



HANDOUT 6

ELD Writing Strategies

1.0 Children Use Writing to Communicate Their Ideas

Through exposure to writing as a means of communication, children begin to learn that writing has many purposes, such as the provision of information, entertainment, and describing and remembering an event that has already occurred. When children make the connection between the written symbol and its meaning, cognitive growth ensues. “When children write, they have a fixed

representation of oral language. They can explore it, as it doesn’t vanish like the spoken word.”¹⁸ For children who are English learners, more instructional support is needed in other language areas, such as listening and speaking, to become successful writers. Children who are English learners benefit from opportunities to write in their home language.¹⁹

VIGNETTE

Jaime and Sarita are playing in the dramatic play area, which has been supplied with food props (e.g., plastic fruits and vegetables) and writing materials. Jaime is carefully looking at the fruits and vegetables when Sarita says, “Por qué no jugamos restaurante?” (Why don’t we play restaurant?) as she pulls Jaime’s arm to make him sit down in the nearby chair. Jaime goes along with the play and sits down. In the meantime Sarita grabs some paper and markers that are located in the dramatic play area and quickly scribbles some lines on a piece of paper and hands it to Jaime. Sarita says, “¿Qué gustarias?” (What would you like?) “Gustarias un banana, un apple?” Jaime smiles at Sarita and says, “Un apple, por favor.”

PLANNING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

▶ A supportive environment for writing includes materials available for this purpose. Paper and markers in the dramatic play area enable these English learners to incorporate writing into their play in a spontaneous way.

The following interactions and strategies support children who are preschool English learners:

Look for opportunities for adult- and peer-mediated conversation about writing by using the child’s home language to initiate this discussion.

When children are engaged in writing, it is important for the teacher to ask what they are writing about. For children who are English learners, the teacher needs

to know the child’s level of second-language development before structuring a question (e.g., in the home language or with key words in the home language). Ask for clarification or elaboration of concepts. For example, if the child is writing about the animals he saw at the zoo over the weekend, the teacher asks questions about the outing. This type of interaction may provide opportunities to reinforce words and phrases in English



and build vocabulary. The teacher may also provide opportunities in the classroom where the children can interact with others and discuss what they are writing. In the writing area children have paper, markers, crayons, and letter stamps.

Link writing to listening and speaking so preschool children who are English learners can draw from other language strengths. The classroom environment should be rich with printed materials, including books in the child's home language, and wordless picture books that children can use as a basis of discussion in their home language and then move on to writing activities. For example, teachers may read *The Little Red Hen* and then discuss with the children why the other animals in the story did not want to help the little red hen. For children learning English, it is recommended that the story be read to them in their home language. See the "Research Highlight" on page 216. If this is not possible, it is recommended that program staff or other adults who speak the child's home language read the book in the home language and stress key concepts. Afterwards, when the book is read in English, the child who is an English learner will be better able to understand the story line and words in English that may correspond to words in her home language. In related follow-up activities, teachers provide finger-puppet facsimiles of farm animals in the block area so that English learners have an opportunity to play with the finger puppets and act out the story in their home language. Later, the children draw the red hen or some of the other animals in the story and dictate a story or passage to

accompany the drawing. Teachers should allow code switching in children's dictated stories.

Focus writing activities on literature.

It is helpful to connect writing to stories that are being used in the classroom and are available in the book area. This strategy will provide the child with opportunities to revisit the story multiple times to strengthen their understanding of specific words and concepts in both their home language and English.

Supply learning areas with writing materials

(e.g., dramatic play, science, and cooking). Children will have the tools to incorporate writing into their dramatic play. They can create such things as menus, personal letters, grocery lists, and charts. For children who are learning English, having access to writing material in interest areas means there is no pressure for them to perform and provides them with opportunities to experiment with their second language both in written form and orally.

Have children dictate their own short stories.

Dictated stories are a good way to introduce the child to writing as a means of description. Teachers may encourage the child to share her stories and, if the child uses her home language, adults who understand and can write the home language write down what the child is saying. These adults then read the child's words back to her. Teachers should allow for code switching in children's dictation. If no adult is available who can understand and write the child's home language, a peer might be engaged to interpret the description for the teacher and child.