encouraging the child to "read" what was written. The emphasis is clearly on the intent of the child's message. The teacher can then respond to the child's message verbally, or with a written response.

In the beginning stages of journal writing, the sessions are kept brief to sustain interest. The journal is an important tool in establishing the bonding between adult and child. Just as writing characteristics change and grow, so does the journal

experience. Journals are a fascinating reflector of the child.

What if the child is reluctant to write?

Children, when encouraged to write the way they think writing should look, are not inhibited in their attempts to record ideas. When individual attempts are recognized and accepted without the expectations of conventional form, then risk taking and experimentation with language concepts are encouraged to flourish.

Should dictation support the journal entry?

As the teacher observes the individual child within the writing process, then decisions should be made on whether or not to dictate the child's message. When the decision to record the child's message is appropriate, then recording the message in pencil on the page is a way to preserve the child's ownership of the writing.

How can the ESL child be supported through journal writing if the teacher does not speak the child's primary language?

Journals are a beneficial instructional strategy to be used with ESL children. Children are free to communicate ideas through a communication system of

their choice. Many times, communicating through an alternate communication system, such as drawing, affords the child an opportunity to generate ideas which are difficult to share orally.

Children should be encouraged to share their writing in their primary language. Within my kindergarten classroom, a variety of languages were present. Vietnamese, and Spanish speaking children wrote enthusiastically and eagerly. As an English speaking teacher, with limited knowledge of Spanish, I could converse with my Spanish speaking children about their writing. However, I depended on bilingual siblings to dialogue with my Vietnamese speaking children. Through the extensive use of alternate communication systems (i.e. drawing, drama, pantomime, music) journaling became an important time for sharing thoughts, concerns, joys, and frustrations.

What about parents who insist on correct form?

Scheduling a parent orientation meeting the first week of school to acquaint parents with the emergent literacy perspective is essential. During the initial meeting explain to parents the importance of supporting risk-taking and approximations in writing. Inservice

parents on how to talk with their child about their writing.

During the school year, continue to involve parents in the writing process through a parent newsletter. Share with the parents insights into their children's writing growth and literacy development. During parent conferences, show samples of the child's writing, and trace with them the growth that the child is showing.

Parent education is a critical component of the writing program. It is important that children are supported in their early attempts to write, without pressure for perfection. In order to promote the process, sending home edited pieces of writing is essential.

#### Are young children ready for the editing process?

As the child's experience with the writing process grows the process of editing evolves. When writing is viewed as a natural process from the beginning, then editing is considered part of the process. I shared my writing on a daily basis with the children using the overhead projector. Through the use of the overhead, I could engage the children in my writing process, and



observe their level of participation. For example, after writing a journal entry, I would ask the children what part of my writing they liked, and what they wanted to know more about. I would carefully make notations on my rough draft, and then publish the edited piece.

When the children demonstrated an understanding of the process, I invited student authors to share their rough drafts with the classroom community during our author's chair time (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988). I served as the scribe to make notations on the child's rough draft. It was the author's decision to change the piece of writing. The rough draft was placed in the child's writing folder, and if the child chose to publish the piece, I would serve as final editor, typing the manuscript on the word processor. The children then assembled their manuscripts, and placed the published piece in the classroom library.

During the course of a year, books, poetry, and plays were shared, edited and enjoyed. Each piece began as a rough draft.

How does shared reading support writing?

As children grow in their writing, so does the need to provide for them models of stimulating literature. The children view themselves as authors and become quite critical of literature. Although big books, with language patterns, and controlled vocabulary are suitable selections for supporting early reading behaviors, children need to connect with quality children's literature and authors.

For example, my class had a variety of favorite authors. Heading the list of favorite authors were Eric Carle, Vera Williams, Bill Martin, and Jack Prelutsky. The children discussed plot, settings, style, and characters. Vera William's (1986) Cherries and Cherry Pits, became a read-again favorite that was incorporated into their own writing. Many children bridged from dictation to their own creations using the theme of cherries in a counting book. Borders were added, imitating Williams' illustrations, and cherries abounded.

Eric Carle's illustrations were incorporated into books patterned after the Hungry Caterpillar. The Grouchy Ladybug was a character who found her way into

many of the children's stories. The children would borrow the vocabulary of favorite authors and weave the language into their own plots and verse. Throughout the year, the children became more critical of literature selections. They would give suggestions as to what the author could have done differently to make a book more appealing. The children were viewing literature through the eyes of authors.

## EVALUATING EMERGENT WRITING

What methods of assessment are appropriate for evaluating the growth of language acquisition through emergent writing?

The evaluation of emergent writing behaviors is a challenge to the classroom teacher. Through the observation and the evaluation of how the child works through language experiences in the classroom, effective assessment is possible. Assessment methods should match the learning processes of the young child.

Yetta Goodman (1978) refers to this informal method of assessment as "kid watching". Goodman states that "the basic assumption in kid watching is that development of language is a natural process in all human beings" (p. 43). Through the observation of the child at work and play, it is possible for the teacher to document behaviors which indicate that language learning is in process. Therefore, "kid watching" becomes a practical and authentic procedure for the assessment of early writing behaviors.

How can "kid watching" be organized successfully in a classroom with thirty-two children?

Within the classroom, numerous opportunities exist for the implementation of observational assessment. For example, anecdotal comments can be recorded as children write notes to each other for the message center. How the child approaches writing events can be notated. Writing portfolios can be used to collect writing samples, and to record strategies that the child uses effectively. Observational checklists can be used to track the child's journey through the stages of writing (See appendix D). Monthly samples of journal entries can be collected to record the child's growth in fluency and graphophonemic awareness.

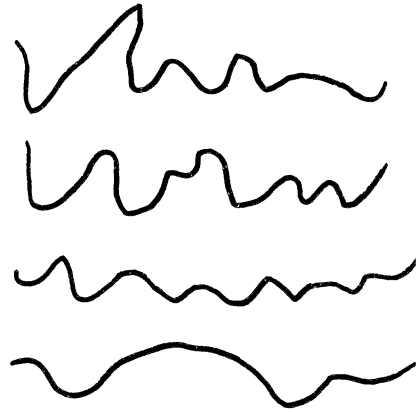
## AFTERWORD

Consider the kaleidoscope. Bits and pieces of colored glass which work together to create a design of intricate complexity. Examining emergent writing is like taking a piece of glass from the design to study its individual beauty. Emergent writing is one element of a more intricate design. When young children are encouraged to explore written language freely and with support, then the picture of emergent literacy is complete. The language processes of listening, speaking, writing and reading must be supported as interactive and dependent at the emergent level.

Young children eagerly record their thoughts, share growing knowledge, and become authors when writing is supported and encouraged. Print becomes a valuable tool which connects the child to a larger community. The kindergarten bridges school and home. Giving children the opportunity to write about the journey is essential.

**APPENDIX B: STAGES OF EMERGENT WRITING**

SCRIBBLE STAGE



This is me.  
I like  
to write.



## NONPHONETIC LETTER STAGE

JRDBYUSPC

IHAARBOTH

OTODOD

UOBT

OTBPU

This is my story. It's about going to a birthday party.

LISTING AND DRAWING STAGES

VONS

Melissa

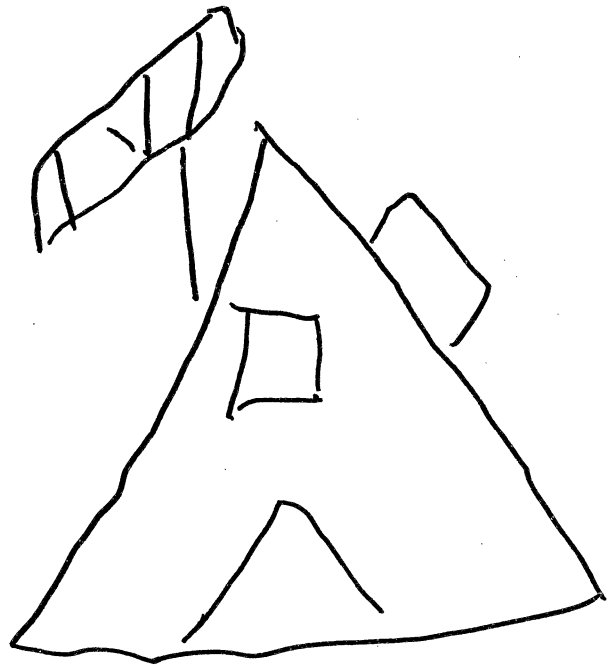
NICOLE

Brixney

MOMMY

DADDY

NKN



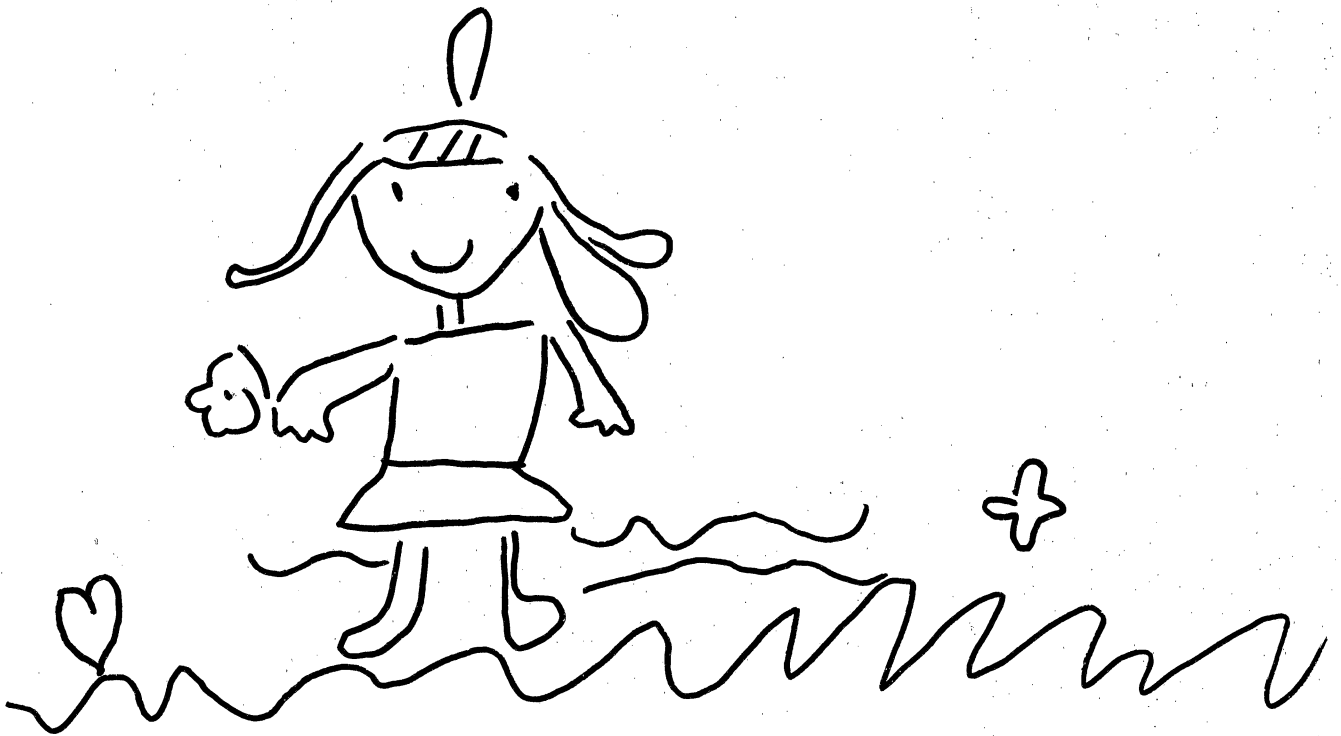
My family went to Von's.

## PHONETIC LETTER STAGE

November 16

Danen d nenySHID Gsa  
flower

The indian she'd gets a flower.



APPENDIX C: SAMPLE KINDERGARTEN CLASS SCHEDULE

## DAILY SCHEDULE

8:05-8:45	Greeting and Carpet Time Shared reading, concept development, shared writing
8:45-9:30	Small Group Time Teacher planned activities
9:30-9:50	Outside Time
9:50-11:00	Work Areas Child selected activities
11:00-11:25	Carpet Time Sharing of day's work, Author's Chair
11:25	Dismissal

**APPENDIX D: OBSERVATION OF WRITING CHECKLIST**

## OBSERVATION FORM: EMERGENT WRITING

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Language \_\_\_\_\_

Strategies	Date	Comments
uses written symbols to communicate ideas: scribble pictures random letters initial consonant initial and some final initial, final, some vowel incorporates environmental print in appropriate context		
<u>Writing Behaviors</u>		
writes without hesitation interacts with peers while writing interacts with adults asks for assistance takes risks with spelling chooses to write independently chooses to write with peers reads back own writing		
<u>Writing Process</u>		
Uses writing for a variety of purposes: maps letters directions blue-prints labels lists recipes story poetry		

Writing BehaviorsWriting Process

books  
journal  
other:

Values the writing of peers  
Is willing to edit  
Is willing to share writing  
with others.

ANECDOTAL OBSERVATIONS