

HANDOUT 5

LLD Writing Strategies

TEACHABLE MOMENT

“Oh, y!” Jessalyn realizes. “Do we have anybody with e?” she asks. “Not this year. But last year, there was a girl named Kaylee, and she used e to write the /e/ sound.”

Rather than simply dictate letters or write words for Jessalyn to copy, her teacher segments some of the sounds in the words and discusses the letters needed to write them. Jessalyn, who is almost five, already has the idea that letters stand for sounds. When she writes, she sometimes uses her letter name knowledge to match a letter to a sound in a word. She would have used the letter E to write the last sound in *pretty*, if working on her own. When the teacher advises the letter Y, anticipating that Jessalyn would ask why, she helps Jessalyn discover some surprises in writing English words. Some sounds can be written with more than one letter, and some letters can stand for more than one sound (e.g., The letter C can stand for /s/ or /k/, as in *city* and *candy*; the letter G can stand for /j/ or /g/, as in *giraffe* and *gate*). Jessalyn is learning a lot about writing when her teacher engages her in natural situations, such as when helping her write the thank-you note. The teacher adapts her approach to each child’s interests and current levels of understanding.

The following interactions and strategies support writing and its varied uses:

Set up a well-stocked writing area (See “Environments and Materials,” page 103.)

Add new materials frequently to the writing area. New materials can support units of study (e.g., envelopes, stationery, card stock cut into postcard sizes, and stickers for use as stamps when children are investigating the post office) or spark children’s interest in writing. Be creative and provide gel pens or pens with glitter ink, hole punchers, scissors, little blank books, colored card stock folded like greeting cards, printed photographs of children engaged in classroom activities for note cards or post cards. Consider finding ways that children can write with their fingers in addition to writing with tools. For example, children can write in trays of sand.

Provide writing materials in other interest areas, inside and outside. In the block area, provide materials for children to make signs and masking tape for attaching them to buildings. Place small notepads in the dramatic play area for children to write messages or grocery lists. Children enjoy opportunities to write and draw in mud outside and to mark in damp sand with their fingers or sticks. They also enjoy creating print props for their play—tickets for a wheel toy “toll booth” or a sign for a pretend lemonade stand or roadside restaurant. Placing a variety of writing materials on a rolling cart makes it easy to take those materials outdoors. Provide access to keyboards and computers (e.g., with adaptations such as covers with individual finger “openings”), as appropriate, for children with disabilities. There should be



ample opportunities to use different writing utensils for marking, scribbling, and drawing. (See Appendix D.)

Embed writing in everyday transitions and routines.

For some transitions, tell children they may go to the next activity when you write on the whiteboard the first letter of their name. After a while, children whose names begin with letters that start with the same stroke (e.g., T, F, E, M, N, L, B, D, R and other letters) might begin to guess their own first letter after you complete the long vertical line. Tell children that you are not yet finished and to keep watching. By attending until the letter is completely formed, children learn that some letters are similar to but also different from other letters. For other transitions, write each of the children's first names, one at a time. This activity is especially informative if some children's names are similar, for example, if there is a Jamal and a Jamie or an Alessandra and an Alexis in the class. After some experience with this transition activity, children learn to watch closely until two, three, or even four letters of their name have been written, because the first two or three letters in their name are also in a classmate's name. Encourage children to write for a purpose as part of a routine, for instance, by signing their artwork, using any level of writing they can, or by signing their name on a turns list when an interest area is already filled to capacity and a child must do something else while waiting for a turn.

Encourage children to write in the art interest area.

Preschool children love to finger paint on a tabletop. Add a few drops of water, as needed, to keep the paint slippery as a child explores. Provide pieces of newsprint to use in making prints of children's finger-painted marks. Children can also write on slabs of clay

using popsicle sticks or wooden tools. Encourage children to sign their drawings and paintings with whatever marks they can, helping when they ask. When drawings and paintings represent stories, inviting a child to "tell me about it" and then writing down the dictation supports children's budding narrative skill. When a child wants to describe a process (e.g., "I made orange when I mixed yellow and red together"), taking dictation supports a child in learning how to record explorations and discoveries. Children often enjoy the freedom afforded by large pieces of paper on an easel to paint individual letters or even their whole names, which they sometimes decorate elaborately.

Respond sensitively to children's emergent writing.

Focus on the meaning that children are trying to convey (e.g., "Tell me about this") rather than on the form of their writing (e.g., "What's that letter?"). In other words, when children first start, let them know that scribbles or letter-like designs are wonderful attempts and that people know children love to experiment with lines and designs. Let them know that you are interested in knowing the thoughts they might have tried to capture in their writing. See "Sample Developmental Sequence of Writing" on page 159.

Respond to children's questions and requests for help.

When children ask questions about how to form a letter, describe actions while demonstrating on a separate piece of paper (e.g., "First, we make a long vertical line, like this; then we add a short diagonal line from up here right to the middle of the vertical line . . ."). When children approaching 60 months of age request help in spelling, make the sounds in the words explicit and name letters needed to write the

sounds (e.g., “Okay, I hear a /b/ sound first, in *baby*. We write that sound with the letter *b*. I hear /a/ next, in *baby*, and we use the letter *a* to write /a/. Then, I hear another /b/--*ba-by* . . .”). As children learn more letter names, ask children what letter they think should be used to write /b/ or /t/ or other sounds that are in a letter’s name (e.g., “d” has the /d/ sound in its name; *p* has the /p/ sound in its name”).

Model writing. If children see a teacher write for particular purposes (e.g., a list of items to bring to preschool for a project, a note to a child’s parent) and if a teacher enlists children’s help in deciding what to write for class letters, notes, or signs, children will come to understand the value of being able to express thoughts on paper. Plan to write frequently in a whole-group setting for a variety of purposes (e.g., a thank-you note to a guest, a note to the custodian about a broken towel dispenser, a sign for a hallway display of children’s drawings). Engage children in helping to compose a message, and write it on a surface that is large enough for all of the children to see the writing (e.g., a whiteboard or a large piece of newsprint paper mounted on an easel). Read the entire message when it is finished.

Display children’s writing. A bulletin board to display children’s writing and drawing is helpful. Rather than wait for writing or drawing related to specific activities, such as a trip to the children’s museum, display items that children create daily (e.g., tickets for bus play in the block area, a list for grocery shopping in the dramatic play area, a colorful painting of letters, a little book or a paper on which a child has written all of the letters of the alphabet at the writing area, just because he wanted to). Post class photos too, and write down children’s captions (e.g., “Here’s when my sand mold broke all up.” “Ricardo and I made this pirate boat in the block area”), or help children to write the captions. A display lets children know that their writing efforts are noticed and valued and can be shared with others.

