

What's Next for this Beginning Writer?

Revision

Mini-lessons that take writing from scribbles to script

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with

ULLA PETERSEN

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A Foundation for Writing Instruction

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A Foundation for Writing Instruction

We know that teachers are practical people with little time on their hands and that they may be tempted to jump right into the lessons and skip this introductory section of the book. To do so would miss the real meat and intention of *What's Next for this Beginning Writer?*. When implemented, the philosophical stance and the daily routines that support the Writing Workshop outlined here, along with the lessons, will reap far greater results for your young writers than would the lessons alone.

For the purposes of this book, any graphic representation that conveys meaning is writing, whether it is a picture that the child can describe or scribbles on the page that the child translates into a story. When a child scribbles and then holds up the masterpiece, telling us what it "says," this child is writing.

Our work with young writers led us to share our understandings as mentors with some of the more than 700 teachers in The Early Literacy Project in Vancouver. Our mentoring took us into classrooms to observe, consult, and conduct demonstration lessons for writers. We met with teachers for team meetings at the school, professional development workshops, and mass assessments of writing across the school district. We came to understand that many teachers were unsatisfied with their current practices, but didn't know how to make successful changes. Over and over, we heard teachers express the same questions and concerns:

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7. How do I encourage students to write?
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11. How do I continue to grow as a writing teacher?
12. What's next for this beginning writer?

Addressing those questions with practical, step-by-step instructions for working with young writers is the focus of this book. In this part of the book, we respond to these twelve questions with concrete suggestions for creating the tone and teaching in Writing Workshop; the parts that follow address the questions through craft lessons 1 to 23.

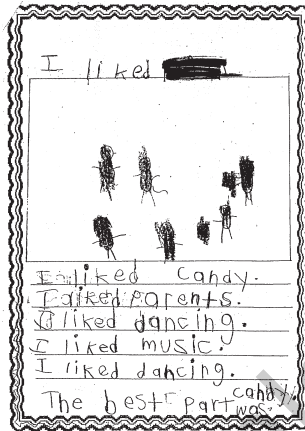
In each craft lesson for Writing Workshop, we present a sample on a continuum of writing development. We analyze each sample and describe what the child knows. We offer language to affirm the child's efforts and make suggestions for moving the child to the next step of writing development in a one-on-one conference. Since a number of students in a class typically present similar characteristics and needs as learners at the same time, the page after each lesson-opening student sample outlines a whole-class or small-group lesson in step-by-step detail. These group lessons provide the language, the examples, and the concepts of writing to all children despite their developmental differences. They may need reteaching and review, as well as reinforcement in conference sessions during Writing Workshop.

What's Next for This Beginning Writer? is based on the belief that all children are writers. In our view, the teacher works actively alongside the child to move the writing to higher levels of competency. This book shows the teacher what to notice about a child's writing and how to meet each child at an appropriate developmental level and provide the nudge towards the next level. It provides insight into the creation of a supportive Writing Workshop, knowledge of the developmental stages of young writers, and recommendations for moving the writing towards greater competency, making teachers of Kindergarten and Grade 1

students well-equipped to teach writing. *What's Next for This Beginning Writer?* will be pebbles in the moonlight as you find your way with writing instruction.

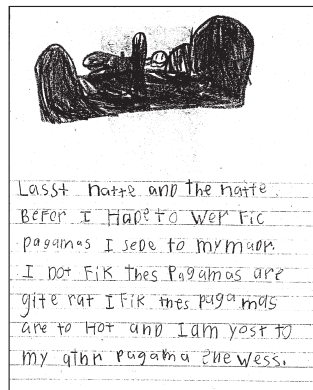
1. On what beliefs should I base my teaching of writing?

Let us explore this question by looking at three fictional teachers who represent different positions on a continuum of the right way to teach writing. Their beliefs, all of which might be found in the same school, are reflected in the student samples from their classes and in their comments about writing.



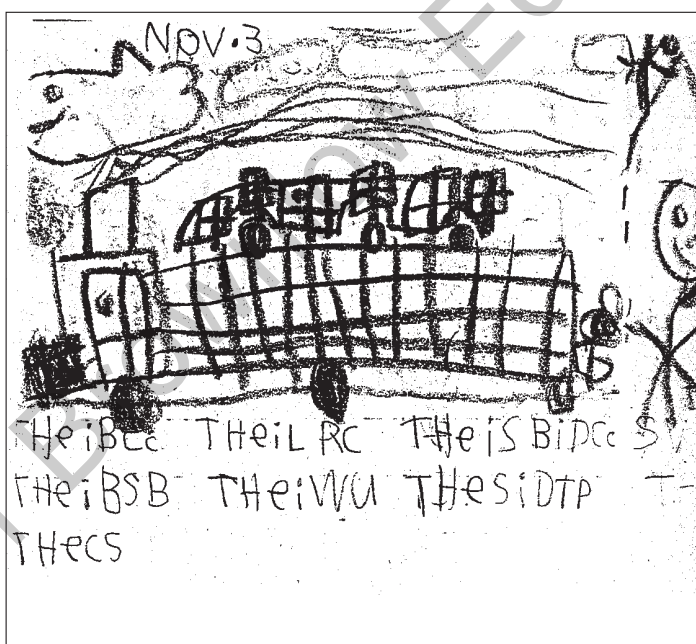
Grade 1, November: The whole class has copied this writing from the board. The first teacher, Glenda, reports, "I develop the story with the students on the chalkboard and then they copy it correctly. They are not ready to come up with their own ideas for stories and I don't agree with invented spelling. We have a spelling list that students take home on Monday and spell for a test on Friday. Many children get the words right on the tests, but they don't apply them correctly in writing, so I don't let them write. The parents have a fit if the work is not corrected and I feel uncomfortable with invented spelling, so when they do write, I correct all the spelling errors. We spend 30 minutes each day on phonics worksheets, but their phonics skills are still very weak. These students are not ready to write—they're still struggling with the reading!"

Last night and the night before I had to wear thick pajamas. I said to my mother, "I don't think these pajamas are quite right. I think these pajamas are too hot and I am used to my other pajamas anyways."



Grade 1, November: Leah wrote the story at the bottom of page 9 on her own. The second teacher, Tara, says, “It is essential to support the child in her belief in herself as a writer. For this reason, I encourage the students to see story events in their lives. I encourage the students to express their thoughts and creativity fearlessly, inventing the words they can say and not restricting their writing to words they can spell. I know that invented spelling lasts for just a short time. It is my role to assess what the child knows, what his opinion of himself as a writer is, and to decide what and when to teach. I believe my role is to advance the child’s ability to write with explicit teaching in whole-class sessions, small groups, and one-to-one conferences. I teach phonic skills and spelling too, and I ask students to apply those lessons in authentic writing tasks. When children have to deconstruct the language into discrete sounds and represent those sounds with letters, that, to me, is phonics in action! I use partner-talking as a bridge to understanding. My students’ writing gives me a window into their reading ability, too. If I see what they can write, then I know a lot about what they can read. I get a few questions from parents, but when I explain the stages of writing development to them and they see their child’s progress, they are always supportive.”

*There is a bus coming. There are cars.
There is a big car. The bus is big. They
are way up. They stopped. The cars.*



Grade 1, November: Josh wrote this story on his own. The third teacher, Jean, says, “We must accept what the child can do. We must trust that children will develop in their own way and in their own time. They need this time to experiment with writing. They are immersed in a print-rich environment with lots of literacy experiences to enjoy. I do not do any explicit teaching of skills for writing. I prefer to fill the room with correct models of writing and to let the children learn in the context of literacy-rich experiences. We must trust that they will learn and apply the skills as they are developmentally ready.”

From these teachers’ comments, we note the following assumptions:

Assumptions About Writing Instruction		
Glenda	Tara	Jean
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing is the end product of a collection of discrete skills. • It is the teacher's role to ensure that students know how to write with correct conventions before they begin to write. • Children must learn to read before they can write. • The teacher must control the writing and the writer. • Students raise their hands to respond one at a time during the writing lesson. • Parents will not understand the developmental nature of children's writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing is learned in the act of writing with the support of a knowledgeable teacher. • It is the teacher's role to accept the child's approximations and to instruct the child ever forward to correctness. • Reading and writing are complementary activities and begin at the same time. • Through demonstration and guided practice, the teacher leads the child to control over writing strategies. • Student independence is further scaffolded with oral sharing in partners throughout the Workshop. <i>All</i> children respond to <i>all</i> questions. • Informed parents are supportive of the developmental process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing is learned in a rich environment as the child is developmentally ready. • It is the teacher's role to accept the child's approximations and to trust that they will develop over time. • Children will read when they are ready. Usually they do not really learn to read until Grade 2. • The child controls all aspects of the writing. • Formal lessons with teacher demonstration and opportunities for structured talk are incidental. • Parents need to be patient. Children will learn!

The chart represents widely divergent perspectives on writing instruction.

Educators who think like Glenda believe that instruction comes first. In this view, the child's approximations of writing are chaotic and make the teacher anxious. Glenda doubts that children can learn in this way and she doubts her ability to teach her way out of disorder. When she structures the lesson so children's writing is conventionally accurate, she feels successful.

Jean, in contrast, represents the belief that children do not need explicit instruction. In Jean's view, if children are immersed in a literacy-rich environment with an encouraging teacher, the writing will develop as children mature. Jean sees that her role is to establish the environment, to nurture, to wait, and to watch.

Tara's perspective matches our own. Our understanding is shaped by years of teaching in primary and intermediate classrooms, meeting beginning writers at many grade levels, reading, reflecting, and redefining our writing practices over decades.

We believe that writing is learned in the act of writing with the support of a knowledgeable teacher. We believe that the right teaching makes a difference. Although children do need a rich literacy environment and a writing climate that nurtures risk-taking, they also need instruction. The teacher's art is to recognize what the child can do, to understand what the next learning step would be, and to provide appropriate instruction. Effective writing teachers work alongside the child in the Learning Zone (see page 20), providing just the right amount of instruction at just the right time—not too much or the writer will be overwhelmed; not too little or the writer will not progress.