

Activities for Supporting Early Writing Development Level II

Activity One: Language Experience Activity-Individual Dictation

When young children are in the scribbling and mock-handwriting stages of writing development, they need daily opportunities to see “real” letters and words in printed form.

This activity helps children to:

- discover the relationship between spoken and written language
- know that their thoughts and words are valued
- view writing as a meaning-making process
- see conventional models of letters and words
- realize that we can write what we say, and we can read what we write.

Directions: Ask children to focus on a specific object or event, such as a classroom pet, field trip, book, photograph, toy, or a piece of their art. Encourage individual children to talk about the selected item, as you proceed through the following steps of this Language Experience Activity.

Step One: Encourage the child to dictate statements about the selected item.

Step Two: As the child watches, write down the child’s words-exactly as they are said.

Step Three: After each sentence, read back what was recorded, pointing to each word in a word-by-word fashion, moving from left-to-right and top-to-bottom of the page.

Step Four: Invite the child to read along with you on a second reading of the words dictated by the child. When the child is reading confidently, lower your voice to almost a whisper while reading along. If the child hesitates on words and sentences, read along in a stronger voice.

Step Five: Invite the child to illustrate the page where the dictation was recorded.

Step Six: Encourage the child to share his or her dictation by reading it to others.

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Activity Two: Group Experience Stories

Teachers can provide new information about writing by “thinking out loud” as they are writing words, phrases, and sentences dictated by the children.

This activity helps children:

- see the relationship between spoken and written words
- see that their thoughts and words are valued
- develop an understanding of the way letters and words are formed
- understand that writing is a thinking process
- understand that we can write what we say, and we can read what we write.

Directions: As teachers, we want children to develop an “inner understanding” of how writing works. As children discover new understandings about writing, and begin to practice new skills, teachers can foster continued development by providing still new knowledge and by modeling even newer skills. Following are some brief steps to conducting a group dictation activity:

1. Encourage the children to talk about a recent experience in which all children participated, such as a field trip, a special classroom event, or activity.
2. Ask: What might others (parents, older siblings, other visitors) want to know about this?
3. Tell the children you want to write down what they say so that others can read and know about this topic.
4. Using a toy microphone or telephone as a prop, invite children to take turns telling you what they have to say.
5. Write down the exact words said by the children. Think aloud as you write. For example: Let’s see, John said, “I like summer because we can swim.” I need to start over here on the left side of the paper...and at the top. I need to start with a capital “I” because that’s the first word in John’s sentence.
6. Put the child’s name in parentheses () after his or her sentence. This helps children remember which sentence they or their friends offered.
7. Reread each child’s sentence, using a pointer (unsharpened pencil, one half of a dowel stick, etc.) pointing in a word-by-word fashion to each word in the sentence. Call attention to the words that are repeated more than once. These might be underlined or circled with different colored markers. Also call attention to any words that start the same in the child’s sentence, or in any of the sentences written up to this point.
8. Invite the children to read along with you as you reread each child’s sentence, pointing in a word-by-word manner to each.
9. Let children volunteer to hold a pointer and attempt to point to the words while the rest of the group rereads again.

10. You may wish to extend the activity by typing the dictation on paper and making a copy for each child to illustrate and keep.
11. Depending on the topic, dictated charts also make nice additions to a parent newsletter.

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Activity Three: Using Children's Names

For most children, their first written word is their name. When children are presented with many, varied reasons for writing their name daily, they begin to develop mental models for what letters look like. This attention to print helps children progress through the stages of writing development—from scribbling to real writing. Following are a variety of ways children can be involved in recognizing and writing their names.

Directions: Make a list of each child's name beside a small photograph of him or her. Make copies of this list to put at the Writing Center, next to the sign-in sheet, and in the Art Area. Put name cards with children's names and photographs on their cubbies, lockers, and on any other "personal space" areas. Cut apart one of the lists into strips with each child's photo and name on a separate strip (posterboard works best for this activity.) Punch a hole in the upper left corner of each of the name strips or cards and put them together with a metal ring or shower curtain hook. Place these in the writing area for use by children who want to trace or copy their name:

1. **Who Stole the Cookie From the Cookie Jar?** Write the verse "Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar?" on a piece of chart paper, and write each child's name on a paper cookie shape. Place all paper cookies in a cookie jar or other container. Invite the children to chant with you as you point to the words on the chart. As each verse is chanted, let children take turns drawing out one cookie from the jar. Hold up the cookie for the children to see whose name is there. The name on the cookie is the name used in the verse. (For example, "Mary stole the cookie from the cookie jar. Who me? Yes, you. Not me. Couldn't be.")
2. **Class Peek-a-Boo Books:** Make class peek-a-boo books by putting one child's name and picture on each page. Cover the picture with a flap that can be lifted up to reveal the picture. Put all of the pages together and bind with a cover that reads "Our Class." Children will love taking turns seeing if they can read the names of their classmates, and then checking themselves by lifting up the flap to see the photograph.
3. **Sign-Up Sheets:** Have sign-up sheets for each center and let children sign-up during planning time to play at a particular center. You might make a 9 x 12 poster for each center by writing the name of the center, and pasting photographs, digital picture, or drawings from catalogs representing the materials found there. Leave plenty of room for children to sign their names. Laminate the posters and let children use wipe-off pens to sign up to play at centers of their choice.

- 4. Nursery Rhyme Play With Names:** Have sentence strips with lines from nursery rhymes such as *Mary Had A Little Lamb*, *Jack Be Nimble*, *Mary, Mary Quite Contrary*, *Jack and Jill* and *Humpty Dumpty*. Place a nursery rhyme sticker, or drawing on the corner of each sentence strip to help the children identify the rhyme. Also have children's names written on sentence strips, cut to the length of their name, and stored in a container. Show a line from a nursery rhyme and invite children to join you in reading it. For example, "Mary had a little lamb." Let children take turns drawing a name from the container. Using a paper clip, clip the child's name over the name of the nursery rhyme character. Invite children to read with you again, substituting the child's name for the nursery character. Let children recite the entire rhyme in unison, with you pointing to the card with the child's name, each time a substitution occurs.

- 5. A Tisket, A Tasket:** Have children's name cards in a basket. As children sing "A tisket, a tasket, a green and yellow (substitute colors for those in your basket) basket. I wrote a letter to my friend and on the way I dropped it." Let children take turns pulling out a name. They are to read the name on the card and drop it behind the child whose name is on the card.

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Activity Four: Creating Patterned Language Charts

Seeing the same words repeated over and over again in print helps children develop a mental storehouse of what letters and words look like. Additionally, children come to understand that words are spelled in the same way each time we write them.

Through this activity, children will:

- begin to see likenesses and differences in letters and words
- begin to move eyes from left-to-right across a line of print
- gain confidence in rereading the sentences written on charts
- gain familiarity with basic sight words, such as *the, and, this, my, me, we, have, see, want, like, can.*

Directions: Using chart paper, record children's responses to open-ended sentence starters such as "See our...", "These are our...", "I have a ...," "We can...", "This is creating and using these repetitive, patterned charts:

1. On the first line of a piece of chart paper, write a sentence starter, such as the ones suggested above.
2. Initiate a discussion to prompt children to respond with words to complete the sentence starter. For example, if discussing items children brought for show and tell, the adult might write "This is my" on the chart and ask children to tell her what they brought to share.
3. Write the children's words to fill in the blanks on the chart, and record the child's name in parentheses next to the sentence:
This is my boat. (Maria)
This is my doll. (Sherri)
This is my whistle. (Henry)
4. After each entry, invite children to read the sentence with you as you use a pointer to point to each word. Let children take turns trying to use the pointer to reread the entire chart, once all children have had their turn.
5. Pictures, stamps, stickers, or drawings can be placed by you or by the children next to their sentences, if appropriate. These picture clues are helpful to children in remembering what each sentence says.
6. These charts can be clipped with clothespins on clothes hangers and hung within easy reach of the children for rereading during Center Time.