

The following material on writing demonstrations in kindergarten is extracted from Chapter 7 of Marilyn Duncan's forthcoming book.

DEMONSTRATIONS

Children develop attitudes about reading and writing as they hear and watch how readers, writers, and speakers think and act. Good attitudes toward reading and writing generate confidence. Teachers can demonstrate the confidence they have as readers and writers. They can also demonstrate that risk taking and approximating are parts of learning, and that—while reading and writing is sometimes challenging—it's worth it in the end.

It is important in encouraging and maintaining children's attitudes that they participate in daily demonstrations of literacy at work. In Chapter 6, I noted a need for a space in the classroom being set aside for demonstrations. The students sit on the floor and the teacher is sitting on a low chair nearby. There is easy access to books, a chart tablet for writing, markers and white boards. This part of the room is cozy and comfortable, with enough room for all children. A cozy togetherness is important. While the teacher may be unable to replicate the intimacy of one-on-one interactions with books and print, he or she can make that experience as close to that one-on-one experience as possible. It is important to watch for the level of involvement and how active the responses are as we read and write in front of the students.

Demonstrations are very short at the beginning of the year, because of the length of time my children can remain attentive. Teachers focus the instruction for these episodes for no longer than ten minutes.

Young children need to understand the logical connections among the literacy modes. I can model how reading and writing influence each other. I can model how reading and writing impact what we know about speaking and listening, and I can model how readers and writers can respond to what they read and write.

Teachers use rich oral and written language in their demonstrations. They show children how to look for the letters they know and the sounds they make when reading. They demonstrate the importance of making sense when reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, or

representing. They share things learned together from the content studies and use the new vocabulary from what we have heard or read, from the books we write, and from the experiences we have shared. Expectations are demonstrated, so children understand how to use the authentic literacy environment they are now part of.

Teachers constantly make links to reading and writing.

- They talk about what the writer wants them to know as they read to the children: "I think the author asked us that question because he wants us to answer it in our heads. I wonder if we'll find the answer on the next page." Reading is supposed to make sense to the reader. Reading causes us to ask questions of ourselves and figure out the answer.
- They think about what they want the reader to know when they demonstrate their own writing. I talk about using different words in my draft. "How could I say that so the person who reads this knows I was really scared?" I think like a writer when I read. "What could the writer have added here that might have told you more about the bear?"
- They think like readers when they write. "Wait, I left out the part about how I got there. That would be too confusing for the people who will read this."
- They know that when writers compose meaning, they

about the author

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ask the same questions as readers. “I wonder what this is going to be about. What do I know about this topic? What should I be thinking as I begin to read this? What’s going to happen next? How do I know?”

Re-reading allows a reader and writer to ask important questions. “Does it make sense? Does it sound right? Does it look right?” Teachers provide support for these developing readers by asking themselves questions in order for their students to see how readers and writers think.

Comprehension

Comprehension is making sense of what we read. Even younger readers are already having a conversation with the writer as they read. The job of any reader is to make sense of the text and think about what he or she is reading. Writing helps to develop comprehension. The job of any writer is to make certain the reader will make sense of what has been written. Teachers do not wait until children know sounds and letters to explore comprehension.

In summary,

- Demonstrations provide opportunities to emphasize meaning making. I understand that comprehension comes when a reader has a large oral vocabulary, so vocabulary development is part of my demonstrations.
- Demonstrations provide opportunities for the children to actively listen while I read aloud from a wide variety of texts. We have conversations before I read a book; I stop and think along the way while I read. I also talk about the words I want to use from what I read to convey meaning in my writing.

Each and every reading and writing demonstration attempts to interrelate all of the language modes.

Writing Demonstrations

Writing in front of students is also something to be done each day. Short, snappy sessions keep the children engaged. Teachers write on a large chart tablet seen by the children as the teacher’s own personal draft writing book. The tablet is low enough to allow children to sit next to it on the floor or on a small chair. The writing is at the child’s level.

The writing reflects what teachers expect from the children at this stage of development in the writing process. Teachers begin with a sketch, so the paper is organized by drawing a line below where the planning sketch will be. Writing is

done with a black marker so it is easy to see and replicates the pencil that the child will use. We use resources that we expect the child to use, including an enlarged version of the alphabet card.

The demonstration is an opportunity for children to listen, think, and observe. The writing is mine. The teacher has the marker, and talks aloud when writing, and pauses when asking questions to encourage oral responses from the children. While we don’t necessarily acknowledge each response, the children begin to see how writers can collaborate in their thinking about writing.

The demonstration is not so much *how* to write, in the sense of the knowledge and skills required for writing—though these are obviously important—but more about what being a writer means and how the writing process works. Demonstrations include—but also go beyond—the teaching of sounds and letters. Demonstrations are about having good ideas, getting them down on paper, and sharing them with others. For the teacher, this requires the same kind of enthusiasm for the process that demonstrating reading to children takes.

Similar to the reading demonstration, the objectives for the writing demonstration come from assessing the class as a whole. For example, from my monthly plan my outcome for demonstrations is to ask questions of myself as I write to ensure that meaning is paramount. Specifically, my objective for today is to ask questions of myself when planning my writing. In addition, I will be asking questions of myself as I record sounds and words as I write.

What I know about these five- and six-year-olds guides my selection of topics for writing. Because I am aware of their self-centered world, I write mostly about myself. I write about my family, my pets, and my surroundings. I write about things that happen to me right now. I write of my own children’s experiences when they were the age of these students.

My demonstration, shown in Figure 1, begins with how writers select topics as follows:

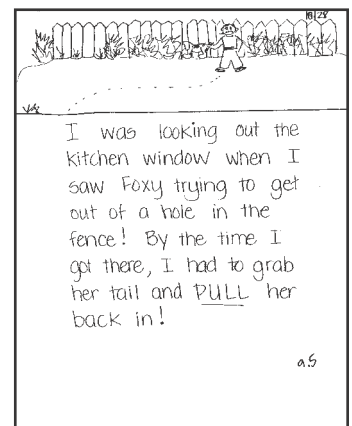


Figure 1:
A Writing Demonstration

“First I’ll write the date, so I know when I wrote this piece.”

I talk about my topic selection and ask myself questions as I determine my topic.

“Hmmm. What am I going to write about today? I have a couple of things I have been thinking about. I had an experience at the mall last night. I could write about that.”

I hear a few children comment, “What happened at the mall, did your car break down again?”

I continue talking about my topic, “And then there’s my dog...”

My students are used to hearing stories about my dog, so there is lots of talk about this topic. “Foxy!!! What did Foxy do this time?”

My topic is selected, “Yes, that’s what I need to write about. This time I was lucky with Foxy. What happened was kind of funny, too.”

Demonstrating writing is about:

- the thinking that goes on in a writer’s head. “Something happened yesterday that I need to write about.”
- describing the thinking going on when a writer selects a topic. “Let me think about what needs to be in my sketch, so that I don’t forget about the three things that happened.”
- showing how the writer organizes his or her thoughts.

I might continue my demonstration as follows:

I am organizing my thoughts. “What do I need to include in my plan?”

I provide enough information to cause them to want more. “My backyard needs to be there.” I sketch as I talk.

I continue, “There’s a fence around the yard. That’s really important.”

I can hear the children asking questions. “Did Foxy chew stuff? I bet she chewed the bushes.” I hear their questions but do not respond. I am pleased by their natural anticipation.

I continue to sketch and talk. “Oops! Do I have Foxy in there? I almost forgot!”

The children’s comments continue and are based on stories they have heard before. “She sure gets in trouble a lot, doesn’t she?”

I put the finishing touches on my sketch. “And I need to be in there too. Now it’s right.”

I want my students to know that we write for a purpose and audience. “My children, Chad and Heidi, don’t live at home anymore. I think they will want to read this piece. They always want to know what their dog Foxy is doing.”

While the amount of text in my writing is relatively short, I am strategic in planning what I say. I am aware of the need for demonstrations in natural language. I want my writing to extend the language of these children, so I do not simplify the language or the content.

While the development of good attitudes to becoming readers and writers underlies my demonstration, skill development is important. For example, I demonstrate directionality when I see children ready for that skill in their own writing. I demonstrate how we hear and record sounds in words while I am thinking about my story.

“Let me think. What will be a good way to start my writing? I think I’ll say... *I was looking out the kitchen window...* Yes, that will make the reader wonder what I’m seeing.”

I demonstrate how writers write—going from sound to letter when they think about writing a word.

“*I was* (I write these two words quickly) *looking... looking*—what do I hear at the beginning of that word?”

I use an enlarged alphabet card to demonstrate connecting the sound I hear to the letter I need. “*Looking* starts like *leaf*. What letter is that?”

I point to a picture of a leaf on the alphabet card and say, “I remember, it’s *l*.”

The needs of my learners determine the focus of what I say when I think aloud:

- “Let me think...hair starts like hand. What letter is that?” demonstrates a writer’s need to go from sound to letter.

- “Let me read that again and see if it makes sense.” confirms the need for writing to be meaningful to the reader.
- “Let me read this again to see how my illustration should look on this page.” encourages writers to match the illustration and the text during the demonstration of illustrating the published text.

Writing demonstrations provide me with assessment samples about attitudes children have as developing writers. Listening to their responses as I write shows me those students who are developing the understanding of how thoughts can be written and how conventions of writing are developed. For example:

I re-read what I have written, “So what do I have so far?” I read aloud. “*I was looking out ... the...the...*” I pause. “I know that word. Let me think—how is it spelled?”

A few children chime in, “*t-h-e.*”

I write *the* and continue writing... “*kitchen window when I saw ... saw...*”

Many children say, “*S! It’s an s!*”

I write *saw* and continue, “...*Foxy trying to get out of a hole in the... fence!!!!!*”

Immediately the children begin chattering. I hear them say, “I knew that was going to happen...” “I told you she was naughty”... “She tries to get out a lot, doesn’t she?”

I respond, “Ah – you figured it out.”

Demonstrations of reading and writing bring a community of learners together. Children begin to know each other and to know me by the stories I read that we love. Together we read stories that have wonderful illustrations, that make us laugh, that connect to our own experiences, that tell us things, and that have us ask questions. The children know me also through my writing demonstrations in which I have shared family stories, stories of the past, and things I wonder about. Demonstrations are often like conversations among a group of friends.

*The article above is extracted from Chapter 7 of Marilyn Duncan’s book, **The Kindergarten Book: A Guide to Literacy Instruction**. See the column on the right for more information about ordering this title from Richard C. Owen Publishers, Inc.*

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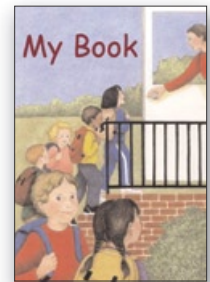
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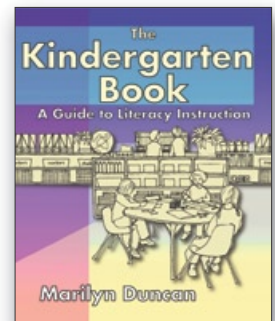
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