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# SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S WRITING IN EARLY GRADES

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**Vignette 1**

**Figure 1.** Children engrossed in writing and drawing at Adarshila Learning Centre, Sakad, Madhya Pradesh.

In a second-grade language classroom in a tribal village of Madhya Pradesh, a teacher sits in a circle with her students, talking about the wedding they attended the day before. Weddings are community affairs in the village — everyone is invited. Each time there is a wedding in the village, you see most children from this residential school running down the hillock for the celebrations. No one is turned away. Every one dances for hours to the beat of drums, men and women often in intersecting circles. Towards the end, food is served to guests sitting on the ground in a line. This is usually either rice and mutton curry, or rice and dal, depending on what the family can afford. The children come back to school after a hearty meal.

As various details surface during the conversation – the food, the songs — the teacher asks the children if they would like to write about their experiences. She sets out sheets, boxes of pencils, colours and other stationery in the centre. “Please put the date and your name on top of the sheet,” she instructs.

Every one writes, including the teacher. After a while, the teacher walks around the class. The children are immersed in the writing exercise, each in their own way. Some are drawing and colouring their experiences in a leisurely manner, some others are scribbling, while still others are striking a balance between drawing and description.

The teacher talks to each child about their writing. She comments, questions, offers suggestions.

*I see you haven't titled your piece. What would you like to name it?*

*Who are these people in your drawing?*

*I see you want to write the word 'wedding'. Would you like to check how it's spelt on the word wall?*

*Do you want to give more details of what you did at the wedding, like what you wore or ate?*

When the children finish writing, they meet the teacher again, one at a time, to show her what they have written. Some children narrate what they have drawn. Acting as a scribe, she writes this down at the bottom of their sheet.

Think about how you were taught to write as a child. Can you relate this vignette to your experiences of learning to write? Perhaps not; such instances of teaching-learning are very rare in Indian classrooms, where the emphasis in the early grades is on learning to write the letters or *aksharas* and words.

Keeping the focus on learning the *aksharas* and letters by rote can make it seem uninteresting and irrelevant to the young child who comes with a rich repertoire of oral language(s) and experiences. How can we help children see that writing can be a useful and interesting way to express themselves and to communicate ideas to others? Is it necessary to wait until the child has mastered all the *aksharas*, has learned to write words, then sentences and paragraphs before they begin writing meaningfully? We argue that it is not.

Children should be encouraged to write for expression and communication right from the start. We know from work in the field of emergent literacy that children enter the world of writing by interweaving drawing, talk, and “invented” (approximate) spellings in an attempt to communicate<sup>1</sup>. Even though they may not be able to write perfectly like adults or older children can, they express a variety of ideas through the written medium. Teachers can provide safe, supportive environments for young learners to experiment with writing for communication, rather than expecting them to master correct spelling and handwriting first.

If we wish to foster in children an interest in writing for a variety of purposes, what key principles should guide our instruction? To write meaningfully, children need to be immersed in a rich learning environment that gives them ample opportunity for meaningful writing. This includes a print rich environment, exposure to literature, engaging classroom conversations, opportunities to draw, and opportunities to review and discuss each other’s work.

Part A of this brief elaborates on these principles. Based on these principles, Part B offers suggestions teachers could use in their classrooms.<sup>2</sup>

As demonstrated in the vignette, if we wish to help children write meaningfully, it’s important to connect their writing to their lived experiences. When we invite children to express and share their thoughts and experiences, they feel encouraged to participate in the process.

### **Part A: Key Principles for Teaching Writing**

In this section, we describe three key principles for teaching young children writing.

1. Establish relevance of writing
2. Permit children to integrate writing with talking, drawing, reading and play
3. Provide guidance.

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<sup>1</sup> To read more on emergent writing, refer to Subramaniam, S., & S, Sajitha.(2018, April 23). *Children’s Writing: How does it Emerge and Why is this Significant?* Retrieved: <http://eli.tiss.edu/childrens-writing-how-does-it-emerge-and-why-is-this-significant/>

<sup>2</sup> To read more on developing children’s writing, readers can consult ELI blog pieces within this [theme](#).

**Principle 1: Establish Relevance for Writing**

Many children in our country are first-generation literates. They do not grow up seeing their parents, siblings or other relatives around them writing. When they come to school, they are asked to copy-write *aksharas*, then words and sentences over and over again.

Many words young children are taught are not meaningful or interesting to them. They may be taught to write the word *jal* (जल, water) over and over again, to practise the aksharas “j” and “l”. They may not even know what *jal* means because the word they use for water may be *paani* (पानी, water). Such meaningless writing may take up the first several years of their school lives. And so they may lose interest in reading and writing because they don’t understand its relevance in their lives.

A key job of educators is to avoid this and help children experience early reading and writing experiences as meaningful and relevant to their lives. Part B will explore concrete ideas for building relevance. The broad principle is that teachers should help children see that what they think, feel, observe, experience and read can all be shared with others through talk and through writing.

Writing is an important way by which we can record our thoughts and communicate with others. Teachers can model this idea explicitly for young writers, and can discuss with the children the possibilities and consequences that writing holds for their own lives (Purcell-Gates, 1997).

In the vignette presented earlier, the teacher writes with the children, demonstrating that writing is meaningful and relevant to her life. On other days, this teacher reads out her writing to students, creating a sense of relevance and community.

**Principle 2: Permit Children to Integrate Writing with Talking, Drawing, Reading and Play**

Adults might view writing as different from reading; reading as different from talk; and all of these as different from play. But young children don’t experience or compartmentalise the word like we do. For them, all of these aspects of their life are interrelated categories of

experience. When asked to write a story, a child may pick up a toy, and start telling his friend a story using actions with the toy; the friend may contradict him and insert his own story into it; and they may stop and draw a part of what they have imagined together.

A teacher might not think of this as writing a story. But children given chances to begin writing by combining all these ways of expressing themselves benefit for many reasons. First, they see the activity as meaningful and interesting. Second, while using such routes to writing, their ideas get fleshed out, and they are able to imagine better. Third, by not focusing on correct spelling and handwriting, they are able to express what they wish to without fear. Fourth, they are able to use their knowledge of oral language and drawing to enter into the world of writing, which they may not have mastered yet.

In the vignette presented at the beginning, we see that children are at ease when they pick up the colours and engage in drawing as they talk to their peers about their writing. This indicates that they haven't separated talk, art and writing into different categories yet, but see them as flowing into each other.

We have to see writing as woven into a larger framework of learning that makes the best use of this pool of expressive skills children already possess. We explore these ideas in this section.

**Talk and writing:** A child grows up surrounded by a culture of talk. She is accustomed to freely talking at home, in the playground, market place and other physical spaces. Many times, children can be found talking to themselves in the middle of a game. Talk is an important way by which the child understands and communicates with others about the world around her. Talk can be used in many ways to support young children's writing.

- The class might go on a trip together, or read a book together, and spend time discussing it. Discussion is focused talk. It might help children put their ideas into writing later.
- While writing, children may talk to each other, or the teacher may confer with different children about their writing.

- Teachers can also provide opportunities for children to share and discuss their writing with the class.

Thus, talk helps children develop ideas they can use in their writing. Through talk, children can resolve their queries, receive and give feedback on each other's writing, share ideas. If teachers remain connected to their students through talk, they can identify experiences or topics that hold emotional importance for each student, and encourage them to write about these.

In the vignette presented earlier, the teacher engages children in talk about the wedding before she asks them to write. Talk helps children gather their thoughts about their experience, remember details and reflect on it collectively before they set out to write about it.

***Drawing and writing:*** A child's foray into the world of writing almost always starts with drawing. Even before she is given pencil and paper, she will draw in mud, on walls and every other surface around her.

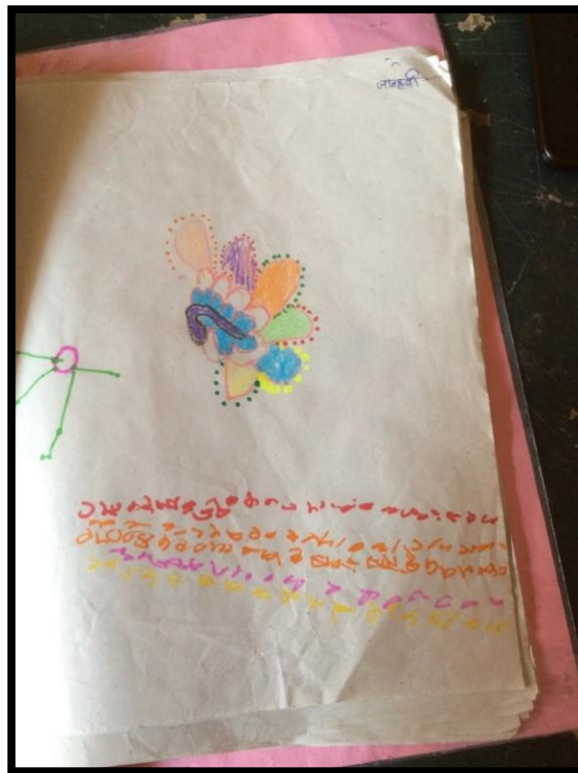
When we introduce children to writing, we don't need to pull them away from drawing because drawing is children's initial attempt at symbol making in the written form. From this will evolve attempts at making other kinds of symbols — letters, words, and so on. Therefore, during the initial years, we should give children ample opportunity to draw, or mix drawing with writing.

In the vignette presented earlier, we see that as the children begin their exercise, the teacher leaves them not only with paper and pencil, but also with colours. Even though many children are writing, the teacher hasn't created demarcations between their writing and drawing. She allows for fluidity between the two.

As teachers, it's important for us to take an interest in children's drawings. We can engage them in conversation about what they have drawn, ask them questions, respond

encouragingly, appreciate their efforts. This helps build a relationship between the teachers and students, which is crucial for the child's learning.

Simultaneously, you can also introduce the child to the script. As children gain knowledge of the script, they start incorporating it into their drawings. For example, in Figure 2, we see the child has complemented her drawing with letter-like shapes. It gives the impression of a written narrative alongside the drawing.

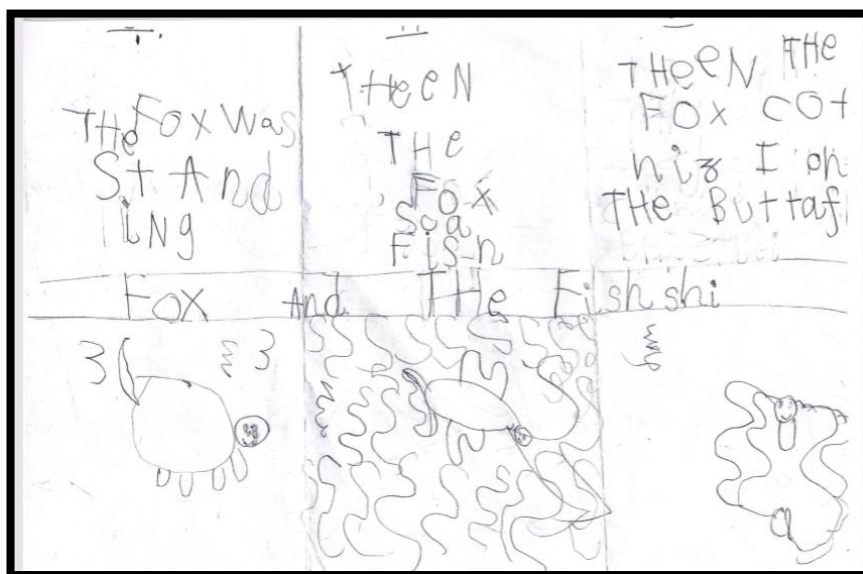


**Figure 2.** Letter-like forms accompany a child's drawing. Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan, Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, Phaltan, Maharashtra.

Over time, children's writing gradually becomes more conventional — but it does not happen overnight; it can take a few years. During these stages, teachers will see children experiment with spelling — creating or “inventing” spellings based on what they have learned thus far about letters and their sounds, as can be seen in Figure 3. Here, the child is trying to write a story about a fox who saw a fish (and was probably trying to catch it). Trying to find a way to distract the fox from chasing the fish, the child concludes, “Then the fox cot hiz I on the Buttaf” (Then the fox caught his eye on the butterfly). By getting the fox to look at the butterfly, the child created an opening for the fish to escape. In this writing, we see the child



mixing drawing and writing, combining invented and conventional spellings. The child also mixes upper and lower case letters in the middle of words.



**Figure 3.** Drawing with a mixture of invented and conventional spellings. Picture Courtesy: Shailaja Menon.

**Reading and writing:** Reading plays a crucial role in supporting and shaping writing. The processes of reading and writing flow into each other seamlessly and what we read often becomes a part of what we write. We learn the differences between various kinds of writing (e.g., note versus list, report versus story) through the texts we read. We bring this knowledge to our writing. Children learn from the print around them. This is one reason why a rich, meaningful print environment is a strong pillar of the early literacy framework.<sup>3</sup>

In the vignette, when the teacher asks the child to go find the word *wedding* on the word wall, she is creating a relationship between reading and writing for the child, using the print-rich environment around her.

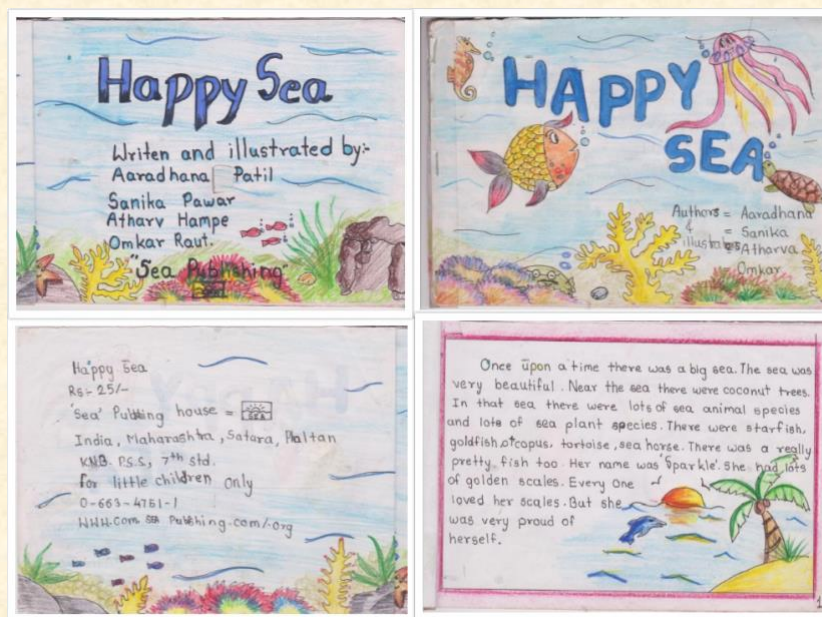
Reading literature aloud to children is one of the most significant ways of supporting children's writing. Children should be exposed to a variety of books, such as picture books,

<sup>3</sup> To learn more about print-rich environments, consult ELI's Practitioner Brief 8, [http://eli.tiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ELI\\_Practitioner\\_Brief\\_8\\_Print-rich-Environment-in-Classroom-1.pdf](http://eli.tiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ELI_Practitioner_Brief_8_Print-rich-Environment-in-Classroom-1.pdf)

poetry and non-fiction, right from the early days of school. A rich exposure to books helps build children's knowledge about different topics, places and cultures as well as of the many styles and techniques of writing for varied purposes. This knowledge serves as the bedrock of a child's writing.

Here are three examples of ways in which literature can be used to support writing.

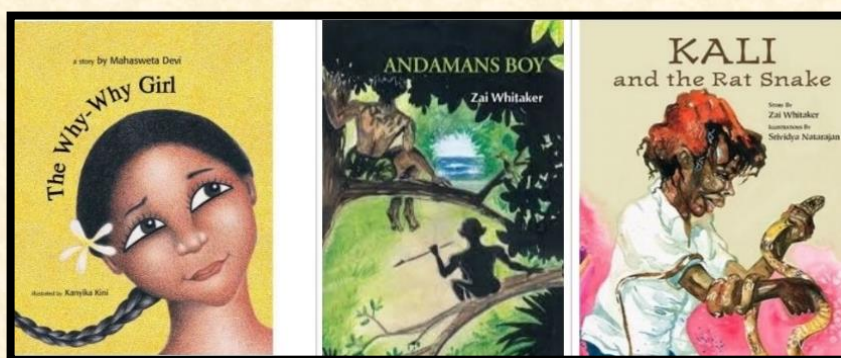
**1. Literature increases children's knowledge of language.** Exposure to good literature supports children's language learning in many ways, from expanding their vocabulary and comprehension to giving them increased confidence with grammar, organisation and structure of writing. Exposure to diverse sets of books also helps children understand the different kinds or genres of literature, such as poetry, prose, fiction and non-fiction. With exposure and appropriate guidance, children can begin introducing these genres into their own writing. They also learn conventions of writing, such as titling, giving credit, and structure.



**Figure 4.** A book created by children of Grade 7 reflects their growing knowledge of pictures books such as titling, crediting, introductions and design. Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan, Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, Phaltan, Maharashtra.

**2. Literature increases children's knowledge about the world.** Literature can be used to build students' knowledge about different content areas such as mathematics, science or social science. For example, to help urban children understand more

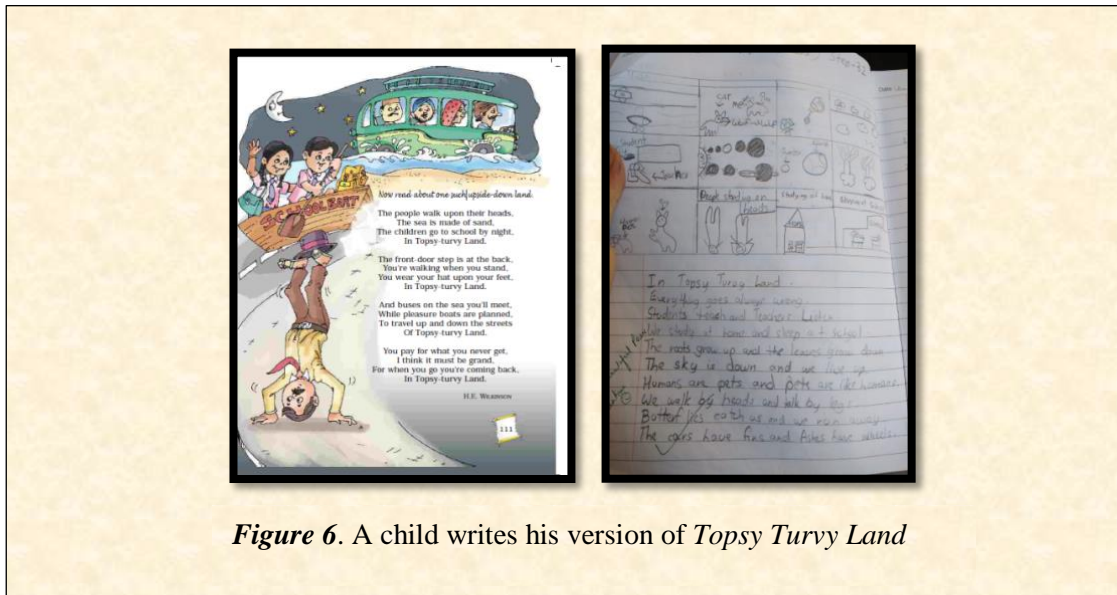
about *Adivasi* communities, which could otherwise be completely excluded from the purview of urban middle-class children's experiences, the facilitator could introduce them to books, such as *Andaman's Boy*, *Kali and the Rat Snake* and *The Why Why Girl*, which describe life in *Adivasi* communities. These books help children learn more about ways of living unknown to them, or known only through superficial and demeaning stereotypes. Exposure to these books and the conversations that follow put children in a much more informed position to write about *Adivasis*.



**Figure 5.** Example of books which can be used to teach children about life in some *Adivasi* communities.

3. Literature increases children's motivation to write about and share their experiences. Many young children may not have considered the possibility of writing about their experiences. Experiences written about in books may seem much more worthy of sharing than their own. Sharing a variety of books with young children, discussing them, and encouraging children to write responses to stories they read could inspire in them confidence and desire to share their experiences or write about their lives. What may have up to then seemed mundane and unworthy of sharing may suddenly take on the shape of a story.

This will, however, require tremendous effort and support from the teacher. The teacher needs to be aware of children's interests and experiences, and encourage them to share them. Teachers can also encourage children to write their versions of stories that they have read, as shown in Figure 6.



**Figure 6.** A child writes his version of *Topsy Turvy Land*

### **Principle 3: Provide Guidance for the Teaching of Writing**

The first two principles we have discussed are to establish relevance for writing, and to permit the child to mix and move between talking, playing, drawing, reading and writing.

The third principle states that we need to provide children with concrete guidance for writing well; we can't simply leave them with "free writing" time.

What does it mean to provide young writers with guidance? Traditionally, children who wrote well received good marks or comments on their writing, but children who were poor or average writers did not receive much guidance or feedback on how to improve their writing. Think of three children in your classroom. One has great ideas for writing, but never manages to put it down on paper in a way others can understand. As you read her work, you realise that she finds it difficult to organise her ideas. A second child has strong ideas and can organise them, but her spelling is so poor that it is very difficult to read what she has written. The third child lacks the vocabulary or words to express her ideas. Each of these children needs specific guidance in terms of their writing. One needs to be taught how to organise ideas. The second needs help with spellings. The third needs support with vocabulary acquisition.

In most Indian classrooms, when students write, the only feedback they get is on their spellings, handwriting and grammar. Rarely does a teacher attend to the other aspects of good

writing. Ruth Culham (2003) has identified six *traits* of writing that we need to guide children on.

**Ideas:** Adults can help children identify interesting or important ideas for their writing.

**Organisation:** The organisation of ideas in a piece of writing needs to be logical and coherent. You can ask children to create a flowchart of their ideas before they set out to write them.

**Voice:** Voice refers to conveying a feeling or mood clearly in the piece. For example, imagine a child trying to describe what happened when she fell down one day: *“I fell down from the ladder. Papa came to help me.”*

She could also write, *“Papa ran towards me, screaming, ‘Arre, baapre! Help! My baby is falling down!’”*

In the second version, the emotion of the moment is conveyed more clearly. Pieces with voice convey the emotion of the story, and the thoughts and emotions of the writer with clarity.

**Word choice:** Teach children the importance of using interesting and specific words to convey a thought accurately and engagingly. Encourage them to look for synonyms, phrases, idioms that help convey their point most convincingly. For example, if a child is using the word “happy” over and over again, you could ask her to try other words, such as joy, glee and delight, depending on the piece.

**Sentence fluency:** Many times, children use similar phrases to start all their sentences. For example, *“I brushed my teeth. I took a bath. I ate breakfast. Then I went to school.”* Bring their attention to the repetitive nature of the sentence structure. How could they say this differently and with better flow? For example, *“My day started as usual, with brushing my teeth and bathing. Then, after a breakfast of hot dosas with chutney and a glass of milk, I left for school.”* In the second version, the writing sounds more fluent and natural.

**Conventions:** We must, of course, teach children to write with good spelling, grammar and a neat handwriting. We cannot expect very young children to write with a strong mastery over conventions in the early years, especially if we want them to focus on writing to express and communicate their thoughts and feelings. But we can definitely teach some aspects of convention at a time.

At an early point in their writing, we may focus on getting them to hear the initial sounds of the words they wish to write, and putting the correct letter or *akshara* down. At a later point, we may expect simple words to be spelled correctly, gradually moving on to more and more complex words. We may also expect them to attend to punctuation and grammar over time. But this should happen side-by-side with teaching other aspects of writing, and will take several years to master.

Good writing takes time and requires multiple rounds of work. Even young children can be helped to understand the writing process, or writing cycle. This includes:

**Pre-writing:** Help children brainstorm or discuss idea for writing with peers or teachers; support them in making concept maps, and so on.

**Drafting:** Once an idea has been identified and thought through, children can write their first draft. The first draft is not the last, and there is always scope for improvement. Rewriting first drafts after comments and feedback is a skill that should be taught early.

**Revising:** Children can get feedback on their initial drafts from the teacher and their peers. There needs to be an environment of respect and support for children to share their drafts with each other. After receiving feedback ask them to revise drafts.

**Editing:** Editing involves the process of making corrections for grammar, spelling and punctuation. Typically, Indian classrooms focus only on editing. By keeping this aspect separate, children get a chance to focus on other aspects of writing.

**Sharing:** Children begin sharing ideas for their writing right from the brainstorming stage. They share their first drafts, to receive feedback. They may again share revised drafts during the editing process, when peers can be encouraged to edit together. Once the final drafts are ready, children can share these to publish (make public) their writing.

How can children publish in a classroom? You could organise a sharing time when children read out completed pieces to each other. Children could put up their writing on the class bulletin board. You could help them create a class book with their best pieces of writing in it. There are many ways to encourage children to share their writing, both with individuals within as well as outside their classroom.

This process is called the writing cycle because children can cycle back-and-forth through phases. It does not need to happen one after the other. For example, a child may feel her writing is not going well during drafting, and may go back to brainstorming. Or a child may receive feedback during drafting and start revising immediately. Children should be given the flexibility of cycling in and out of phases. Not all pieces a child begins need to be re-drafted and published — only ones that the child really cares about.

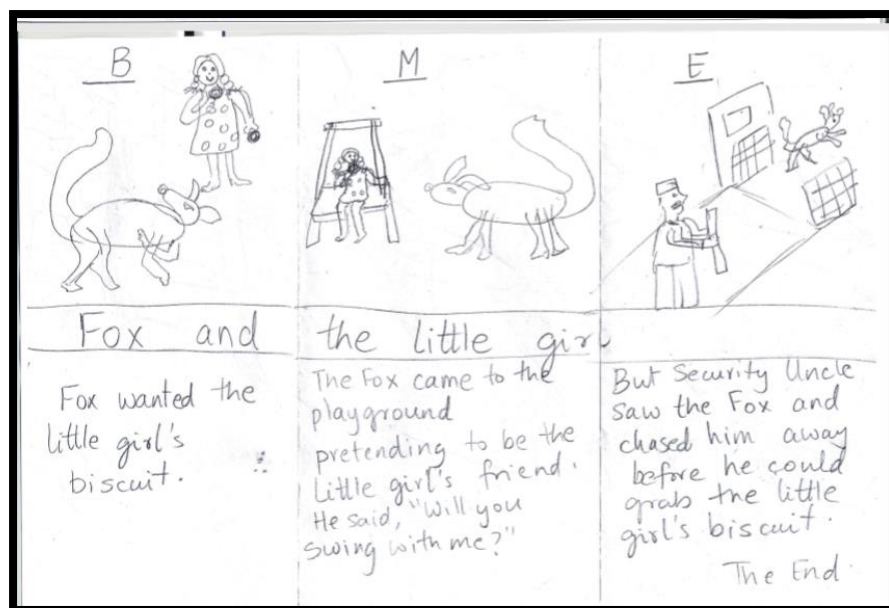
When children’s writing is put up for sharing, or when they read out their writings for their peers, the feedback they receive is very important — when their friends say, “We could not understand what you are trying to say here,” or “You are starting all your sentences with ‘after this’ (*tar por, tar por* – in Bengali) – this sounds funny.” (Chatterji, 2019).

## Part B: Supporting Writing in Classrooms

### 1. Getting Emergent Writers Familiar and Comfortable with Writing

- a. **Maintain a writing corner:** Have a writing corner where children can access pencils, papers and colours. If the classroom is small, it is not important to have one stable location for this. A writing corner can be any place where the teacher brings the children together and gives them paper, pencils, colours and stamps, to draw, stamp, or write.
- b. **Dictated stories:** Let children scribble if they wish to, or draw a picture. Once they are done, ask them what they have written. Write down what they say, and display these dictated writings with their drawings in class. This helps the child understand that their writing is valued and that what they write can be read by others.

In Figure 7, a parent has written down a story her daughter dictated to her, and has helped her illustrate it. In general, children should be encouraged to illustrate their stories; but, sometimes, to overcome a reluctance to write or draw, an adult models it for them.



**Figure 7.** Dictated Story. Picture Courtesy: Shailaja Menon

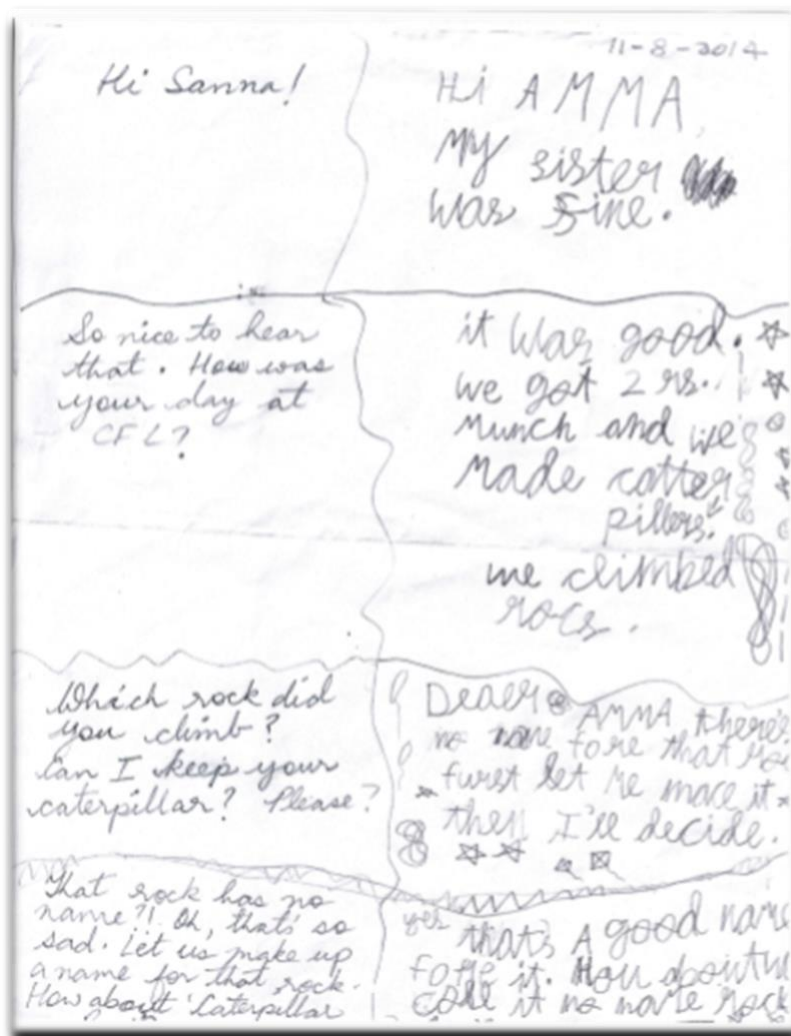
- c. **Shared writing:** You can create activities where the teacher and students share the writing. For example, the class might read a story together, and then discuss alternative endings. The teacher may rewrite the story with the new ending dictated by the students. Likewise, the class may have experienced some activity together. They may have gone on a walk and noticed something interesting. After discussing their experience, they could collectively compose a piece of writing. The teacher could take responsibility for writing it down (on the blackboard or chart paper), but children could write down some parts. Some children may be able to contribute whole words, while others might write one letter.
- d. **Written conversations:** Young children can be encouraged to see that oral conversations can be written down. A teacher working with 30 to 40 students cannot do this one-on-one with all students. But she could model it for the class with one student and then have peers chat with each other using paper-and-pencil (not a phone!).

Figure 8 shows an example of a chat between a parent and her seven-year-old daughter who has just returned from school, after leaving home in the morning with a slightly sick sister. That the child is eager to chat about her day, including about her sister's health, is clear. Looking closely at the sample, you can see that the mother, without appearing to correct the child, models the correct spellings for "caterpillar" (which the child spelled "catterpillars"), "rock" (which the child had spelled "roc"),



and “for” (which the child had spelled “fore).

The child’s handwriting and spelling are far from perfect. She has a mind of her own — in the last line when the mother suggests naming the rock “Caterpillar Rock”, the child says that perhaps it should be called “No Name Rock. The child also corrects the spelling for “rock” after misspelling it the first two times.



**Figure 8.** Written Conversations. Picture Courtesy: Shailaja Menon.

## 2. Teaching Genres and Techniques in Primary Grades

Give children practice in different genres of writing. Here are some examples of genres of writing you can teach in the primary grades.

- a. **Narrative writing:** Young writers can be taught that stories have a beginning, middle and end. After reading aloud a story, you can draw a train with three compartments. Discuss the story with the children, asking them which parts of the story should go into which compartment — the beginning, middle and end. After

discussing several stories this way, you can give the students a sheet of paper folded into three parts. Ask them to write a story with a beginning, middle and end, each written on one part of the sheet. Figures 3 and 7 show different ways in which this can be done.

- b. Personal narratives:** Show children that they can write a story about their experiences. You could read a story to them that is about the author's experience. Or you could tell them a story from your life. Once you have modelled this process, you could ask them to pick a story that is important or interesting from their lives and to tell it to a partner. Once children know the stories they wish to write, they can begin drafting. This process could take some time to complete and may need a lot of conferring with you and with their peers, revising and re-drafting. But children will be proud of having written about their lives, and will be eager to share.
- c. Adding dialogues:** You can ask children to take a piece of their writing and write it again with more dialogues. For this, you should model how to write dialogues, and explain why it makes a story more interesting. You could, as a class project, also take a story from the textbook and turn it into a play full of dialogues.
- d. Small moment writing:** Young children tend to rush over details in their eagerness to tell you the plot — who, what, where, when. But that kind of writing is not very interesting to read. So it is important to teach them to slow down and really describe the small moments well. You can ask them to return to their personal narrative (described earlier), take one small moment in it and write deeply about that moment.

For example, a six-year old girl wanted to write about her grandmother's illness (which lasted several weeks). When asked to pick ONE small moment, she picked the time when her grandmother was being taken to the hospital and couldn't get out of bed on her own. Her mother and father had to support grandmother, whose head kept rolling back and legs wouldn't move. She wrote about how long it took her grandmother to get from her bed to the front door, and how the little girl thought that grandma was going to fall. She wanted to go with her grandma in the car, but her parents asked her to stay home.

In the earlier piece of writing, none of these details or her emotions were visible, but it is these details that make a piece of writing strong, and interesting for the reader. Even very young writers who cannot spell perfectly can think of such

details and express them through a combination of invented spellings and drawings.

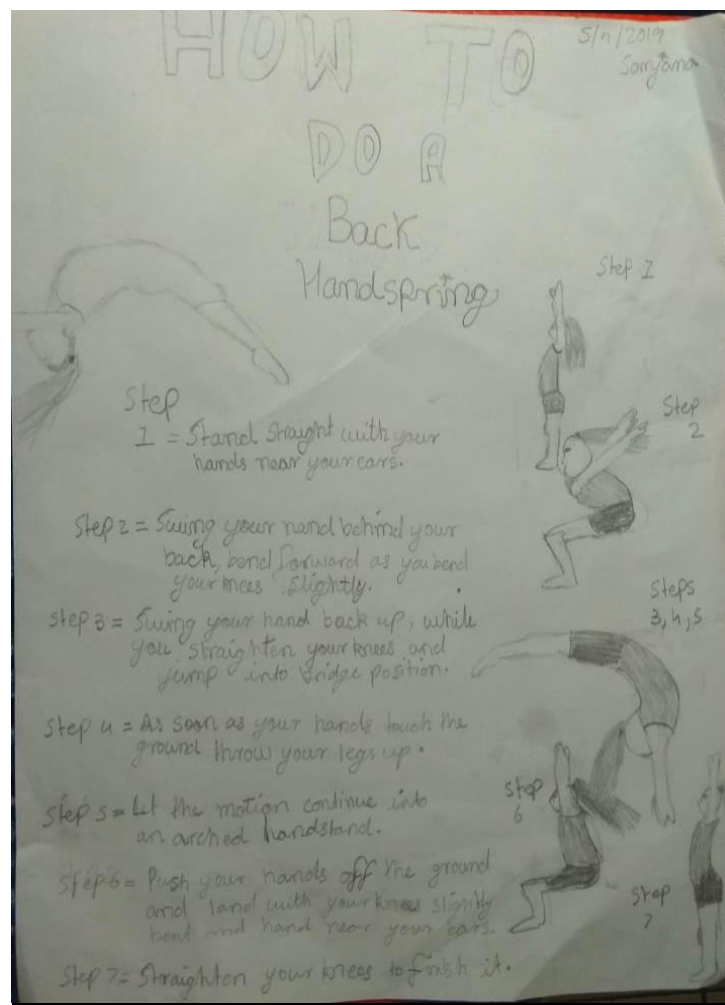
- e. **Making lists, notes, and labels:** Give children ample exercises in writing for functional purposes. Lists, notes, labels and letters are forms of writing that are needed in everyday life. Ask children to create these for classroom purposes — make a list of your weekly tasks; write a note to your friend thanking her for her help with your last writing piece; help the teacher create labels for objects and activity areas in your classroom.
- f. **Creating books:** Teachers can create a variety of books in the classroom with the children<sup>4</sup>. Children could create shared books in which each child contributes a page to the story. They could create class books, in which there is one page about each child (written and illustrated by them); or they could create alphabet books (where each child writes and illustrates one letter of the alphabet).
- g. **Descriptive writing:** Bring a range of small objects to classroom that could be interesting for young children, such as a sea shell, a rock, a bell, a toy or a feather. Spread these objects on a cloth in the middle of the classroom. Ask each student to pick up an object of her choice. Ask the children to pair up and describe the objects to each other in as much detail as they can. What does it look like? What does it look like when you turn it around? Or upside-down? Or inside-out? What does it sound like if you bang it against different objects? What does it feel like? What does it smell like? Once they have described it to their partners, they can write their descriptions, along with a drawing of the object. This exercise helps children closely observe what they are writing about, and expand their vocabulary.
- h. **Procedural or *how-to* writing:** Ask students to write about something they are an expert on, and that they are excited to teach other children about. Teach them the basics of procedural writing: list out the materials needed; give step-by-step instructions on how to do something. They can also give tips. For example, how to spin a top; how to fly a kite; how to hop on one leg for a long time; how to fool your brother; how to make a mask.

The list of things that young children might be interested in teaching others about can be endless. In Figure 9, an 11-year old who learns gymnastics explains how to

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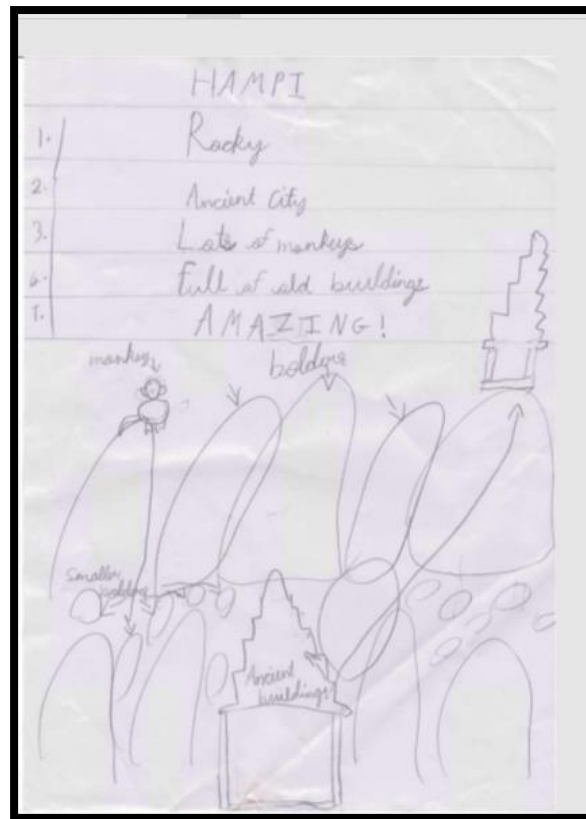
<sup>4</sup> To learn more about this topic, please see EL Practitioner Brief 7, [http://eli.tiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Creating\\_Books\\_in\\_the\\_Classroom\\_ELI\\_Handout\\_7.pdf](http://eli.tiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Creating_Books_in_the_Classroom_ELI_Handout_7.pdf)

do a *back-handspring*. In a later draft, she would be encouraged to include material needed as well as some tips for her peers.



**Figure 9.** Sample of procedural writing. Picture courtesy: Shailaja Menon

- i. **Writing Poetry:** Children can be exposed to a variety of poems (rhyming and not-rhyming) and helped to write simple poems of their own. It goes without saying that teachers should read aloud many different kinds of poems and discuss them with children before expecting them to create poems. For example, in Figure 10, an eight-year old describes her recent visit to Hampi using the 1-2-3-4-1 format (first line has one word; second line has 2 words and so on). Many more ideas for teaching poetry to young children can be found at: <https://www.poetry4kids.com/lessons/poetry-writing-lessons/>



*Figure 10.* Poem by an eight-year old. Picture Courtesy: Shailaja Menon

- j. Journal writing:** Encourage students to maintain a daily journal or personal diary, in which they can write to themselves about daily happenings, thoughts and feelings. The objective is to use writing as a tool to document and reflect on their lives. Create time every day for journal writing. If the children are struggling with what they should write about, engage them in a conversation to help them identify a topic. Every once in a while, read the journal and share feedback.

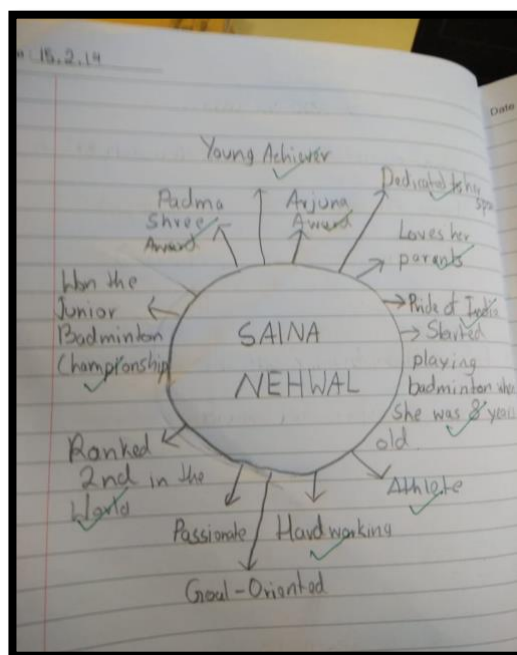
### 3. Using Writing to Respond to Literature

We have discussed the reading-writing connection earlier in this brief. Not only does reading improve writing; but writing can be used as a medium to respond to what the children read, or what you have read aloud to them. Here, we describe a few activities that can be used to encourage children to use writing as a response to literature.

#### a. Create story or character maps

*Story maps:* This has been discussed earlier, where children are asked to plot the beginning, middle and end of the story on a sheet of paper.

*Character maps:* On a sheet of paper, ask children to write the name of the character in the centre. Using arrows, ask them to write different personality traits they associate with the character. They should share the character maps with their partners and discuss the traits they have listed. Each personality trait could be justified by a piece of evidence from the story.



*Figure 11.* Shows an example of character map. Picture Courtesy: Divi Singh.

### b. Change the story!

After they read a story, you can ask children if there is an aspect of it they would like to change. Ask them to rewrite the story incorporating the change. This change can include changing or extending the ending, changing the setting, or changing a character's personality traits.

### c. Point-of-view

Discuss whose perspective or point-of-view a particular story is written from. Ask children to imagine what the story would have been like if written from a different character's point-of-view. For example, many stories have a wicked step-mother. Ask children to write from the step-mother's point-of-view. This technique can be applied to most stories because most stories are written from a particular character's point-of-view.

**d. Write a letter to the author or characters**

After reading a story, ask children to write their thoughts, questions or opinions to the author. Similarly, you can also ask them to write letters to a character from the story.

**Conclusion**

Good writing is rooted in the experiences of the author; thus, as educators, we have to bring children to see the relationship between their experiences and their writing. This brief has attempted to elaborate on the idea of using writing for communication and expression. It has discussed three main principles. First, establish the relevance of writing in young children's minds. Second, permit them to integrate their writing with talk, drawing and play to better make sense of the task given to them. Third, to guide children in learning to be writers.

While “free” writing time is good, guided writing time is better. Guide children on the processes of writing, rather than focusing only on the product. A variety of suggestions — suggestive and not comprehensive in nature — for guiding children on their writing has also been provided. We hope teachers can adapt some of these ideas and activities for their classrooms, and will feel inspired to further explore this topic.

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