

Kindergarten Small Group Early Writing Intervention

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This article presents a summary of a presentation given at the WSRA Institute, Small Group Early Writing Intervention. Anne McGill-Franzen opened the institute by sharing her research on kindergarten literacy. Her book, Kindergarten Literacy, Matching Assessment and Instruction in Kindergarten provided the backdrop for this presentation.

Here's what Anne says about literacy learning in kindergarten: "Social development and literacy instruction needn't be an either/or proposition. If we are to improve literacy in our nation, we all have to embrace the belief that teaching reading to 5-year olds can be a school experience that's every bit as playful, imaginative, inquiry-driven and developmentally appropriate as anything John Dewey or Jean Piaget might have dreamed up. We have to stop casting the discussion as skill-and-drill versus joyful learning through play."

Other lessons from Anne include:

We can teach kindergarten children to read and write

Literacy experiences in kindergarten have a lasting impact on students

Work from students' strengths – link new information to familiar –
make instruction explicit and personal

Writing supports reading development in many ways. Marie Clay noted that the reciprocity of early reading and early writing is grossly undervalued. Reading and writing are two different ways of learning about the same thing. It is like having two hands. (Marie Clay Literacy Lessons Part 2, p. 48)

At the time of early literacy learning writing helps the young reader to analyze some of the detail in print,. It fosters slow analysis of print, highlights letter forms, directionality, forces the learner to attend to different levels of analysis and to the importance of letter sequence and requires the eye and hand to coordinate awareness and actions.

Kindergarten teachers create many opportunities for children to interact with writing:

- Shared writing: Teacher writes, children read back, think aloud as you compose together, and re-read many times
- Interactive writing: writing done with children, the pen is shared and children contribute letters and words as they are able, and
- lots of opportunities to write independently. (Insert fig. 1 here.) Figure one shows an interactive writing sample composed by a kindergarten class after reading The Farm Concert by Joy Cowley. The children were concerned that the farmer was angry at his animals for making so much noise, and wrote him a letter to offer a suggestion. Note that everyone had a chance to contribute. A child who up to that point did not write with letters drew the heart. Also note that the teacher finished the letter as she noticed that student attention was waning.

With all these opportunities to write, there are still some children who struggle to learn. It is important to intervene early. With that in mind, we developed an early intervention model at the kindergarten level for students who did not have sound / symbol match in their independent writing in January of their kindergarten year.

We based our early intervention for kindergarten writers on systematic assessment of literacy development including: writing samples, alphabet and phonemic awareness assessments and teacher classroom observations.

Format of intervention lessons:

- share a book
- compose a message
- children write, teacher coaches writing
- draw a picture
- practice using alphabet chart
- re-read book if time

Teachers need an understanding of the developmental writing stages. The following examples mark a child's development as a writer:

(Figures 2-5) Figure 2 shows a child who has read Spot Goes to School and writes, "Spot goes to School." Note that he has one sound per word, and is still learning to write his name. Figure 3 shows the same writer a few months later. He can hear more sounds per word, and can reread his message. He also may have a visual memory of Corduroy as he writes the first three letters of this word. Figure 4 shows more sounds per word, and some known words. Figure 5 is an independent writing sample written in May. He hears many more sounds in words, spells more words correctly and his message has meaning, as it is a take off on the book, Goodnight Gorilla, by Peggy Rathmann.

In coaching writing, teachers used these cues, based on Marie Clay's work with Elkonin boxes. (Clay, 2005)

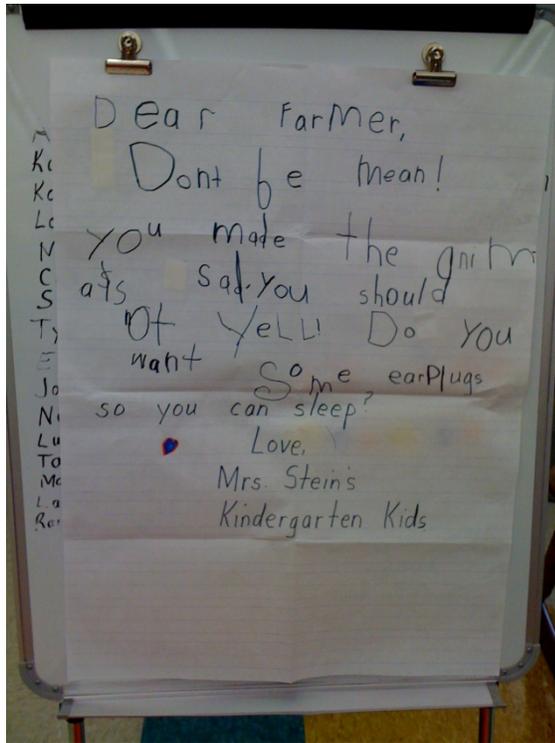
- Say the word slowly
- What do you hear?
- How will you write it?
- What else do you hear?

- Have the child re-read his sentence to figure out the next word

The following examples show the work completed during small group instruction. Note the workspace on top of the page, Elkonin boxes and word brought to fluency by the student. This workspace is a helpful tool to provide practice for the child and to show work done during the writing lesson. (Insert fig. 6 and 7).

Final thoughts: Kindergarten teachers play a huge role in the future success of their students as readers and writers. Children need to write everyday in Kindergarten, many times and in many contexts. If children write once a week, that's 36 opportunities; once a day, that's 180 opportunities; several times a day in whole group, small group, and individual settings, the opportunities are limitless. Kindergarten children love to write and create. Enjoy the process and savor the samples. (insert fig. 8) One child wrote this and I simply asked, "Tell me about your writing." and heard, "Spider said his ABC's, and when he got finished he was so tired he said, "Phew!" Let's celebrate the creativity of our children.

Figure 1



Sample of interactive writing.

Figure 2

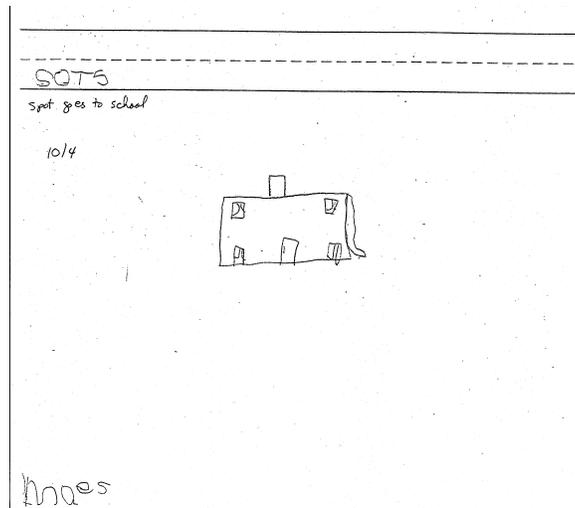


Figure 3

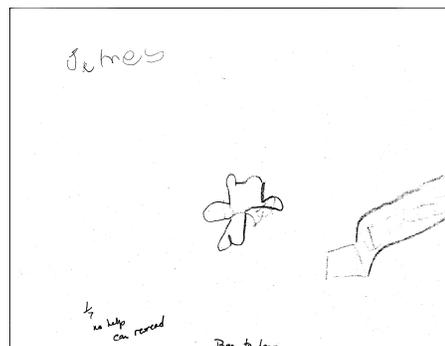


Figure 4

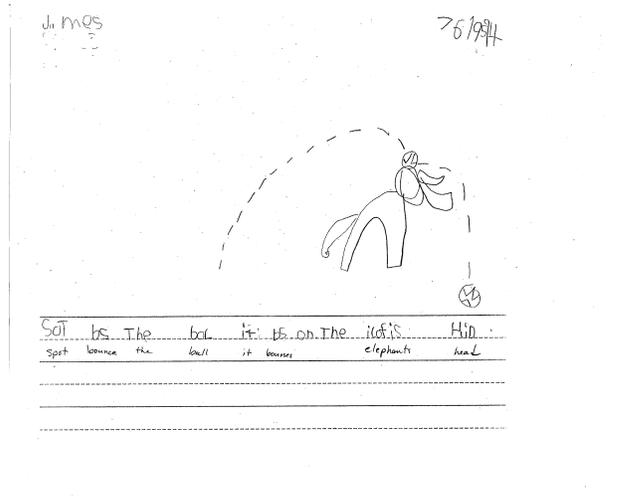


Figure 5

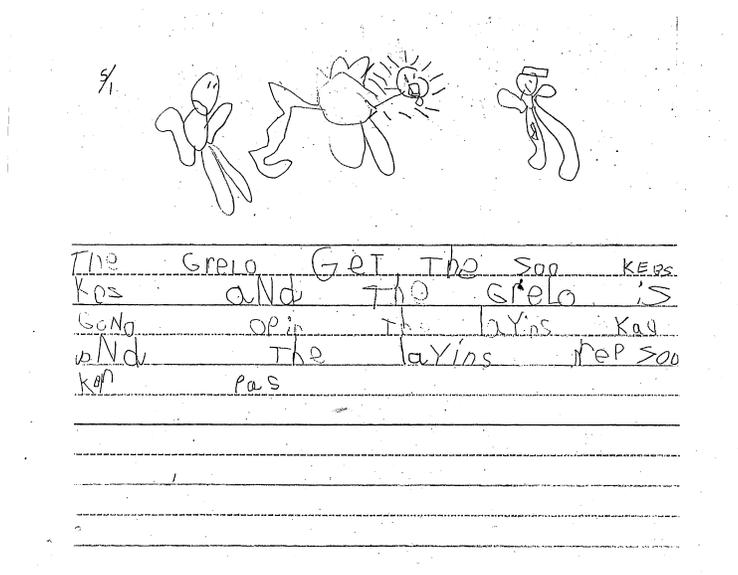


Figure 6

UP UPUPUP
 steps

The cats
 went up the steps.

Figure 7

This This
 This This
 snake the

This is a snake.

Figure 8

A B C D
 T H E S B D R S P B C S W
 a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o
 P q r s t u v w x y z

References:

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McGill-Franzen. (2006). Kindergarten Literacy Matching Assessment and Instruction in Kindergarten. USA: Scholastic.

Children's books cited:

Cowley, Joy. (1998) The Farm Concert. Story Box: Read-Togethers: The Wright Group

Hill, Eric. (1984) Spot Goes to School. New York, NY: Putnam

Rathmann, Peggy. (1994) Good Night Gorilla. New York, NY: Putnam.

Authors note: Thank you to the teachers at Marcy Elementary School (Mary Stein, Kathi Mueller, Kaye Hunt, Elizabeth Sidders, and DeMaris Gill for their wonderful writing work with students.

