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Learning to Write and Loving It!.

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Interactive Journal Writing in Preschool and Kindergarten

In her article “A Sense of Story: Interactive Journal Writing in Kindergarten,” Susan White Cress (1998) describes how using interactive journals in kindergarten can encourage young children to write, help them to understand the writing process, and at the same time develop a sense of story. Cress describes some research findings with regard to journal writing in kindergarten classes. Typically, kindergarten children draw pictures, may label something in the picture, and sometimes write or dictate short sentences. But there is rarely any connection from one day’s writing to the next. Each piece of writing becomes its own entity. Since there is usually only a line or two of writing, rarely is there a sense of story. However, according to Cress’s research, children do learn about the writing process and story writing through interactive journal writing. They are also motivated to write because they are writing to someone (in this case, you) who will write back. Cress outlines an effective step-by-step process for implementing interactive writing journals.

MINI-LESSONS 9.3

Implementing Interactive Journal Writing

- 1. Place 10 pages of blank paper into a booklet format. Cover each booklet with colored construction paper. Instruct the children to use one page of their booklet per day so that the journal lasts about two weeks, assuming daily writing. Two weeks typically also works well in developing “stories” as their writing on the same topic extends day to day. For each subsequent booklet created, use different colored covers. For example, make the first set of booklet covers blue, the second red, and so on. This will help you to keep track of how much each child is writing. Although finishing a booklet is not the goal, we know that to develop the skill and the will to write, young children need to write a great deal.**

Model and think aloud to demonstrate how the children are to draw and write on each page. Some children might need to be shown how to divide their page with a line so that there is room for both writing and drawing.



2. Have a heterogeneous group of children sit together at a table on Day 1 so that they can learn from and support one another. The children will be at different writing skill levels. Some may be scribbling, others may be writing words to go with their pictures.
3. Instruct the children to draw and write about whatever they want on the first page of the journal. Explain to the children that you will speak with them about what they wrote and that you will write back to them.
4. As the children finish their work, speak with them about their writing. It is best not to ask them what they wrote as some may not actually know or remember what they wrote. Instead, ask each child to tell you about his or her writing and drawing. Some children may read what they wrote while others might make up something or simply describe their drawing. To remember the child's message, underwrite in conventional script or write the conventional script on a sticky note. (For more information on underwriting, see Chapter 2 on page 43.) Be sure to write back before the next day. For example, if the child drew a picture of a cat and wrote *M CT (my cat)*, write back by asking a question at the top of the next page (page 2) such as, *What does your cat like to do?* It is important that your response is at the top of the next page. This enables the child to copy some of the words from your response in his or her response if desired.
5. The next day (Day 2), review what the child wrote on Day 1 and read your question response to the child. Have the child point to each word as you read. Next, direct the child to respond in words and pictures below your question on the second page. The dialogue about the cat might go on for two full weeks. In the end, the child may create a story about the cat or simply describe the cat. Each day, the child is encouraged to start at the beginning of the book and review what has been written (and drawn). They are reminded that this is what published adult authors like Eric Carle and Kevin Henkes do.
6. Once a booklet is completed, the finished product is sent home with a note to parents/caregivers explaining the interactive journal-writing process and ways that they can support the process (see Reproducible 9.1: Interactive Journal Writing, on the CD).

