

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 390 066

CS 215 175

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TITLE Promoting the Lifelong Love of Writing.  
PUB DATE [95]  
NOTE 21p.  
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.)  
(120) -- Guides - General (050)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; \*Family School Relationship;  
Parent Participation; Program Development; \*Writing  
(Composition); \*Writing Attitudes; Writing for  
Publication; \*Writing Instruction  
IDENTIFIERS \*Lifelong Writers; Visiting Authors

ABSTRACT

Nurturing children's passionate interest in writing increases the chances that they will incorporate writing into their lifestyles. Educators can help children in their journey toward success by creating a positive professional attitude about writing in school, allowing substantial time for writing, providing opportunities to become immersed in a variety of discourse, guiding efforts to "go public" with their writing, organizing an effective visiting authors' program, and encouraging family-school connections. These approaches represent only a sampling of the ways in which schools can empower children to love writing and to use it successfully throughout their lives. Contains 29 references. An "ambitious" model of a student's yearlong schedule that includes writing immersion is attached. (RS)

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ED 390 066

Promoting the Lifelong Love of Writing

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Becoming literate is a complex process, involving positive experiences with reading, writing, listening, talking, and viewing. Regrettably, developing proficiency in literacy learning is no guarantee that individuals will use it throughout their lives. This problem is especially evident with writing, the most challenging piece of the communication puzzle.

According to Graves (1994, pp. 154-155),

When I conducted my study for the Ford Foundation a number of years ago [Graves, 1978], I was struck by how few adult Americans used writing in their everyday lives. If they wrote, they did so nervously and only under duress. Few had witnessed the power of writing as demonstrated by their teachers.

In setting a foundation that will empower adult writers, the challenge for teachers and administrators is to maintain a "big picture" perspective as they deliberately work toward helping children develop the lifelong love of writing.

#### **Why is becoming a lifetime writer important?**

Efforts to foster lifetime literacy are often linked to voluntary, recreational, and independent reading (Morrow, 1986a, 1986b, 1987; Morrow & Weinstein, 1984, 1986; Sanacore, 1988, 1989b, 1989c, 1990a, 1990b, 1992, 1993, 1994; Spiegel, 1981, 1989). Yet, the same reasons for promoting the lifelong reading habit can be applied to fostering the lifetime writing habit. Foremost is the sheer pleasure that writing brings to

individuals as they record their experiences with life. Whether a child is responding to an exciting story in her journal or an adult is completing an entry in his diary, writing becomes an intimate act of reflection. Not surprisingly, writing also can be therapeutic as revealed in personal discourse and in published letters appearing in the advice columns of Ann Landers, Dear Abby, and others. Imagine being a child or an adult who is frustrated or embarrassed because of an inability to communicate personal thoughts in writing. This plight not only limits the quality of life by preventing a healthy outlet for intimate (and sometimes pent-up) feelings, but also stifles the problem-solving process which is often refined and clarified through writing.

Beyond these personal considerations, promoting the lifetime writing habit is also necessary for having positive connections with the field of technology. In schools around the world, telecommunications has provided students and teachers with additional opportunities for sharing valuable information through electronic mail and computer conferencing. These types of communication are described in a recent issue of **Technology Applications Quarterly** (New York State Education Department, 1994). One project involves a computer network that links fifth grade classrooms in different schools. The students in both schools differ significantly in their cultural and ethnic heritages, but their interactive communication enables them to enrich their understanding of the different heritages. Another project involving older students encourages a team approach for communicating with people from different countries. Through

their Internet connections, students from a variety of cultures can communicate with one another and can access more than 5000 networks and 500,000 computer systems. Groups of learners become involved in activities, including drafting/writing treaty texts that focus on an issue of major importance to their countries, doing related library research, engaging in teleconferences, and completing final drafts of a treaty with the support of computers and telecommunications.

While students are enjoying and learning from personal and technological experiences such as these, they are simultaneously simulating what is expected of them in the "real world." Thus, their journey toward becoming lifelong writers provides them with both pleasurable and practical benefits.

#### **How can we promote the lifetime love of writing?**

What follows are guidelines that attempt to foster writing as a lifetime activity. These guidelines are not prescriptive, nor are they intended for use in a linear progression. Instead, when used in concert, they represent a reasonable sense of direction for helping children enjoy writing throughout their lives.

- **Build a positive professional attitude toward writing in the school.** Teachers and administrators need to work cooperatively to create a learning environment that nurtures writing growth during the school day. Interestingly, the same approaches for

developing favorable feelings about independent reading (Sanacore, 1989b) have merit for motivating positive feelings toward writing immersion. Of primary importance is the involvement of the entire staff during every phase of carrying out this innovation, including determining a need, organizing teacher-led staff development, establishing goals and strategies, sharing and applying updated research, and deciding on the best ways of evaluating these efforts. The staff also benefits from the continual support of study groups, which meet at flexible times and reinforce in specific ways the value of writing as a thinking/learning process. These and other considerations build a positive attitude toward using school time for writing immersion.

- **Provide extended blocks of time for writing.** As teachers and students become more involved with process writing, they soon realize that increasing amounts of time are necessary for this activity. Since writing is a recursive act, children are likely to reflect, modify previous ideas, reorganize sections of text, and discuss these actions with the teacher and with peers. Children also may review several working papers in their portfolios and may decide to revise or complete one of these stories or essays. Extended time is therefore needed to enable developing writers to be successful.

An ambitious plan is to encourage content area writing for 5-week blocks of time. For example, in social studies, children might be learning about the American Revolution by reading and

discussing James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier's **Jump Ship to Freedom, War Comes to Willy Freeman, and Who Is Carrie?**; Esther Forbes' **Johnny Tremain**; Jean Fritz' **Early Thunder**; or another source concerning a Revolutionary era perspective. Through individual conferences, literature circles, and whole-class discussions, students expand their repertoire of the time period and develop the impetus to respond in writing to the point of view presented in their book. Depending on the preferences of the children, they could work individually or in small teams to chronicle their perceptions of major historical events, to complete a short biography of a poignant character who added a personal dimension to the time period, to produce a challenging comparison and contrast essay, to write a miniresearch paper, or to do another creative project. These individual and collective efforts demonstrate to children that learning is both personal and social and that their teacher respects their choices of books and written assignments. Similar activities are easily incorporated into science, language arts, health, home and careers, and other content areas (see Figure). The point to be made here is that as students gain facility in making choices about their reading and writing across the curriculum, they soon realize that they not only learn valuable information about different subject matter, but also develop positive literacy habits that affect the quality of their lives.

- **Guide children in a variety of writing experiences.** As developing writers enjoy extended time for experimenting with

their craft, they sometimes become too comfortable with one type of writing. In the primary school, narrative discourse understandably dominates process writing and reading as young children are becoming confident with their emerging literacy. Too much emphasis on narration, however, can distort children's perception of literacy and can stifle their fluency with thinking and learning in the content areas (Sanacore, 1991). Young writers need opportunities to discover their strengths and interests by exploring a variety of discourse, including expository, descriptive, narrative, and poetic. This perspective does not negate natural immersion but instead complements it, since learners grow from wide and varied experiences with writing.

Teachers can support this thrust by sharing and demonstrating their craft with students, metacognitively thinking aloud during the composing of different types of text. Thus, children observe firsthand the realistic joys and frustrations of refining a thesis statement, reorganizing ideas, omitting unnecessary details, deciding on vivid words to describe a setting or character in a short story, creating imagery in a poem, or engaging in other contextual aspects of writing.

As students learn and apply these insights to their own writing, they need to focus this energy on specific purposes and audiences. For example, drafting several arguments for a panel discussion with classmates or composing a letter of invitation for the visiting authors' program are among the positive experiences that are enjoyable and beneficial for developing

writers. Realistically, children sometimes struggle with the process of reaching their audience because they think in egocentric terms, thereby causing poor communication with others. Since their thinking is based on a singular perspective (Piaget, 1955), writers need help to effectively reach different audiences. One way of helping is to challenge their assumptions that they are aware of or sensitive to the perspectives of others (Sanacore, 1989a). Using a variation of cognitive stereoscopy is an example of such a challenge. According to Bleich (1986, p. 99), the underlying principle of this process is "that knowledge comes when some other experience is perceived through at least two perspectives at once." Writers and speakers can develop a stereoscopic sense through exposure to the double-script/double-speech assignment within a progression of assignments. Learners therefore have opportunities over time to recognize and compare their communication styles. For instance, while focusing on a variety of audience perspectives, they can describe a topic one way for parents or teachers and another way for peers. If the topic concerns a cake fight that was witnessed in the school cafeteria, students probably will experience difficulty as they go from informal language for their classmates to different rhetorical devices for adults. This conflict is positive because it challenges writers' and speakers' assumptions that they are sensitive to their audiences' points of view and because it helps children to be flexible when responding to different audiences.

Expanding children's repertoire of discourse types and helping them to be comfortable with varied purposes and audiences

increase the chances of success with writing. Since these experiences with text are enjoyable and meaningful, learners are more likely to continue incorporating them into their lifestyles.

● **Help writers to "go public."** As children become facile reaching their audiences, they soon realize that their communication is a form of publishing or of "going public." Since students usually write to be read, publication becomes a natural vehicle for motivating frequent writing. Atwell (1987) believes that teachers should support publication efforts because children write better when they know that audiences they care about will read their writing.

One of the writing teacher's roles is to help writers discover how to go public--how to recognize a potential audience for a given piece--and to share and create new publication options. And another of our roles is to remember that not everything needs to go public, that there will be pieces written solely for the expressive purposes of the writer (p. 265).

Atwell suggests approaches that writers can use to acquire readers for their work. These approaches are carried out at Boothbay Elementary School in response to literacy events that occur in the natural classroom context. They include individually bound books of short stories, poems, content area research, etc.; classroom magazines consisting of contributions that are typed or handwritten and that represent monthly themes or required writing modes; school newspaper featuring all types

of student writing and distributed to all students in the school; submissions to local newspapers and trade magazines; and correspondence including pen pal letters, postcards, greeting cards, and messages in bottles. In supporting such efforts, Atwell argues that going public should be an ongoing process that gives all writers opportunities to reach audiences.

Further support for this process is provided by Fraser and Skolnick (1994), who consider a published story to be a real boost for children as well as an important strategy for promoting the writing habit. After children's contributions are typed in book form, the authors illustrate pages with colored pencils, markers, crayons, or pencils. Then, the books are celebrated during group sharing, and copies are placed in the classroom collection. To facilitate the publishing of stories, parent volunteers are a great source of help. For example, one volunteer assists for a 45-minute block of time 4 days a week and, with the computer and printer moved into the hall, works with 1 or 2 writers during each session. While sitting with each author, the parent types his or her story; meanwhile, the volunteer demonstrates respect for the young writer's language and gives the writer final authority over the story. According to Fraser and Skolnick, when children are encouraged to engage in the thinking and working habits of writers, some of their work may take several weeks to complete. Interestingly, these sustained efforts representing rigor and commitment serve as a foundation for enjoying and developing the lifetime writing habit.

● **Hand our students over to authors through a visiting authors' program.** Developing writers not only need experience going public, but also benefit from meeting published authors whose books they have read and enjoyed. During these get-togethers, pertinent conversations take place as the visiting authors reveal what inspires them, how they engage in the act of writing, and why they experience joy and frustration when they write. Listening to published writers firsthand can be a special treat for children because it guides them to become deeply and sensitively aware of the process of writing and of themselves as authors.

Since a visiting authors' program is beneficial to children, we should organize it effectively so that its potential for success is increased. The following suggestions should therefore be considered in the context of local needs and wants (Sanacore, 1995): (a) Form a committee of key players--children, parents, teachers, library media specialists, supervisors, and administrators--who have a passionate interest in bringing children and authors together. (b) Involve the staff in developing a rationale that connects the authors' program with the philosophy, goals, and mission of the school. (c) Use a thematic structure as a basis for selecting books and authors. (d) Motivate children to read some of the authors' books so they will be prepared to interact effectively during the authors' visitations. (e) Schedule the visitations at times that accommodate the authors' busy schedules, and avoid conflicts caused by the school's holidays, recess periods, and

instructional and assessment activities. (f) Secure funding for the authors' program through the Parent-Teacher-Student Association, school budget, authors' publishers, local industry, and other resources. (g) Use qualitative and quantitative approaches for assessing the program's outcomes. (h) Be savvy about related politics by considering a variety of perspectives concerning overall decision making but ultimately by empowering educators to drive the process.

Handing our children over to authors is one of our culminating responsibilities which nurtures the children's growing independence as readers and writers and, thus, helps them become secure members of the literacy club (Smith, 1992). Whether our students are enjoying authors vicariously through their books or directly through their visitations, these enriching experiences have lasting value.

- **Invite parents to be partners in promoting the lifetime writing habit.** According to Graves (1994), an important characteristic of lifelong writers is that they initiate writing. These children choose to write so they can recount and then understand experience. They also have a sense of topic and attempt to tell the story their way. Other qualities of lifetime writers include their recognition of the power of writing (e.g., they understand how writing affects others), their awareness of history as a foundation for the future (e.g., they realize that past experiences with writing can be used to improve current and future writing performance), their sense of audience and purpose

(e.g., they know who will be reading their text and why they are initiating this text), and their understanding of the appropriateness of writing in different content areas and genres (e.g., they demonstrate uses of writing in their lives and in social studies, mathematics, etc.). Graves' research on process writing during the past 2 decades has led him to conclude, "When children write at home, on their own and to affect others, they demonstrate the best of the 'lifelong' characteristics" (p.155).

During parent-teacher conferences, PTSA meetings, and other get-togethers, teachers and administrators can provide parents with insights about the importance of becoming a lifetime writer and about ways in which the school and the home can identify and foster the lifelong writing habit. For example, at an elementary school where I serve as a consultant, I was invited to join a study group that was focusing on improving children's writing. The group consisted of teachers and the building principal, and they were interested in determining ways that parents could support the school's writing efforts. Although this goal should certainly be part of the overall design for nurturing developing writers, it did not consider the literacy learning contributions already occurring in the children's homes.

We therefore explored related professional literature, including Taylor's (1983) **Family Literacy: Young Children Learning to Read and Write** and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) **Growing Up Literate: Learning from Inner-City Families**. These studies respectively demonstrated that middle class and low-income families support their children's literacy learning.

Reading and discussing these and other related studies helped the study group to realize that children would probably grow more confidently as writers if their teachers consider their home literacy learning to be a foundation for and a complement to the school's writing efforts. The group also gained insights about extending the experiences of developing writers so that they will use writing in meaningful and enjoyable ways throughout their lives.

From this reflection and collaboration, a tentative plan emerged. The study group agreed to invite parents to their classrooms for afternoon get-togethers once a week. The building principal provided refreshments and transportation, if needed. Initially, informal discussions focused on literacy learning in the home, especially the kinds of writing and reading activities that parents and their children shared. Then, the teachers showed transitional ways in which they could extend these activities in the classroom. They also made suggestions that parents could support at home, including providing a writing center (or writing corner) cluttered with widely lined and standard composition paper, pencils, pens, crayons, chalkboard, chalk, trade books, and a children's dictionary; allowing children to take risks as they immerse themselves in writing activities that they enjoy; and demonstrating authentic tasks, such as writing letters to friends and relatives, completing shopping lists, and doing crossword puzzles. Throughout these positive teacher-parent sessions, the teachers continued to attend study group meetings during which they reflected on their

sharing with parents and its subsequent impact on the children's writing. After one year of this successful family-school connection, the staff and parents are committed to maintaining it because the children not only are communicating better but also are immersed in writing as a social, functional, and enjoyable activity. This perspective certainly helps children to value and to use writing as an important part of their lives.

**Is promoting the lifelong love of writing worth the effort?**

Nurturing children's passionate interest in writing increases the chances that they will incorporate writing into their lifestyles. We can help children in their journey toward success by creating a positive professional attitude about writing in the school, allowing substantial time for writing, providing opportunities to become immersed in a variety of discourse, guiding efforts to go public, organizing an effective visiting authors' program, and encouraging family-school connections. These approaches represent only a sampling of the ways in which schools can empower children to love writing and to use it successfully throughout their lives.

Ambitious model of a student's yearlong schedule  
that includes writing immersion\*

	First progress period		Second progress period		Third progress period		Fourth progress period	
1. Social studies	WI							
2. Language arts		WI						
3. Physical education			NWI					
4. Science				WI				
5. Mathematics					WI			
6. Lunch						NWI		
7. Health							WI	
8. Home and careers								WI

**Note:** Each box represents 5 weeks

**WI:** Writing immersion (blank means other instructional activities are occurring)

**NWI:** No writing immersion is included during physical education and lunch, since PE is offered twice a week and lunch is not an instructional period. These areas, however, are appropriately spaced so that no gap in writing immersion is longer than 5 weeks. Thus, the children experience writing in all 10-week progress periods.

\*Adapted from Sanacore (1994)

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