

Writing Instruction in Pre-Kindergarten Classrooms:
Methods, Considerations, and Practices

Capstone Experience

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Table of Contents

Abstract	p. 3
Literature Review	p. 4
Reference List	p. 22
Capstone Project	
Curriculum Overview	p. 26
Example of a Classroom Schedule	p. 28
Example of a Classroom Environment	p. 29
Prompts and Questions	p. 30
Guidelines for Center Contents	p. 31
Sample Lesson Plan	p. 36
Supplemental Book and Lesson Chart	p. 38
Sample Letter to Families	p. 40
Assessment Materials	p. 41
Reference List	p. 43
Analysis of Project	p. 44

Abstract

Writing instruction in pre-kindergarten classrooms meets the need to address students' emerging literacy skills and understandings as well as addresses young children's natural curiosity about the written word. Current research and practical literature emphasize the importance of the social, physical, and instructional environments on the acquisition of and interest in writing skills and understandings. Through differentiated curricula that includes whole group, small group, and individual interactions, experiences, and teaching opportunities, students can make progress in their writing development and maintain their natural interest. Writing can and should be incorporated into multiple times of the day and locations in the classroom. Students should be engaged in experiences that prompt them to use writing in interesting, natural ways and have multiple opportunities to work with their peers as well as with adults. Teachers in pre-kindergarten must engage his or her students in both planned and impromptu learning opportunities surrounding writing. Emphasis should be placed on purpose and meaning rather than on letter formation or spelling—those are skills that will come later. The curriculum materials developed address these major themes and guidelines that emerge from the research and practical literature.

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Literacy is a constant focus in the field of early childhood. Reading and writing are seen as the skills necessary for students to be successful in later schooling; early childhood is the place and time where formal schooling commences and the foundation for critical literacy skills begins. In a joint statement published in 1998 the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) made their views clear: “although reading and writing abilities continue to develop throughout the life span, the early childhood years—from birth through age eight—are the most important period for literacy development” (p. 1). Because the early childhood years are seen as being of particular significance, IRA and NAEYC elaborated on what a developmentally appropriate environment would include. Citing developmentally appropriate goals and expectations, students should be challenged by the environment but still be supported by adults in order to be successful.

Literacy competency takes time and a multitude of experiences to develop. In particular, parents, politicians, and society in general place a high value on reading; writing is given less of a focus at times. Political actions and laws have real effects on classrooms, including at the early childhood level. A concern in the field is that with “increasingly higher expectations in reading skills for children in kindergarten, teachers in preschool programs will revert to using developmentally inappropriate practices in order to push children to learn how to read” (Wayne, DiCarlo, Burts, & Benedict, 2007, p. 6). Inappropriate practices and an overall disregard for individual children’s

development, skills, and abilities only hinders children's motivation and natural curiosity to learn about reading and writing.

Because of society's focus and realization that early experiences provide the foundation upon which later literacy achievement is based, both researchers and authors of practical guides for instruction are interested in reading and writing in early childhood education, often termed the period of emergent literacy. McGee and Purcell-Gates (1997) describe the field as "alive and well" (p. 317). However, they also cited the need for research in emergent literacy to extend over longer periods of time and to examine different sociocultural contexts.

Ten years after the publication of the McGee and Purcell-Gates article Mayer (2007) made the observation that more research has focused on early reading skills than early writing skills. In an article that summarizes a variety of research on early writing, Mayer makes the statement that reading and writing are connected and their development occurs simultaneously. The inequity in research between reading and writing also has parallels to the unequal focus on reading by parents. In the same Mayer (2007) article Marie Clay is quoted: "most parents and teachers believe that preschool reading experiences are very important but know almost nothing about the value of preschool writing experiences" (p. 34).

Writing experiences in early childhood are critical and worthy of extensive exploration in classrooms, in research, and in practical instructional literature. Children come to early childhood classrooms with some knowledge about writing—its purposes, forms, and conventions. The literature makes it clear that teachers should both

acknowledge the prior knowledge of students and well as address aspects of writing they have not yet begun to understand.

Learners and Learning

Many researchers and authors have described how young children acquire knowledge about writing prior to beginning school (Donovan, Milewicz, & Smoklin, 2003; Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007; International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). By interacting with family members and other significant people, by observing others using writing, and through pretend play “young children learn there are different times, places, appearances, and purposes for certain kinds of reading and writing” (Donovan, Milewicz, & Smolkin, 2003, p. 30). Writing as a meaningful act was described by Morrow (1997) in a slightly different way: “children learn the uses of written language before they learn the forms” (p. 260). This understanding that writing has meaning provides the backbone upon which pre-kindergarten writing instruction and experiences should be built.

Development

Children’s development in writing begins long before they enter the early childhood classroom. According to Morrow (1997), “as a process, early writing development is characterized by children’s moving from playfully making marks on paper, through communicating messages on paper, to creating texts” (p. 260). Many researchers and authors have described this development. Schickedanz and Casbergue (2004) phrases early writing development in a slightly different way: “there is the story of the child’s journey from scribble to script, from letter strings to real words, and from short, simple messages to messages that are reasonably detailed and somewhat coherent”

(pp. 6-7). Greer and Lockman (1998) put it in yet another way: “one of the most striking advances in motor skill in the preschool years is the development of handwriting.

Children progress from producing seemingly random scribbles on a page to producing meaningful and organized collections of forms” (p. 888). No matter how it is phrased, it is generally agreed upon that children move from random to more purposeful, from the simple to the more complex, and from indecipherable to others to decipherable.

While this general progression of writing development has been discussed by many, Mayer (2007) makes it known that “children’s writing development is not linear in progression, nor is the progression the same for all children” (p. 38). Going on, Mayer states that this process of development often occurs between the ages of three and five, generally though of as the preschool years. Some students begin this process much earlier than others, while some students progress more slowly with writing due to a host of factors. The time period described by Mayer, emergent literacy, is worthy of more explicit discussion.

Emergent Literacy

Many in the field have defined the term emergent literacy. McGee and Purcell-Gates define the term:

Taken as a continuum, then, I would have to say that the emergent literacy years stretch from the time children begin to experience (and thus acquire conceptual knowledge about) the uses of print and the point where they can independently read and write for whatever uses seems relevant to them (including school-type purposes)”

(pp. 310-311).

Mayer (2007) summarizes the definitions of many, stating that emergent writing is when “children begin to understand that writing is a form of communication and their marks on their paper convey a message” (p. 35). While the development of the understanding that print conveys meaning is significant, Schickedanz and Casbergue (2004) caution that it is important to realize that practicing writing without attention to meaning is important as well because it helps young children develop their skills in writing.

Relevant Theorists

While the theories of many are applicable to the field of early writing, Rousseau, Froebel, and Vygotsky’s ideas are most pertinent, particularly when considering the type of learning environment and instruction that best supports young children’s writing development. Rousseau advocated a “natural” approach where students learn what is developmentally appropriate for them. The importance of developmental appropriateness and differentiation cannot be overemphasized. Morrow continues, describing Rousseau’s belief that the educator’s job is to “use strategies that mesh with the child’s readiness to learn” (p. 4).

This idea of a “mesh” between the child and the teacher is related to Vygotsky’s emphasis on the importance of social relationships in learning (Morrow, 1997). Using the idea of the zone of proximal development, Vygotsky believes that teachers should provide challenges to students that are achievable with the appropriate level of support from an adult.

Froebel emphasized play in learning (Morrow, 1997). Play is a critical aspect of the early childhood classroom. The theories of Froebel, Vygotsky, and Rousseau have

critical links to the establishment of a learning environment that supports children's early writing.

General Curriculum

Writing activities are an essential part of pre-K classrooms (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). The kind of curriculum that best supports writing in pre-kindergarten has depth and offers students the kinds of experiences they need to develop essential skills. "A wide range of literacy skills and competencies may be emphasized: language development, understanding the functions of print, print awareness, concepts about print, literacy as a source of enjoyment, understanding about stories and their structure, expediency with books, knowledge of the alphabet, phonemic awareness, opportunities to write, and so on." (Aram & Biron, 2004, p. 605) According to Mayer (2001), "when these opportunities are abundant in preschool classrooms, children enter kindergarten with a strong literacy base and the potential for experiencing school success. Children leave preschool with a feeling of empowerment, seeing themselves as budding readers and writers" (p. 40).

Extensive planning is necessary to ensure the pre-K environment a cohesive, thoughtful, and purposeful place to be. Specifically thinking of literacy, Strickland and Schickedanz (2004) make known the importance of symbols, which are the heart of literacy. According to the authors, "effective teachers plan the environment so that children are engaged in interpreting and using meaningful symbols" (p. 21). In classrooms for young children, perhaps more than at any other level, the physical environment is extremely important.

The task of learning to write takes place in a variety of contexts in the pre-K environment—in small group, one-on-one, and in whole group experiences. These are opportunities to expand and extend knowledge and skills relating to writing when teachers are both purposeful and knowledgeable about individual students' development and reading and writing in general. It is important to note the connection between reading and writing skills—their boundaries are somewhat muddled even at the early childhood level.

Teachers need to understand that learning to write is not just about making letters. Children need to come to understand a great deal about writing: “the level of speech alphabet letters represent; the ways in which print is organized on a page; the purposes for which writing is used; the various conventions associated with various purposes; and that the writer must think about the reader's reaction to the writing” (Schickendanz, 1999, p. 98). The understanding of writing as a purposeful act is particularly important.

Writing is not just handwriting practice; children should have experiences in their early childhood classrooms that makes this clear (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). In fact, “formal handwriting lessons do not belong in the preschool, but explicit instruction can be given in response to a child's requests” (Schickedanz, & Casbergue, 2004, p. 27). Instead of worksheets that teach children that writing is simply copying letters correctly, the curriculum should be heavy in the emphasis of meaning. According to Love, Burns, and Buell (2007), “children best learn the joy and power of writing when it is integrated into various themes and by writing for varying purposes” (p. 15).

The general format of writing instruction in preschool should be demonstration and explanation by the teacher followed by free exploration by the children. “Generally, young children are most successful when teachers provide structure and instruction about a new aspect of writing. Once the concept is introduced, the teacher then steps back to allow children the freedom to incorporate and master the new skills” (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007, p. 18). In addition, the authors believe teachers can provide opportunities for writing by encouraging writing in many learning centers, by supporting writing through one-on-one interactions, and by building home-school links for writing (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007).

The Learning Environment

The Importance of Meaning

Meaning is a critical aspect of early literacy. This is particularly true pertaining to writing. The social environment of a classroom has significant implications to children’s writing. Rowe (1994) documented this important link: “children’s desire to engage in positive social exchanges with peers and teachers served as important motivation for their exploration of literacy” (p. 191). In her 1994 work, Rowe became a part of the social network of the classrooms in which she completed her research. As a frequent participant in the classroom she became part of the social world in the classroom and was able to engage in interactions with students around their writing. According to the author herself, “young children learn to read and write by interacting with the literate people with whom they have significant relationships” (p. 192). By become a person with which children have a significant relationship she was able to more deeply explore students’

writing, their motivations for writing, and the social structure of the classrooms that contributed to student writing.

In addition to ensuring that writing is both social and meaningful, authors have emphasized the importance of how writing is part of the social environment as well as the classroom in general. In their 1998 joint position statement, IRA and NAEYC emphasize the importance of opportunity to write without worry about spelling and handwriting. Others have emphasized the importance of opportunity; Love, Burns, and Buell (2007) contend that “children are aware of print before being formally taught its conventions, but for their understanding to grow, they need regular and meaningful interactions with print” (p. 18). In addition to opportunity, as previously discussed, children need to take part in interactions that emphasize how print and writing carry meaning. While prior experiences may provide some of this critical information, teachers must teach. Strickland and Schickedanz (2004) emphasize this point: “it is not enough that children learn to notice and manipulate the print in their environment. They must understand the uses and functions of print in daily life” (p. 21).

Wing (1989) examined the effect of teacher and administrator beliefs about reading and writing on students’ conceptions. According to the author’s results, “teachers’ beliefs and instructional decisions also influence preschool-age children’s conceptions of reading and writing. The practices of the preschool teacher may influence whether children view reading as “sounding out words” or as “looking at books” and whether they view writing as “copying letters” or as “writing a story” (p. 71). Wing’s study highlights the importance of meaning. In addition, the results indicate that instructional decisions, which are based on the beliefs of teachers, administrators, and/or

curriculum developers, must be examined closely. One aspect of instruction worthy of examining is how teachers interact with young children around their writing.

Working with a Teacher

Because of the nature of many preschool and pre-kindergarten classrooms, there are daily opportunities for children to interact with adults in small group or in individual interactions. These interactions, which are often both social and instructional, provide students with the support they need to develop their writing.

Oken-Wright (1998) describes the importance of young children working with an adult: “when a child works at a level of personal challenge or when he is working with an adult, toward what he could do, he encounters some of the best conditions for learning about letters, sounds, and how writing works” (p. 78). The child is given immediate feedback from an expert, an important aspect of such interactions. The interaction allows for questions, comments, and teaching that will help the child to learn and refine their writing. As children’s writing development advances they become more proactive in seeking information from adults (Morrow, 1997).

It is important to note that the way the teacher or other adult responds to the child is significant. According to Mayer (2007), students make more progress in writing when they are surrounded with supportive teachers. “Teachers described as supportive answer student questions thoughtfully, acknowledge writing strengths, scaffold children’s writing activities, and encourage writing with verbal affirmations” (p. 36). The balance between adult guidance and child independence and autonomy was described by Love, Burns, and Buell (2007) as being significant as well. Through modeling, discussion, and allowing the child some freedom in writing teachers support writing development.

In general, “effective early childhood teachers help children feel free in their writing” (Mayer, 2001, p. 37). Imposing too much structure or constantly correcting a child’s writing can have negative effects (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). Instead, a sensitive teacher who makes writing interesting, fun, socially motivating, and does not constantly correct young children’s writing helps to establish and maintain a classroom environment where writing is explored and is motivating.

When the teacher and child engage in an interaction that is in the child’s zone of proximal development, as described in Vygotsky’s work, the child is able to achieve greater sophistication than they would on their own. Through adult support the child’s knowledge, skills, and understanding are made more sophisticated. Rowe (1994) discusses the zone of proximal development in a different way, regarding the importance of the social aspects of the idea: “my observations indicate that the zone of proximal development is a two way street. When adults and children interact with one another, both groups find themselves in need of social support to learn about the activities of their partners” (p. 108).

In addition to small group and individual interactions, some facets of writing instruction supported by the research and practical literature are appropriate to use in whole group situations. Rowe (1994) describes the importance of demonstrations. According to Rowe, demonstrations provide children with information about how something (writing) may be done. In addition, they are “*multidimensional displays of what might be done, and why*” (p. 155, Rowe’s emphasis). Such demonstrations can certainly occur in small group situations but whole group situations allow many students access to the information.

Learning to write is a social process. It is through the social interactions that students and teachers engage in that students learn the skills and continue the motivation to explore writing. Rowe (1994) summarizes this eloquently: “it was social interactions that lured children into the world of literacy, and pushed them to build ever more sophisticated and conventional literacy knowledge” (p. 189).

Physical Environment

Critical components of writing instruction and experiences in the early childhood curriculum are the physical environment and the schedule of the classroom. IRA and NAEYC (1998) assert that “children need regular and active interactions with print” (p. 3). Through encouraging and supporting children’s writing with materials and time children’s knowledge, experiences, and expertise grow (Schickedanz, & Casbergue, 2004). Schickedanz and Casbergue go further:

Physical stage-setting is essential if we are to encourage preschoolers to write.

Teachers must provide places and materials for children to write and must allocate time for children to engage in writing. These are indirect, but powerful, ways that teachers use to guide children toward engagement with writing.

(p. 61)

Multiple authors of practical literature have suggestions for what should be included in the physical environment of the classroom. Oken-Wright (1998) offers many suggestions for materials to include, but cautions that materials should be included in the classroom not only because they are interesting; they must also be useful for representation in written form. Writing prompts such as paper, pencils, recording sheets, appointment books, and other materials help students to understand writing can be a part of virtually

any kind of play they engage in. In addition, “providing writing materials in activity centers gives children opportunities to connect reading with writing” (Donovan, Milewicz, & Smolkin, 2003, p. 34). Because writing and reading are so interconnected and the skills for each develop simultaneously it is important for teachers to provide materials, set up opportunities, and make these connections explicit through teaching.

In addition to plentiful materials in activity centers, writing should be throughout the room and used in multiple circumstances and parts of the day. Love, Burns, and Buell (2007) stress the need for the print around the room to be used by both the teachers and the children in the room. Plentiful environmental print around the classroom provides many opportunities for both planned and impromptu teaching moments.

Importance of Time and Scheduling

Learning to write takes time. Teachers need to structure the classroom to allow time for students to engage in writing in depth and for their own purposes (Oken-Wright, 1998). Rowe (1994) puts it well: “if children are to participate in a supportive authoring community, teachers will need to provide opportunities, time, and freedom for children and teachers to express themselves in talk, print, and drawing, and to share these efforts with each other” (p. 198).

Teachers can appropriately address children’s writing development through the schedule and instructional groupings of the classroom. Children need opportunities for independent play, often termed center time, as well as more structured small and/or whole group times of the day. Mayer (2001) believes that “structuring time in the day for children to interact with various others on writing projects is vital” (p. 39). In whole group situations the teacher can provide information and guidance to the entire group; in

small groups the teacher can differentiate further as well as encourage children to work together. Free choice time naturally allows and encourages children to play together and work with materials.

Free choice time has received attention in the literature because of its opportunity for teachers to work one on one with students and to allow students to explore and play with writing. According to Wayne, DiCarlo, Burts, and Benedict (2007) “free-choice center time provides teachers with an opportunity to support children’s literacy development by scaffolding literacy behaviors at a level that is appropriate for each individual child” (p.15). With other students engaged in materials of their choice the teacher is better able to work with individual students and thus differentiate instruction appropriately.

Specific Instructional Strategies

Names

One area of early writing that has received attention in recent research is the writing of names. Young children are very motivated by writing and reading their names and many parents devote time at home to the skill (Treiman, Cohen, Mulqueeny, Kessler, & Schechtman, 2007). In fact, due to this attention, children’s own names “often serve as the first stable written form that has meaning for them” (Rowe, 2008, p. 401). Molfese, Beswick, Molnar, and Jacobi-Vessls (2006) examined name writing and believe that “children’s exposure to their written names by parents and teachers is thought to provide many early learning opportunities by which written letters and letter sounds become connected” (p. 17). Children’s names can be incorporated into the physical and

social environment of the classroom through name cards, sign in sheets, and through consistent attention from the teacher.

Drawing

Several have explored the connection between young children's drawing and writing as a way to explore (Baghban, 2007; Mayer, 2007). According to Baghban (2007), "children draw pictures and write to organize ideas and construct meaning from their experiences" (p. 21). Drawing and writing allow students to explore their ideas in multiple ways; sometimes children's writing extends their drawing and vice versa. In addition, drawing provides ready-made prompts to write: things that need labels, captions, and explanations. The act of drawing, therefore, becomes a scaffold to writing stories (Baghban, 2007).

Dictation and Joint Writing

"One way to help children connect speaking, reading, drawing, and writing as forms of communication is to offer to take dictation" (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007, p. 14). Dictation serves as a model for the child; the adult writes down what the child says and helps to convey to the child that writing carries meaning. A more interactive form of instruction that is related to dictation is joint writing or co-authoring. In such interactions the teacher leads the writing on a surface so all children can see and elicits responses, help, and suggestions from the students.

According to Aram and Biron (2004), joint writing activities were very effective—they promoted basic literacy skills, vocabulary, knowledge, and listening comprehension (p. 603). These interactions provide a multitude of opportunities to discuss concepts about print and the children's responses provide information to the

teacher about what concepts children understand and which require instruction and more experience (Strickland, & Schickedanz, 2004).

Assessment

General Considerations

Writing in the pre-kindergarten classroom should be explorative, interesting, and open. Assessment of children's writing should be as informal as possible, relying on anecdotal notes, observations of children's self-selected activities, and simple checklists (Schickedanz, & Casbergue, 2004; Morrow, 1997). This requires diligence on the part of the teacher, as inappropriate assessment tools such as worksheets may be easier to collect data. However, the data from such activities does not represent the child's true understanding or abilities in writing. Above all, children's writings should not "be made the occasion for the hunting and correction of errors or for excessive direct instruction" (Morrow, 1997, p. 273). Because motivation and continued interest is a key goal of writing instruction in the pre-kindergarten year, such punitive and error-seeking assessments go against the philosophical foundations of an appropriate writing curriculum and environment.

Developmental Considerations

The variability in experience and skills accounts for some of the vast differences in pre-kindergarten students' abilities. Teachers need to consider children's individual progress and monitor it to instruct the child in the most appropriate way for them (IRA & NAEYC, 1998). When considering the stages of writing, children do not move from one stage to the next, abandoning the previous stage completely. For example, a child may use conventional letters and demonstrate beginning understandings of letter-sound

relationships in attaching labels to a drawing, but then revert to mock writing of lines when writing a letter to a friend. According to Bus, Both-de Vries, de Jong, Sulzby, and de Jong (2001), “children use their knowledge about writing as a repertoire, moving back and forth across various forms of writing” (p. 1).

Children’s fine motor development also has an impact on their writing (Schickedanz and Casbergue, 2004). In particular, the formation of lowercase letters requires more finger dexterity than uppercase letters. While teachers may want to make note of children’s letter formation, it should not be the focus of a writing program.

Conclusion

Young children are naturally curious about writing. They are “fascinated with writing, the tools used to do it, with the purposes for which it is used, and with the physical and social results of their own efforts” (Schickendanz, 1999, p. 97). Young children see older children and adults using writing in their daily lives, for both pleasure and for information.

It is critical that pre-kindergarten teachers take both the time and attention to create physical, social, and instructional environments that support children’s writing. Morrow (1997) highlights the relationship between the various environments that encapsulate an early childhood classroom: “generally, the best way to assist children in language and literacy development is to create situations for meaningful use in addition to offering some direct instruction” (p. 260).

The goal of writing instruction in pre-kindergarten is to create an environment where writing is enjoyed, useful, and frequent. Through both careful planned instructional activities such as joint writing and discussion of writing as a purposeful act

as well as a multitude of individualized interactions that address individual students' needs, teachers can create environments that support the progress of children. Oken-Wright (1998) puts it well: "given such rich experiences and given the help to grow through selective support, children can be empowered, will draw and write more, and can grow toward literacy with confidence" (p. 81). Confidence and continued motivation is certainly a worthy outcome.

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Curriculum Overview

Writing is an essential, but often overlooked, part of the pre-kindergarten classroom. This curriculum provides a basic outline and description of ways to use writing in the classroom that are supported by both the research and practical literature in the field of early childhood education. Included in this curriculum are the following components:

- Example of a Classroom Schedule- to help you think about the schedule of your classroom and whether it supports writing
- Example of a Classroom Environment- to help you think about the design of your classroom layout and how it does or does not support writing
- Prompts and Questions- to provide you with ideas of what kinds of phrases and questions to use with students around their writing; these prompts are appropriate for children at all levels of writing development in your classroom and will provide you valuable assessment data
- Guidelines for Center Contents- to prompt you to think about how to include writing all over your classroom, not just in the writing center; these guidelines also include considerations for instruction
- Sample Lesson Plan- to demonstrate the ways that writing instruction can be incorporated into story time; also includes a description of how a joint-writing activity can be utilized effectively
- Supplemental Book and Lesson Chart- lists ten additional books that are appropriate for pre-kindergarten and readily support writing development;

also includes possible joint writing and center time activities relating to the text

- Sample Letter to Families- important because it demonstrates the need for home-school cooperation; outlines the importance of writing for young children; includes prompts for later letters relating to writing
- Assessment Materials - a checklist for writing development that includes prompts for evidence, analysis of strengths and areas of need

These components are designed around the belief that pre-kindergarten children deserve an environment that is supportive of their writing. Young children learn to write when they are surrounded by a physical, social, and instructional environment that is both supportive and appropriately challenging to them. Instruction is based on a relationship between whole group activities (story time and joint writing lessons) and free choice activities where children work together and with adults in a small group or in a one-on-one fashion.

The goal of this curriculum is to assist teachers to set up and maintain environments that will lead to students making progress in writing. Another major goal of this curriculum to maintain student motivation relating to writing in order to prompt continued effort in the area. The challenge with writing in the pre-kindergarten classroom is that the children in the room have widely varying degrees of understanding about the purposes and forms of writing; however, writing instruction is well worth the time and attention.

Example of a Pre-K Classroom Schedule

This classroom schedule writing in the following ways:

- Multiple opportunities for students to work independently and for extended periods of time
- Multiple opportunities for teachers to work with students one on one or in small groups
- Whole group time allows teacher to introduce, assess, and teach writing concepts with the entire class
- Extended mid-morning center time allows opportunities for teachers to pull together small groups of children to extend or remediate (allows for differentiation)

8:00 a.m.	Arrival- Center Time Centers open- Library, Writing Center, Math Center, Science Center
8:30 a.m.	Breakfast
9:00 a.m.	Whole Group Time Preparation for day Introduction/extension of center activities
9:15 a.m.	Center Time Teacher may work with small groups
10:30 a.m.	Whole Group Time Songs Story time #1 and/or Instructional time relating to current unit or other concepts
11:00 a.m.	Outdoor Time
11:40 a.m.	Lunch
12:20 p.m.	Rest
1:30 p.m.	Center Time
2:00 p.m.	Whole Group Time Songs Story time #2 and/or Instructional time relating to current or concepts
2:30 p.m.	Dismissal

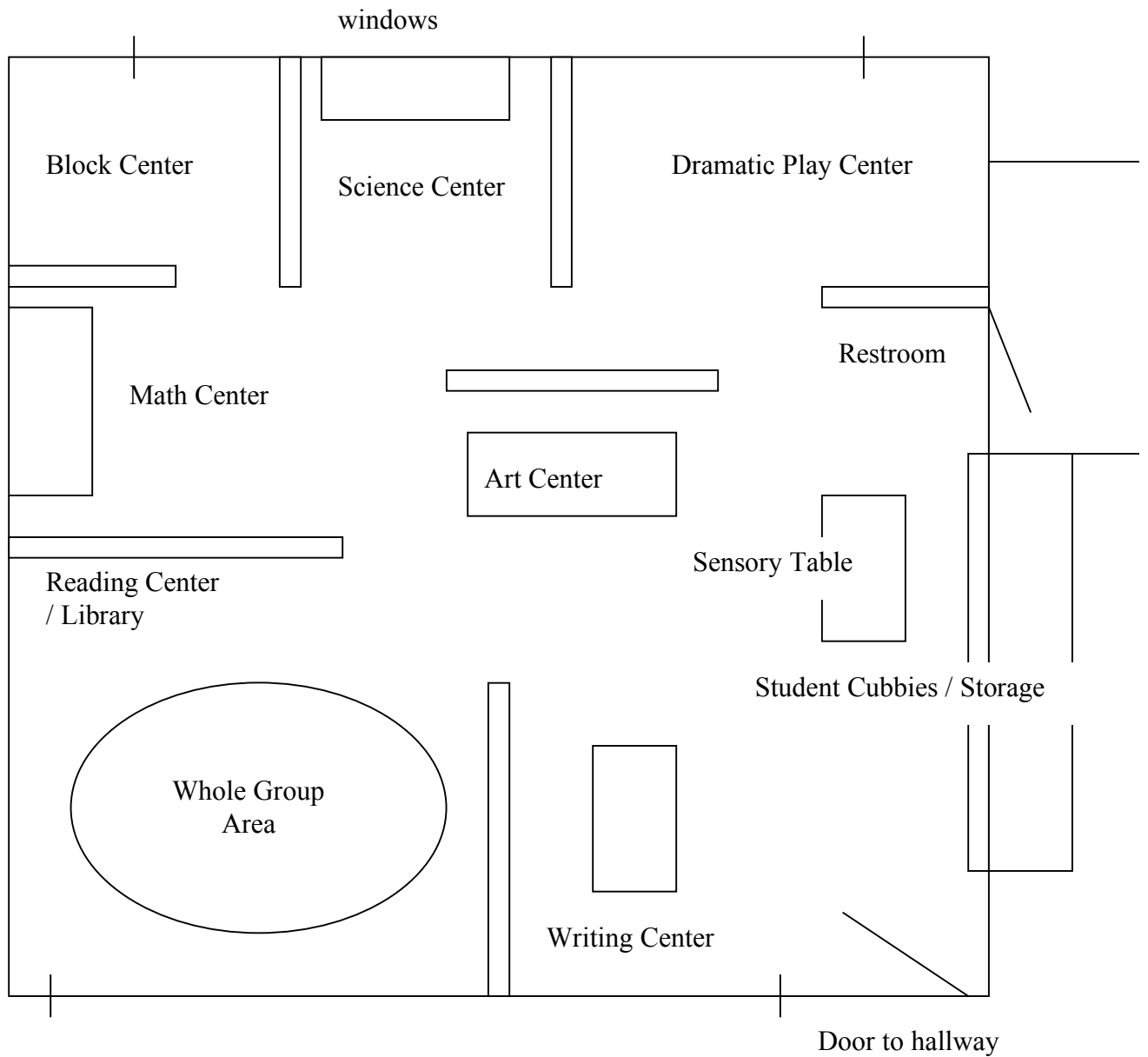
Example of a Pre-K Classroom Environment

This classroom layout supports writing in the following ways:

Defined writing center in a relatively quiet part of the room (far from blocks and dramatic play)

Many other defined centers where writing can be incorporated

Areas for whole group, small group (tables in art center, writing center, and math center), and individualized instruction (throughout the room)



Prompts and Questions

The following table includes prompts and questions to use with students to guide your interactions with them around their writing. This is not a checklist—use prompts carefully and with attention to the interaction that is taking place. The rationale for use explains the theoretical background to the prompt in broad terms and also provides reminders for assessment data that may be taken in the form of anecdotal notes or video/audio recording.

Prompt/Question	Rationale for Use
Tell me about your picture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opens the door for conversation • No judgment on the teacher's part • Child able to respond at his/her own level
I notice....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables teacher to talk about aspects of writing • Allows teacher to make connections to previous conversations, lessons, or experiences • Assessment data- level, progress of student
Tell me more about...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompts child to be more descriptive • Assessment data- allows teacher to gain greater insight into an aspect of writing and the child's understanding
I can tell you are working hard on...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows teacher to make connections to previous conversations, lessons, or experiences • Specific praise and the connection to motivation for some students
How could you include writing in your picture/work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompts student to use writing • Allows teacher to make connections to previous conversations, lessons, or experiences • Assessment data- understanding of purpose of writing
How do you think you could write that?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses child as a capable writer • Allows teacher to make connections to previous conversations, lessons, or experiences • Assessment data- attitude toward writing
Let's work together to write...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiates scaffolding interaction • Shows child that the teacher is willing and able to help

Guidelines for Center Contents

Writing can be incorporated into children's play in every center in your classroom. What follows is a list of examples of materials that would be appropriate to include in the center. Note that these lists are to prompt thinking and are not intended to be exhaustive. In addition, some novel materials may be rotated to maintain interest and according to other curricular themes and units (such as word cards relating to a given theme), but basic writing materials (paper and pencil) should always be available in each center. In addition to the lists, considerations for each center and how to include writing are listed.

Writing Center

Materials to Include:

- A wide variety of paper- plain, lined, colored, white, interesting shapes, index cards, etc.
- A wide variety of writing utensils- pencils, markers, alphabet stamps, colored pencils, crayons, pens/pencils that are interesting (colors, themes, glitter, etc.)
- Chalk and chalkboards
- Dry-erase markers and dry-erase boards
- Examples of children's work
- Envelopes
- Word cards (such as children's names, words related to theme) with pictures
- Small notebooks
- Book binding materials- stapler, hole punch, yarn, tape

Considerations:

- Are materials organized in such a way that children can easily find what they are looking for?
- Is the space designed so several children can work together at once?
- Is the space designed that an adult can sit comfortably and engage in the center with one or more children?

Possible prompts:

- Why don't you work with (student's name) to figure this out?
- We talked about writing letters in whole group today. Would you like to write a letter to someone?
- Why would it be important to write...

Reading Center / Library

Materials to Include:

- Paper and pencils
- Clipboards
- Class-made or individually made student books
- Books that include writing
- Books with a variety of formats and content

Considerations:

- How will I teach students how to use writing materials in the book center?
- How will I ensure students will not write in books?

Possible prompts:

- I notice in that book you are reading that the character writes a letter. Would you like to write a letter to someone?
- There are lots of interesting words in that book. You might want to use the paper, pencil, and clipboard to write some of them down.
- I see that you are really interested in that book. Would you like to write your own version of that story?

Science Center

Materials to Include:

- Paper and pencils
- Clipboard
- Data collection sheets
- Student made work
- Recipes
- Writing pertaining to the care of class pet(s) or plants

Considerations:

- How will I teach students to use writing in the science center?

Possible prompts:

- Our plant looks taller today! How can we document that to be sure?
- We will have a substitute teacher tomorrow. How can we make sure she knows how to take care of (class pet). Let's work together to write a list of what (class pet) needs.
- I took these photos of you looking at the leaves. Let's make them into a book with writing about what you noticed.

Sensory Table

Materials to Include:

- Sand
- Dowels
- Small foam letters
- Shaving cream

Considerations:

- How will I teach students to use writing in the sensory table?
- How can I document student use of writing in the sensory table?
- Does the sensory table have enough space for more than one child to work together?

Possible prompt:

- I can write in the sand! Can you do it too?

Block Center

Materials to Include:

- Paper and pencils
- Clipboard
- Examples of student work

Considerations:

- How can I teach students to use writing in the block center?

Possible prompts:

- I notice you made a road! There are some writing materials if you'd like to make signs for it.
- Let's work together to make a map of your city with the building names.

Math Center

Materials to Include:

- Paper and pencils
- Clipboards
- Examples of student work

Considerations:

- How can I teach students to use writing in the math center?

Possible prompts:

- How can we make that into a story problem? Let's write it down.
- I notice you made up your own game. Let's write the rules down so someone else can play it too.

Dramatic Play Center

Materials to Include:

Home living theme:

- Appointment book
- Paper and pencils
- Calendar
- Sticky notes
- Paper for placecards

Doctor / veterinarian theme

- Appointment book
- Prescription pad
- Word games (for waiting area)
- Address book

Grocery store theme

- Paper and pencils for lists
- Chalk board and chalk
- Plain paper for coupons, child-created “store cards”
- Plain newsprint and magazines to create sales advertisements
- Large paper for aisle and store signs
- Sticky notes for nametags
- Comment cards

Post Office theme

- Paper and pencils
- Blank cards and envelopes
- Sticky notes for nametags
- Plain paper for maps and route directions
- Stickers (to use as stamps)
- Stamp pads and stamps (to use as postmarks)

Restaurant Theme

- Pad of paper for orders
- Large paper for menus
- Sign paper
- Receipt paper

Considerations:

- Is the dramatic play area set up so several children can play at once?
- Are writing materials included in ways that are natural to the theme?
- Will students have experience with the themes and ways writing are used or will modeling be necessary?

Possible prompts:

- Remember to write that down...
- How will someone know what that is? Let's make a sign.
- What kinds of writing would the (doctor, waiter, etc.) need to do to do their job?

Art Center

Materials to Include:

- Paper and pencils
- Paint and paintbrushes
- Stamps (including letters)
- Index cards for “gallery tags”
- Date stamp

Considerations:

- How can I encourage students to include writing in their artwork?

Possible prompts:

- Tell me about your picture. Would you like me to write it down for you?
- Remember to write your name on your artwork so we know whose it is when it is on display.
- Let’s write the date on your artwork. That way you can look back at it later on and know when you did it!
- Let’s write directions of how you made that.
- Your sculpture includes lots of materials! Let’s make a list so someone else can make one too.

Sample Lesson- *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type*

Objectives:

- Students will begin to understand that writing can be used to get things done.
- Students will participate in a joint writing lesson.
- Students will write their own letters.

Materials:

- Copy of a letter that includes a request from the writer (i.e. an email from a friend asking for help with something, a note from a parent asking for a meeting, etc.)
- Cronin, D. (2000). *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type*. Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers.
- Large chart paper
- Marker
- Envelopes
- Plain white paper
- Pencils

Procedures:

1. Invite students to the carpet. Tell students that you received a letter that includes a request. Explain your example letter and discuss how the writer used writing to request something.
2. Display the front cover of the book and tell students today you will be reading *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type*, a book where the animals write letters to Farmer Brown to request things they want and need.
3. Read the text, highlighting aspects of the text where writing is used.
4. Tell students that you will write a letter as a group asking someone for something that need to be fixed in the classroom or for something that we need. Elicit student suggestions.
5. Using the chart paper and marker, compose the letter. Elicit student assistance and explicitly talk about conventions of letter writing- the greeting, body, and closing.
6. Tell students they will have a chance to sign their name on the letter during center time so that the recipient will know who it is from and then you will send it to the recipient. Remind students that this letter was to get something done.
7. Before dismissing to centers, show students letter writing supplies that will be included in the writing center- envelopes, paper, etc. Tell students that these supplies will be in the writing center if they would like to write a letter to someone.
8. Dismiss students; leave letter out in a place where students can sign it during center time. Discuss with students why the letter was written and why they are signing it. Monitor and make sure every student has an opportunity to sign the letter.
9. Deliver or mail the letter to the recipient.

10. Discuss the response with the class at a later time.

Assessment:

- Did students volunteer responses during joint writing session?
- Did students attempt to write their own letters?

Supplemental Book and Lesson Chart

The lesson included previously is an example of how writing can be incorporated into story time, a joint writing activity, and then used to prompt students to use writing in their own free choice center time. What follows is information about other books that would be appropriate and conducive to discussion about writing. This is not meant to be an exhaustive or a sequential list—use books that fit with the rest of your curriculum and address misconceptions or gaps in your students’ knowledge.

Book Citation	Points of Discussion	Joint Writing	Center Time
Ahlberg, A. (2006). <i>The Jolly Postman</i> . New York: Little, Brown, and Company.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letters • using writing to convey a message 	write a friendly letter to another class	write a letter to a friend, stuffed animal, etc.
Freeman, D. (1964). <i>Dandelion</i> . New York: Puffin Books.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • invitations • store signs • magazine • name plate on the door 	write an invitation to a staff member to come for a special event	write invitations to family members to come for a special event
Hill, Mary (2003). <i>Signs at the Store</i> . New York: Children’s Press	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • signs • labels 	create a store sign for the dramatic play center	create aisle and product labels
James, S. (1996). <i>Dear Mr. Blueberry</i> . New York: Simon & Schuster Children’s Publishing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letters • acquiring information from others • writing as an enjoyable activity 	write a letter to another teacher	write for fun
Keats, E.J. (1968). <i>A Letter to Amy</i> . New York: Penguin Putnam Inc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letters • invitation • store sign 	create an invitation to an event	create invitations to an event
Lin, G. (1999). <i>The Ugly Vegetables</i> . Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plant labels • recipe 	write a recipe of a class-made food item	make labels for seeds/plant cups
Pak, S. (2001). <i>Dear Juno</i> . New York: Penguin Putnam Books for Young Readers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letters • address on envelope 	write letter and address envelope	write a note and use an envelope

Book Citation	Points of Discussion	Joint Writing	Center Time
Rylant, C. (2005). <i>If You'll Be My Valentine</i> . New York: HarperCollins Publishers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • writing to express sentiment 	create a class-made valentine for a staff member	create valentines
Wallace, N.E. (2000). <i>Apples, Apples, Apples</i> . New York: Winslow Press.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • signs • product labels • chart with types of apples • recipe • song 	create a chart	write family recipes
Wellington, M. (2001). New York: Dutton Children's Books.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • logos • product labels • road signs • closing time sign • recipe book 	create useful signs for the classroom	label items in the dramatic play center for a store theme

Assessment:

For all lessons, look to see if students are showing understanding of the purposes of writing. In addition, look for student progress and refinement of their writing skills.

Sample Letter to Families

Dear Families,

Welcome to pre-kindergarten! I am excited to get to know you and your students this year. We will talk about and explore many important concepts and ideas—I hope your child will both enjoy school and will grow in ways you cannot expect. My goal is to challenge your students every day and to make sure they have the skills and experiences that will make them love learning.

One major focus of our classroom will be writing. I strongly believe that your students should have lots of experiences with writing. As a result, we will do daily activities relating to writing and your students will have lots of opportunities to write at their own level. For some of your students, writing means that they make letter-like forms. For other students they may make marks that do not resemble letters but they look different than their drawings. No matter where your child is in his or her writing development, I anticipate them making extensive gains this year.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to include your child in the writing experiences you already do in your own home. When you are making your list for the grocery store, invite your child to help you. If you are writing a letter to a friend, provide the opportunity for your child to write a letter as well. No major changes are necessary—simply allowing your child to participate is important. I would also encourage you to not to worry or give too much attention to your child's spelling of words or the way they write letters—these are skills that will come with time. My goal in including writing in the classroom and encouraging you to do so at home is to see every child leave pre-kindergarten at the end of the year with strong motivation to write.

I will be sharing a great deal with you over the course of the school year about what we are doing in the classroom. You are always welcome to come to the classroom or call/email me with any questions you may have. Our door is always open and it will always have writing on it!

I look forward to seeing you soon,
Your Child's Pre-K Teacher

Follow-up letters might include:

Ways to incorporate writing into your daily routine

How to talk to your child about writing

Why is writing important?

What are some resources if you want to know more?

My child isn't interested in writing. What now?

Checklist for Writing Development

Child's Name-

Age-

Marking Period (Circle)

1

2

3

4

Date Completed-

Attitudes About Writing

_____ Eager to write

Evidence:

- Spontaneously uses writing in play (circle one)

Never

Rarely (1-2 times/wk)

Often (3+ times/wk)

Daily

- Uses writing in play with encouragement from an adult (circle one)

Never

Rarely (1-2 times/wk)

Often (3+ times/wk)

Daily

_____ Appears motivated by writing

Evidence:

Understandings About Writing

_____ Print Carries Meaning

Evidence:

_____ Writing can have many purposes

Evidence:

Writing Behaviors

_____ Drawing appears different from attempts at writing

_____ Dictates to adult

_____ Letter-like forms

_____ Directionality

_____ Able to write name legibly

_____ Recognizable letters in writing

_____ Copies words

_____ Writing shows some understanding of letter-sound relationships

_____ Spaces between words

_____ Written work includes complete phrases or ideas

(continued on next page)

Evidence collected (circle all applicable):

Anecdotal notes

Writing samples

Photographs

Videotapes/
Audiotapes

Notes about child's writing development:

Areas of strength:

Areas of relative weakness / teaching opportunities:

Next steps:

(Adapted from Baghban, M. (2007). Scribbles, labels, and stories: The role of drawing in the development of writing. *Young Children*, 62 (1), 20-26 and Strickland, D.S. & Schickedanz, J.A. (2004). *Learning about print in preschool: Working with letters, words, and beginning links with phonemic awareness*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.)

Reference List

Baghban, M. (2007). Scribbles, labels, and stories: The role of drawing in the development of writing. *Young Children, 62 (1)*, 20-26.

Strickland, D.S. & Schickedanz, J.A. (2004). *Learning about print in preschool: Working with letters, words, and beginning links with phonemic awareness*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Analysis of Project

The curriculum materials designed are meant to be an introductory outline for writing instruction in pre-kindergarten classrooms. They are meant to fit in with any unit or theme and include information about the physical environment as well as instruction. The unit was designed with current research and practical literature in mind.

An example of a pre-kindergarten classroom schedule that supports writing instruction was included because classroom routines are important in early childhood classrooms. The schedule is important to consider in terms of writing instruction because current literature suggests children need multiple times of the day and blocks of extended time to engage in writing. The schedule also allows for opportunities for the teacher to pull together small groups if remediation, extension, or simply a different concept is appropriate for a small group but not necessarily the whole class. Three short whole group times are included in the schedule; this decision was made in the model schedule because it is most appropriate for young children. Pre-kindergarten children will likely not be engaged in whole group situations for long periods of time. The schedule includes more time for center time than any other component—this decision was very purposeful. In general, center time is appropriate for pre-kindergarten because it allows children to make choices and the teacher is able to work with students in one-on-one or small group situations. Because children are able to make choices, they are likely to be highly engaged, as long as the materials are interesting, of high instructional quality, and are rotated to maintain interest. In terms of writing, prolonged center time allows students to work on writing for an extended period of time. In addition, there is adequate time for students to work together, alone, and with a teacher all in a given center time period. This variety allows children to participate deeply in multiple activities and enables true learning to take place.

The physical layout of a pre-kindergarten classroom is important to consider as well; it is for this reason an example pre-kindergarten classroom environment was included in the curriculum. The layout shown includes defined centers, an area for whole group instruction, and tables that would be appropriate for small group interactions. All are necessary for writing instruction and experiences in addition to learning in other content areas. In addition, the centers include enough space for multiple children and an adult to work together. This is critical, especially during center time, when the literature in writing suggests children should have opportunities to work with their peers as well as have an opportunity to work with an adult expert. In addition, the classroom environment example includes a designated writing center that is far from some of the typically noisy and active centers to allow students to concentrate and better be able to discuss what they are working on.

The literature suggests that the social environment is a key aspect of writing instruction. Teachers who are sensitive, inquisitive, and supportive of children's writing efforts are viewed to be the most successful in terms of children's writing progress. The prompts and questions are included in the curriculum to give teachers ideas about the kinds of things they can say to prompt students to use writing, to talk about it, and to understand it more deeply. It is important for teachers to engage children in conversation about their writing; such prompts help those interactions to be productive for both the child and the teacher.

Because center time is such an important part of the pre-kindergarten classroom, both in terms of time and in instructional possibilities, the guidelines for center contents were included in the curriculum. While many pre-kindergarten classrooms do include writing centers, fewer contain materials to support writing throughout the room. While some centers are more conducive to writing (such as the dramatic play center), all centers can include materials that can

be useful for writing. The lists included are not exhaustive; rather, they are meant to prompt teachers into thinking about all of the materials that can be included. These materials are generally not hard to find or expensive—the goal is to include writing in natural, interesting ways in every part of the classroom. In addition to examples of materials that can be incorporated into every center, considerations and prompts are included as well. These are meant to initiate reflection and be conversation starters for teachers.

Current literature suggests that children can benefit from some whole group instruction relating to reading in addition to the types of interactions that typically occur during center time. The lesson that is included in the curriculum is built around using children's literature as the impetus for discussion and use of writing. *Click, Clack, Moo* by Doreen Cronin was chosen because it is fun, colorful, easily understood, and includes writing as an important component. The purpose of the lesson was for children to begin to understand that writing can be used to get things done—in the case of the text, to get their needs and wants (electric blankets, a diving board, etc.) satisfied. The teacher introduces the purpose at the beginning of the lesson and explicitly talks about writing when it is used in the text. Following the reading of the story, the class engages in a shared or joint writing activity. This activity, discussed in the literature, is when the teacher does the writing but elicits student responses throughout. Over time, more responsibility is shifted to the children, but the teacher always provides information and modeling to enhance student understanding about writing and concepts about print. The lesson concludes with a suggestion for children to use the skills discussed and practiced in whole group during their free choice time. This follow-up is extremely important—students will likely be motivated because of their interest in the story as well as their natural interest in exploring writing.

Rather than creating a large number of lessons that follow a similar format to that described in the *Click, Clack, Moo* lesson, a chart was designed. The chart includes ten books that are appropriate for pre-kindergarten and include explicit uses of writing. The writing in these texts are important to the text in general and provide natural links to students' own lives and experiences. Because this writing curriculum is not meant to stand alone the books are not listed in any particular order, nor is there the expectation that every teacher read every book. Instead, teachers use the list as a resource to find materials and design lessons that fit with their given unit or theme or that will address concepts or skills relating to writing that their class needs more practice with.

Many authors in the field cite the importance of home-school connections, particularly at the early childhood level. Many pre-kindergarten teachers send weekly letters or newsletters home to families to provide information about what is occurring in the classroom. The sample letter to families includes information is designed to be a letter that would be sent at the beginning of the school year. It highlights writing in the classroom and also provides basic information about how families can support their child's writing development at home as well. In addition, prompts for future letters are included in the curriculum to remind teachers that writing should be a focus throughout the year, including in their correspondence with families.

In terms of assessment, it is agreed in the field that writing assessment should be anecdotal in nature and rely on teacher observations and analysis of student work. The curriculum includes a checklist that was adapted in part from materials created by Baghban (2007) and Stickland and Schickedanz (2004). The checklist includes information about the child's attitudes about writing, which are significant to note because motivation relating to writing is a goal of the curriculum. The checklist also includes information pertaining to the

child's understanding of writing, developing, and writing behaviors. While these lists are not exhaustive and certainly could be more detailed, they are realistic and adequate for teachers to complete. The checklist includes prompts for evidence, an important thing to note. Without evidence, the assessment materials are simply checklists that have no connection to children's understandings and uses of writing. The second page of the checklist prompts the teacher to synthesize the evidence collected and make notes about the child's strengths and areas that should be addressed in future instruction. The checklist is designed to prompt teachers to thinking about ways to differentiate instruction to best meet the needs of individual students as well as to monitor student progress and attitudes.

The curriculum materials created align with the views expressed in current literature in the field of early childhood writing. The curriculum is purposefully open so that it can be incorporated with the other literacy, math, science, and/or social studies curricula classrooms may already have in place. The components of the curriculum are designed not to tell teachers exactly what to do; rather, they are designed to prompt them to think about their practice and how to best support children's writing development through the inclusion of examples, guidelines, and prompts. Writing is an important area of interest at the pre-kindergarten level and this curriculum is intended to support the kind of instruction, environments, and interactions that will help every child to progress in their writing skills and to maintain and extend their interest in writing.