

Writing in Early Childhood

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OETA Ready to Learn

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Early Childhood research tells us that there are eight stages of writing development. These stages include scribbling, letter-like symbols, strings of letters, beginning sounds, consonants represent words, initial-middle-final sound recognition, transitional phrases and standard spelling. Each of these mechanics allows students to create words and phrases that are legible. They don't however teach students how to become a good writer.

Beyond teaching the mechanics of writing we also teach students the joy of writing. While the mechanics are important and all students need to know how to form letters and combine them to create words, this skill means little if they are not able to combine these words in ways that create an effective form of written communication. While this communication may be a short message written on a post-it note it could also be a novel. Regardless of the form of communication, it is imperative that our students understand the importance of written communication and also the joy that can be found while completing a piece.

It is the belief of these presenters that the joy of writing begins with ideas that inspire and encourage children to expand their imaginations. To live beyond their present world and to explore a world of make believe. A world in which they are the creator, the storyteller. Culham (2005) tells us that "As we teach students to look at the world through a writer's eyes and validate what they see, they become skilled observers, marvelous storytellers and conscientious recorders of information". These students are able to take everyday situations and happenings and turn them into works of art; "They notice what others overlook. They describe bits and pieces of life, the ordinary, in extraordinary ways" (p. 68). Children see things in a way that adults cannot, which is something that all educators need to appreciate and foster.

Educators are able to foster and instill the excitement that children feel for writing

through the use of active brainstorming. Colorado State University defines brainstorming in writing as “Brainstorming is an informal way of generating topics to write about, or points to make about your topic. It can be done at any time during the writing process. You can brainstorm the topics for a whole paper or just a conclusion or an example”. They continue by telling writers that brainstorming should not be a stressful event and instead should feel natural and come easily. This is an important piece to note when working with children. While it is important that there be an end result to brainstorming it should not be the most stressful or difficult part of the writing. Brainstorming should be fun! It should create a level of excitement and enthusiasm for the piece that is going to be formed.

After students have completed their brainstorming it is important that they begin to organize their writing. There are several different ways that this can be done and contrary to popular belief there are more ways than one that this can be done. The most important thing to remember at this point is that the writing flows and can be understood by the reader. While this may seem easy enough to adults it is something that students (and even some adults) struggle with. There are several ways that teachers can assist students with organizing their writing and ensuring that all important information is represented. One way that teachers can do this is through the use of EET's (Expanding Expression Tools). These tools will assist students with ensuring that all important information has been covered in their writing in an organized fashion through the use of a color coded, tactile system.

Next a student must ensure that their writing makes sense to the readers. There is nothing more frustrating than starting to read something that can't be understood. Reading it over and over again just leads to more frustration and generally the abandonment of the piece of writing. So that students can work to ensure that their writing can be understood they must first know

what it is like to read something that doesn't make much sense. There are multiple ways that teachers can work on this in their classrooms such as silly sentences. Silly sentences are used to teach students that there are different parts of speech that must be included in each sentence but that simply including these parts of speech does not make a sentence make sense. These sentences can be used to create valuable writing lessons as well as to allow students to have fun with the writing process.

As you can see there are many important pieces to writing and it is difficult to say which mechanical piece is most important. It is not, however, difficult to say that making writing enjoyable and fun for the students is imperative to their desire to learn to write. By utilizing best practices, multiple teaching strategies and activities, writing can be one of the most exciting parts of a student's day. The sky is the limit when the imagination takes control and students are given the authority to determine the story that they will tell.

References

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