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Providing a print-rich environment for young writers

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Providing a print-rich environment for young writers

Abstract

A print-rich environment can provide many experiences to nurture young children's writing abilities. Cambourne's instructional elements for promoting literacy have been related to a literature-based program. Literature experiences and related writing activities extended to the science area of an elementary instructional program, specially to the concept of air, are developed.

Providing a Print-Rich Environment
For Young Writers

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Abstract

A print-rich environment can provide many experiences to nurture young children's writing abilities. Cambourne's instructional elements for promoting literacy have been related to a literature-based program. Literature experiences and related writing activities extended to the science area of an elementary instructional program, specially to the concept of air, are developed. ..

Learning to write by engaging in the composition process nurtures children's literacy, or their thinking-language abilities. Young students acquire knowledge of print by interacting with it in their environment (Graves, 1994).

A print-rich school environment fosters children's writing abilities by providing opportunities to explore, experiment, and interact with print. Within such an environment, children can engage in the function of language to create their own meaning, thus developing thinking-language abilities and discovering the nature of language. Early exposure to literature and other printed materials allows students to become accustomed to experiencing print in useful ways. Children can come to realize and associate print with the real world and their surrounding environment (Harms & Lettow, 1992).

The purpose of this article is to present ways to provide a print-rich environment for writers in first grade. Cambourne's (1988) suggestions for promoting literacy will be related to a print-rich environment. These elements are intertwined. Following this discussion an example of an extended literature base for a science unit will be presented.

A Literature-Based Learning Environment

Developing an instructional program for optimum emerging literacy should include concerted attention to the learning environment--allocation and design of space, selection of

materials, and placement of those materials (Loughlin & Martin, 1987). Cambourne (1988) has suggested components for promoting literacy--immersion, demonstration, responsibility, use, and response--that should be reflected in a learning environment.

Immersion

A print-rich environment provides many opportunities for children to be exposed to quality literature representing the different genres--fiction, folk literature, poetry, and information. Quality literature offers memorable experiences and models of language. Literature needs to be real and exciting to entice young readers to focus on the reading process. Meaningful literature experiences rather than controlled vocabulary stories enable children to understand the power of language and the elements to use in their communication (Huck, Hepler, Hickman, & Kiefer, 1997).

A quality literature-based classroom can be incorporated into first grade in many ways, such as the teacher reading aloud from different genres several times a day, the students sharing their reading and related expressive experiences, visits to the library, and work in the literature-based learning centers. Reading aloud experiences foster listening abilities; develop concepts and related vocabulary; provide experiences in hearing the models of oral language with its features, such as fluency,

range of pitch and volume; aid reading comprehension; and promote positive attitudes towards language (Routman, 1994).

When students share their ideas generated through the reading and writing processes, interactions among the peers and the teacher can take place to further reading experiences and expressive activities (Routman, 1994). Also, writing form elements can be discussed in the context of the students' writing (Graves, 1994).

Library visits give students access to a wide variety of reading materials that can serve as springboards to expressive activity and models for their writing. The children's favorite authors can be studied from the standpoint of where they got their stories and how they engage in the writing process.

Literature-based learning centers, both sustaining and specific to a unit of study, can offer children many options for language experiences involving the comprehension and composition processes throughout the school year. Sustaining centers change with the unit study. Examples of sustaining centers are listening/reading, poetry, author, dramatic play, and bookmaking (Harms & Lettow, 1992).

The listening/reading center can be supplied with examples of the different genres of literature and texts that represent a range of reading abilities. Books can be packaged with

teacher-made cassette tapes, particularly for following along experiences for children who have listening ability but lag behind in reading. Props related to specific stories can be offered to assist children in focusing on the story and becoming aware of its literary elements. Examples are items representing an important element of the story, such as a purple crayon from Crockett's Harold and the Purple Crayon; stuffed figures representing the story characters; flannelboard pieces; and puppets.

Many literature experiences and related expressive activities from the listening/reading center can be taken home to extend the children's language experiences and also to demonstrate to their caregivers their involvement and progress in learning language. The home-school connection is most valuable in supporting young children's writing abilities (Sulzby, Teale, & Kamberelis, 1989).

The poetry center can provide students with the work of fine poets. Poetry also can be presented through posters, chart pads, and booklets of poems on a specific theme. Through the poetry center, children can enjoy the song of the language--rhythm, rhyme, repetition, alliteration, and onomatopoeia, as well as finding models for writing.

In an author's center, an author and his/her work can be highlighted. It is more meaningful to children if the author

study is closely related to the unit or theme study. The center can include books, posters, and pictures and biographical information about the writer. This center can house student-developed books, either by the class or individual children. Big books composed of student stories and illustrations are much read pieces by students.

A dramatic play center can enable young children to role-play real life and imaginary experiences. Such a center gives them opportunities to explore reading and writing as a functional part of their play. For example, in a doctor's office, students can write prescriptions, develop patient rosters, and issue bills of service. In a restaurant, orders can be taken and menus produced. A post office can focus on letter writing, and distributing mail. These experiences not only can foster children's writing abilities but also can nurture their concept and vocabulary development (Vukelich, 1990).

The bookmaking center can provide materials for constructing books. It can facilitate the publication component of the writing process.

Demonstration

Children need language demonstrated, or modeled, for them. A print-rich environment can be a constant modeling agent. For young children, group story writing directed by the teacher with reference to quality literature experiences can provide

demonstrations of the elements of story structure. Interactions with peers and the teacher focused on both parties' reading and writing experiences provide natural occasions for language demonstration. Author study also can offer opportunities for the demonstration of the writing process. These experiences can provide a study of language, or metalinguistics (Graves, 1994; Smith, 1994).

Responsibility

Children can take responsibility for their writing if they are given ownership of the writing process, for example, if they are allowed to select their own topics and to determine their involvement in the other writing components--drafting, redrafting, revising, and publishing. An ongoing instructional goal in writing for both teachers and students is the expression of ideas with clarity and ease. The teacher is responsible for providing students with audiences with whom to share their writing. As children share their writing in conferences, teachers can collaborate with them about their progress and instructional needs. Mini-lessons can follow with references supplied by the print-rich environment (Graves, 1994).

Use

Students need time and opportunity to create meaning through the writing process and then to share their ideas with others. Such experiences can lead to furthering their writing

abilities and also their personal-social development. Engaging in the functions of language across the curriculum can provide opportunities to do many types of writing.

Response

Opportunities to respond to each others' writing allows students to receive feedback and also to offer suggestions to others. Through the use of feedback, students can test out their writing ideas and form. These responses should be non-threatening and genuine. Besides small-group peer conferences and whole-class sharing sessions, students and teachers can collaborate in noting progress and instructional needs through journals, conferences, and portfolio collection. All these opportunities to respond to one's own and others' writing can nurture children's reflection on the writing process (Graves, 1994).

Response can lead to the publishing component of the writing process. Students can learn to publish in many ways, such as Author's chair, chart stories, illustrated stories, poems, reports, big books, and newsletters.

A Literature-Based Unit with Many Writing Opportunities

The focus of this unit is air which is a part of a science unit on ecology for grade one. The major objective of this part of the unit is for the students to recognize and understand the functions of air in the environment. The unit includes a rich

literature base and numerous options for writing experiences. It offers sustaining centers and centers specific to this unit.

Sustaining Centers

These sustaining centers can be presented to support the study of air.

Listening/Reading Center

This center is filled with literature works of different genres which support the theme. Trade books as well as student-made booklets are provided. Headphones and cassettes are available so students can listen to the books.

Fiction:

Carle, Eric (1970). The tiny seed. New York: Crowell.

Dewitt, Lynda (1991). What will the weather be? New York: HarperCollins.

Elliott, Alan, C. (1980). On Sunday the wind came. New York: Morrow.

Ets, Marie Hall (1963). Gilberto and the wind. New York: Viking.

Greene, Carol (1982). Please, wind? Chicago: Children's.

Harness, Cheryl (1991). The windchild. New York: Holt.

Hutchins, Pat (1974). The wind blew. New York: McMillan.

Karas, G. Brian (1998). The windy day. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Lobel, Arnold (1988). The turnaround wind. New York: Harper & Row.

McAllister, Angela (1994). The wind garden. New York: Lothrop.

McPhail, David (1987). First flight. Boston: Joy Street.

Mahy, Margaret (1987). The garden party. Chicago: Children's.

Polacco, Patricia (1990). Thunder cake. New York: Philomel.

Roche, Hannah (1996). Corey's kite. New York: De Agostini.

Root, Phyllis (1996). One windy Wednesday. Cambridge, MA:
Candlewick.

Wildsmith, Brian (1993). Whose hat was that? San Diego: Harcourt.

Zolotow, Charlotte (1995). When the wind stops. New York: Harper
& Row.

Nonfiction:

Adler, Irving (1972). Air. New York: Day.

Ardley, Neil (1984). Air and flight. New York: Watts.

Branley, Franklyn (1986). Air is all around. New York: Crowell.

Brewer, Mary (1975). Wind is air. Chicago: Children's.

Devonshire, Hilary (1991). Air. New York: Watts.

Farber, Seymour (1991). The air we breathe. Springfield, IL:
Abdo.

Hatch, Shirley Cook (1973). Wind is to feel. New York: McCann.

Henry, Bernard (1969). Air. New York: Roy.

Hoffman, Mary (1995). Earth, fire, water and air. New York:
Dutton.

Howarth, Lesley (1995). Weather eye. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick.

Jennings, Terry (1982). Air. Chicago: Children's.

McMillan, Bruce (1991). The weather sky. New York: Farrar.

Makower, Joel (1989). The air and space catalog. New York:
Vintage.

Poth, Cathy (1989). The air. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Silver
Burdett.

Preston, Edna Mitchell (1965). Air. Chicago: Follett.

Robbins, Ken (1995). Air. New York: Holt.

Rybolt, Thomas (1993). Environmental experiments with air.
Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Enslow.

Schmid, Eleonore (1992). The air around us. New York: North &
South.

Smith, Henry (1982). Amazing air. New York: Lothrop.

Poetry Center

Several poets and their works can contribute to the understanding of air. Poetry books, posters of poems, and booklets with collections of poems on the concept can be a part of the center.

Poetry:

Barton, Bryon (1982). Airport. New York: Crowell.

Bunting, Eve (1991). Fly away home. New York: Clarion.

Forrester, Victoria (1985). A latch against the wind. New York:
Atheneum.

Hopkins, Lee Bennet, coll. (1994). Weather. New York:
HarperCollins.

Livingston, Myra Cohn (1989). Up in the air. New York: Holiday.

Merriam, Eve (1985). "Crick! Crack!" Blackberry ink. New York:
Morrow.

Mizumura, Kazue (1966). I see the winds. New York: Crowell.

Moore, Lilian (1982). Something new begins. New York: Atheneum.

Author Center

The center features Lilian Moore, a poet, who addresses the emotions in many nature images. Poems on wind found in this work can be presented through posters.

Something new begins

Lost

What happened in the sky
today?

Why did the
wild geese flying
south

turn north
in
disarray,

the whole flock
drifting?

Did clouds
blur the
sun

or mist
hid the
hills?

Did strange
winds
blow,

shifting the great
geese in their
flight?

Did they ever spy
the river's
glint

and find the way?

p. 16

Hurricane

All night
the wind
poured
through the trees,

roared
like a waterfall,
tugged and
tore.

In the morning light
the stunned
trees
looked down on

tattered leaves
heaped in
brown
hills

torn twigs
flung
in barbed wire
tangles

battered
branches
crossed like
swords.

p. 20

Summer Rain

The sky is
scrubbed
of every smudge of
cloud.

The sidewalk is a
slate
that's quickly
dry.

Light
dazzles
like
a washed
window pane,

and
I

breathe
the freshly laundered
air
of after-rain.

p. 20

Rain

mud
puddled
paths

damp
robins
in splashed nests

flood
in the woodchuck's
burrow

wet fur
wet feather
weather

p. 49

Dry Spell

Again,
sunfire in a
cloudless sky.

Another
dry
day.

Hot wind licks
the land,
licking the green away.

Grass cringes,
singes and
dies.

The tree rations water,
the leaf
dries

snaps
falls,

In the brook bed
rocks whiten,
cracks vein the earth.

Roots have forgotten
the taste
of rain.

p. 96

Go Wind

Go wind, blow
Push wind, swoosh.
Shake things
take things
make things
fly.

Ring things
swing things
fling things
high.

Go wind, blow
 Push things
wheee.

No, wind, no.
 Not me-
 not *me.*

p. 55

Dramatic Play Center

The subject of this center for the concept of air is a weather station/meteorologist newscast. It can contain weather logs, instruments, and maps. The children can report weather conditions and make forecasts. These books can serve as resources:

Gibbons, Gail (1987). Weather forecasting. New York: Four Winds.

Gibbons, Gail (1990). Weather words and what they mean. New York: Holiday.

Martin, Claire (1987). I can be a weather forecaster. Chicago: Children's.

Yolen, Jane (1993). Weather report. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills.

Centers Specific to the Unit

These literature-based centers can extend the study of the unit on air.

Air

A. Literature Experience

Read or listen to Shirley Cook Hatch's Wind is to feel.
 (New York: McCann, 1973).

Expressive Activity

Conduct some of the experiments with wind.

B. Literature Experience

Read or listen to Air is all around, by Franklyn Branley (Crowell, 1986).

Expressive Activity

Illustrate a picture with evidence of air movement and share it with the class.

C. Literature Experience

Read or listen to Wind is air, by Mary Brewer. (New York: Child's World, 1975).

Expressive Activity

1. Write a story about how air helps humans and animals survive.
2. Describe or illustrate how wind affects the environment.

D. Literature Experience

Read or listen to The air we breathe, by Seymour Farber (New York: Abdo, 1991).

Expressive Activity

1. Compare and contrast clean and polluted air. Draw a picture representing both types of air.
2. Write suggestions for cleaning up the air.

Wind

A. Literature Experience

Read or listen to The wind blew, by Pat Hutchins (New York: McMillan, 1974).

Expressive Activity

After reading the story, see if you can sequence the flying objects in the story from your memory. Rewrite the story using new flying objects.

B. Literature Experience

Read or listen to Please wind? by Carol Greene (Chicago: Children's, 1982), and Corey's kite, by Hannah Roche (New York: De Agostini, 1996).

Expressive Activity

1. Kite Making Center

- a. Create flying objects using paper, dowels, string, and sticks.
- b. Go outside and fly your kite.
- c. After flying your kite report on how it flew.

2. Windmills

- a. Using straws, construction paper, and pins, create a windmill.
- b. Check the wind direction and speed with the mill.
- c. Discuss why windmills were needed in the past.

Poetry and Wind

A. Literature Experience

Read the poems in the Poetry Center on wind.

Expressive Activity

Create a cinquain poem about wind.

Form

Line 1	Wind	
Line 2	2 Words	Use words describing wind
Line 3	3 Words	Use words describing wind
Line 4	4 Words	Use words describing wind
Line 5	1 Word	Related to wind

Storms

A. Literature Experience

View Thunder cake on video, by Patricia Polacco (New York: Philomel, 1990).

Expressive Activity

1. Tell about an experience you have had with a storm.
2. Make a thunder cake.

B. Literature Experience

Read or listen to Bizzy Bones and Uncle Ezra, by Jacqueline Briggs Martin (New York: Harper, 1984).

Expressive Activity

Compare and contrast the characters and their feelings in Thunder cake and Bizzy Bones and Uncle Ezra.

Summary

A print-rich environment can nurture young children's involvement in the writing process. Supported by quality literature that offers both content and models of language, children can be empowered to create meaning through the writing process, thus extending their thinking-language abilities. Children's understanding of the writing process and their personal-social development can be fostered by interactions with others--sharing their writing and assessing their progress and instructional needs with peers and teachers.

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