

Looking at the elements of a comprehensive literacy program and how they can be embedded throughout the day to engage literacy instruction.

By Brenda Fowler

Classroom Environment Supports Literacy

- We try to have lots of opportunities to read and to write all around the classroom.

We have our word wall which includes our names with photos that the students can access easily and is a good way to interest the children to read in an authentic way. They want to be able to read and write their own names as well as those of their friends and teachers.

We distribute meaningful and inclusive literacy materials throughout the room.

Every centre has pencils, paper and clipboards readily available.



Reading and writing are closely connected.
If there is a reason to write then there is a
reason to read.



- The students label the room and read the signs. We encourage the children to write notes and signs during play that other children will want or need to read.
- We put books of interest at all the centres as well as paper and writing tools. When children read or write during play, we often celebrate their learning at whole group reflection time.

Everyday we read to children - a balance of fiction and non-fiction.



- We discuss prior/during/after reading information. We orally retell, relate and reflect on the stories. We introduce story patterns, plots and characters. We generally do Read Alouds in whole group as well as small group settings if needed.
- During Read Aloud/Think Alouds, we make the lesson very explicit, short, and fast-paced. Those that will still need more support will get it in smaller groups.

Everyday I read with 2 small groups of students.



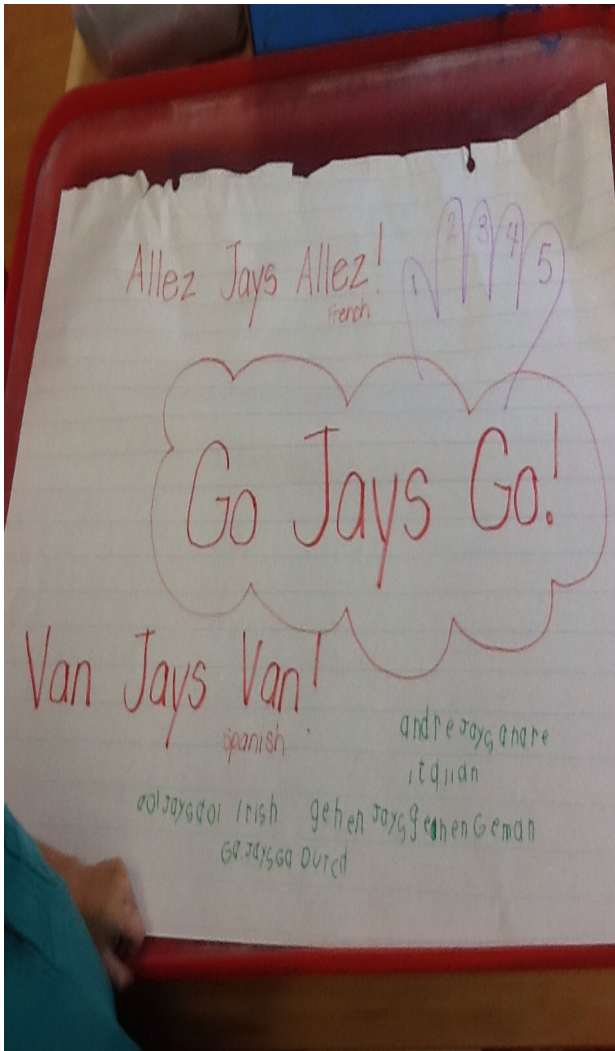
- This is guided reading lessons. We do picture walks, look at rhyming words, and concept about print. After whole group learning, off to learning centres the students go. I quickly assemble my "lucky duckies" (the lucky group of students who show me how to read). Guided groups are done usually with 4 students maximum. I pick a target area for learning based on the groups' needs. If other students want to watch or participate in the reading lesson, I allow them to join.
- During a guided reading group, we sometimes get other students who will come over and listen and they can come and go as they please. Although they are not part of the lesson, they hopefully absorb what they need from it. Plus they are always welcome to look at the book after the lesson is finished. The students know that if they are called to a guided reading lesson, they can go right back to where they were playing as soon as we are done. A guided reading lesson is usually 5 to 10 minutes maximum.

Everyday, the students read by themselves.



- This is done during Book Browse time (self selected reading), literacy centres and also through the home reading program. There are opportunities throughout the day for the children to explore books on their own or with friends during a quiet time over the lunch hour. The students who participate in Guided Reading groups also have a small bag of “just right” books all their own.
- Some students can read on their own, some students are looking at the pictures in books, some are listening to others read (e.g. student teacher, or parent volunteers) and others are looking at alphabet books. It is a great time to observe what the students can do on their own. As part of our home reading program, all students will take home a book a night at their independent reading level. Students who have not produced a running record take home easy level 1 books and their parents can help them read it.

Everyday we write for children.

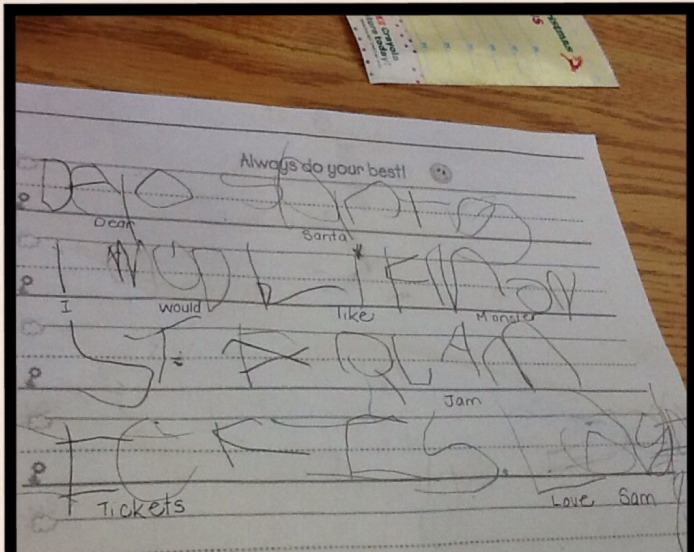


- This is done during writing workshop lessons. We model 'think alouds'. We display the writing visuals for children to revisit and reread after the lesson. When students see there is a purpose to their writing and that they are writing like adults, they are very motivated to write. Writing is a learned skill.
- We teach modeled, shared, and interactive writing in a whole group setting because everyone is being introduced to the form for writing. We can also have whole group lessons when we are modeling the sheer joy of writing or during some shared writing experiences. Interactive writing happens once a week where I share the pen with the students. The students write as much as they can and we all edit it when we are finished.

Everyday, we write with the students.

Sam's letter to Santa

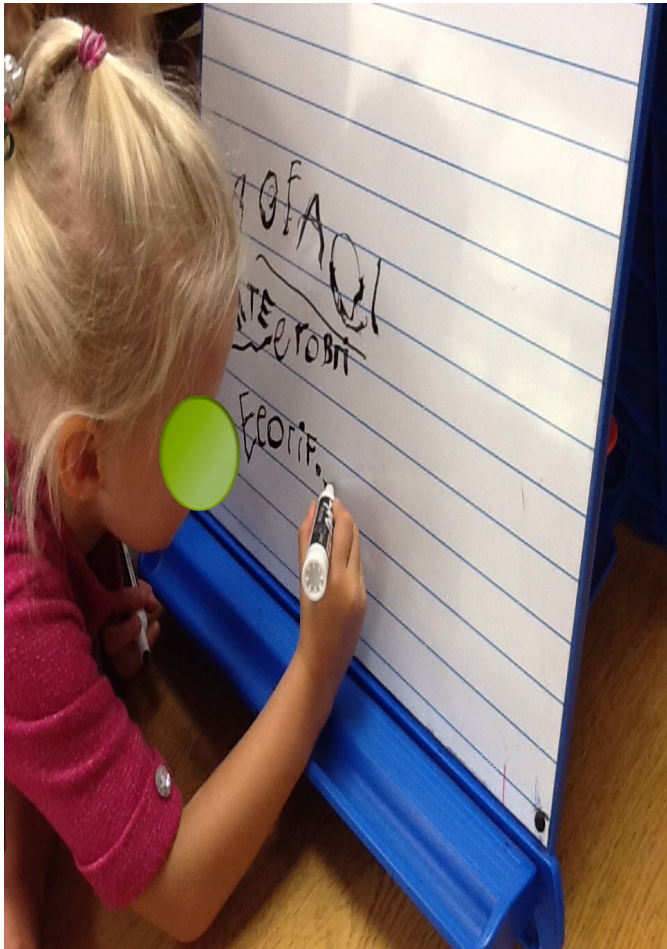
Sam wrote a letter to Santa asking for tickets to Monster Jam. He mentioned he would have to ask for 2 tickets so an adult could come with him. He told us he needed to add the letter S to the end of tickets to make it more than one ticket.



He independently sounded out the words and wrote the letters with the use of an ABC chart.

- In small groups, guided writing teaches the students the mechanics of writing. The students need to be in groups that can better address their proximal zone of development.
- In our classes, we can have students that are just learning to hold a pencil as well as students that are able to write several sentences or more with mostly conventional spelling. It's impossible to meet these learners' diverse needs in a whole group setting.

Everyday, students will write by themselves.



- This is done at the writing centre or any of the other learning centres during inquiry time. In our classes, we can have students that are just learning to hold a pencil as well as students that are able to write several sentences or more with mostly conventional spelling. It's impossible to meet these learners' diverse needs in a whole group setting. We need to honour the learning that presents itself naturally during play because that is where some of the really best learning takes place.
- Sadly, we can't expect all our students will use play opportunities to support writing in the classroom. At the end of every day, we have a sharing time where we briefly share some of the learning that has happened during our learning time. The students appear to enjoy listening to other student's learning stories, while engaging them in further learning. We often share a student's writing a day and invite the other students to try it in their own writing.