
UNIT 15 : CREATING A WRITING ENVIRONMENT

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15.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall look at suitable ways of stimulating and encouraging children to write in their second language i.e. English, within the Indian context.

After you complete this unit you should be able to:

1. motivate children to communicate and gradually express themselves through written English by creating a conducive environment.
2. provide suitable experiences to generate purposeful writing activity.
3. provide real audiences.
4. develop a writing programme within the context of the primary school curriculum.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Learning to read and write is a process of experiencing language. Children learn to talk in a language by participating in communicative interactions. They receive a feedback about what they have said. They discover whether their meaning has been understood. They learn to refine their language to be able to convey their meaning adequately to a particular audience. Once a child has begun to communicate orally in a language, writing can be introduced.

Writing is the physical expression of what you think. The close relationship between writing and thinking makes writing valuable. As young children struggle with what to put down next, or how to put it down on paper, they often discover a new way of expressing an idea. Sometimes they rethink the idea itself. It allows the writer time to look at, as well as reflect upon thoughts, ideas, feelings or experiences, since there is a degree of permanence about writing. It is something you can go back to. The child

also begins to realise the power of written words, as vehicles which communicate our thoughts to others. She discovers a real need to find the right word or construct a correct sentence. Often it is indicative of a search for meaning and reveals the amount the child knows. Thus writing is closely related to the inner processes within a child's mind i.e. the internal manipulation of external experiences. In addition to this, writing reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary that we have been teaching our children.

Most writing by young children can be considered as encoded speech i.e. residual images of experiences are stored within a child's mind and are transformed into inner speech. This is then transliterated into a graphic form which is writing. Initially children communicate their experiences and ideas in a variety of ways such as through talking, through actions or through drawings. Writing which is a sophisticated, abstract and complex symbol system gradually gains importance as the child grows older.

As with most forms of expression, writing will not flourish, unless it gives the child some form of satisfaction. Initially, the fact that the writing exists, that it is finished, may be enough to make the writer feel that the effort to produce it has been worthwhile. But such satisfactions are short lived. The more important and long lasting satisfaction comes from the need to communicate to somebody. Therefore, any meaningful writing activity comes from a sense of wanting to convey something to a real audience. For writing to grow and flourish, the classroom environment should provide plenty of opportunities for communication in a naturalistic way. It is in such non-threatening environments that children begin to experiment with and explore an unfamiliar language and discover the strategies that allow her to be an effective language user. When children are writing they should be encouraged to alternate between encoding (writing) and decoding (reading) the writing. If the teacher finds that children are not able to read what they have written, there is a need to look at the specific problem and provide additional help. The assessment of the quality of childrens' work is subjective, but an on-going programme of formal instruction geared to the specific requirements of the class is advised. This is developed by the teacher on the basis of the specific needs of the class at different stages. We shall look at some ways of doing this in later units. In this unit we shall limit ourselves to the creation of a conducive classroom environment for writing.

It is by creating a natural language environment in which children are enthusiastically experimenting with written language that we can help children become confident and successful writers. We shall now look at how a teacher can provide this environment.

15.2 SPECIAL NEEDS OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Initially bilingual children seem to acquire two sets of lexical items (one of their first language, and the other of their second language), and one syntactic system. This has been noticed more so in cases where the second language is being developed under natural conditions. Slowly, however, with greater exposure, children begin to acquire the second syntactic system. The important issue has to do with the transition from the mother tongue to the second language. For children who do not have support in the second language at home, acquiring functional competency in the second language may not be so easy. This situation gets aggravated by the fact that 'English' is given an added social value, while the native language of some of the children may be considered socially backward, particularly in the case of children using non-standard languages or dialects. The teachers' own attitude towards such children is of great importance. Children need to feel proud of their own language and cultural backgrounds. This comes from a feeling of acceptance. The transition to the second language happens gradually. Until the child feels confident in the second language, she is going to keep drawing support from her mother tongue. Since we function in multicultural classrooms, it is a challenge to us teachers, to make sure that all the children in the class feel confident to use their mother tongues, whenever the need arises. Not only does this enrich the class environment, but it also gives the children a strong foundation from which to launch into the second language. Acceptance of

dialectical renderings or metaphorical usages not known to English, are important. This in fact enriches the English in use, and links it to the children's lives, making it more meaningful. It is therefore important that the teacher should examine her own attitudes towards the children's native languages (particularly if these are non-standard).

The teacher also needs to be sensitive to possible areas of mismatch between the child's own language and the second language. She should look out for areas of confusion and provide special formal instruction in these areas. For example, first language (Mother Tongue) interference often leads to the incorrect placement of the verb in a sentence, for children who come from a Hindi speaking background. The teacher in this case should give the children additional practice to overcome this problem.

If the writing process is to develop naturally, then it is important to allow some mother-tongue usage until such times as when a child has enough mastery over the second language to not require the mother tongue. The policy of "speak in English only" is not found to be conducive to learning naturally. The transition is gradual, and if we do not allow children to use the mother tongue we might completely block the children from being able to express themselves. We need to facilitate the transition, by providing suitable vocabulary or structures, as well as motivating children by creating a real need to communicate in the second language. This can be done by providing a secure and stimulating natural environment for language learning.

Check Your Progress 1

Why do children need to learn to write?

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15.3 CREATING A NATURAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

If we look at second language learning as it occurs in the natural environment, it becomes clear that the processes for the development of communication abilities develop, so long as the environment provides the necessary stimuli and experiences. The most important feature seems to be that the learner should need to use the second language for communicative purposes. This does not mean that a teacher is redundant or not required. The classroom is often called an artificial environment for learning and using a second language. However, linguists have realised that the classroom is a real social context in its own right, where learners and teachers enter into real social relationships with each other. Language structures and communicative functions are not bound to specific situations; once they have been mastered, they can be transferred to contexts other than the one where they were initially acquired. Structures and skills acquired by a second language learner in classroom interactions can be transferred to other kinds of situations and the other way round. The important thing is for a teacher

to try and use all the opportunities that a classroom provides for real communication. In this way the teacher utilises the natural learning environment within the classroom.

Given this general view it is important to realise that the natural language environment allows children to explore a variety of forms of writing, with a variety of different purposes. Broadly these may be categorised into three major categories -

1. **Transactional forms** : This is speaking/writing concerned with getting things done. It involves giving information, instructions, notes, giving messages, writing notices and other similar activities which attempt to advise, persuade or inform others.
2. **Expressive form** : This is language which is close to the self, used to reveal the nature of the person. It is a free flow to ideas and feelings.
2. **Poetic form** : Here the language used is fashioned in particular ways to make patterns. Language in this form is used as an art medium.

Any contrived writing experiences for children, within a classroom should ensure exposure to all three forms. It has been pointed out earlier that children learn to write through meaningful writing. The teacher's aim is to create a classroom environment in which children write about things that matter to them. The teacher would support them with suggestions of suitable form, vocabulary or writing conventions.

A peep into most existing primary schools does not reveal an environment of the kind described above. The classes appear to be very structured and teacher-directed. Student talk and student interactions are minimal. 'Being quiet and listening to the teacher', create a climate of controlled order, in which a child is not free to explore language—hence there is a minimal amount of meaningful usage of the language. Written work is limited to the text book and work book exercises or structured compositions, letters or paragraph writing. For real language learning to take place it is essential to create a climate where children feel free to use the language in its various forms in meaningful ways. It becomes the role of the teacher to create situations in which a child is required to interact and communicate with a real audience.

So far we have been discussing the need to create a non-threatening and conducive atmosphere in the classroom, so that children feel free to express themselves. We shall now look at some suggested guidelines for doing this.

15.3.1 Some Guidelines

1. We need to build our writing programme and the classroom environment around **the child's need to convey something to a recipient audience**. The primary drive for wanting to write comes from the need to communicate or convey an idea. In the process of exchanging written interactions, the child learns to understand other people's writings while they begin to understand what the child has written.
2. **We need to understand the importance of experimentation and risk-taking in the process of learning to write**. In an environment where children are not anxious about making mistakes, they explore the language in various ways. Through invented spellings, imitations of adult writings and their own inner drives, children step into unfamiliar language areas. As they use the language, as they write and speak and read in it, they become better equipped - they acquire new linguistic abilities. Their mistakes help a teacher to provide the formal instructions they need.
3. We need to understand that **children progress in different ways and at different paces**. Each child brings to her writings a rich background of experience. Whether this experience is supported by a literate background at home, or whether the child comes from an oral tradition will influence the child's writing.
4. **We need to support children's experiments with the new language, watching for conventions as they creep into their writing**. Children must feel comfortable exploring the written form of the second language. They must relate to it and

feel a sense of ownership about their writings, without being afraid to make mistakes. It is through this that each learner discovers the strategies that allow her to be an effective language user. Every time a teacher sets a topic, asks for a particular rhetorical form or expects accurate spellings and punctuations to take precedence over meaning, she is not giving children the opportunity for experiencing and experimenting with the language.

5. **Children need to be gently led into the arena of writing in the second language.** Since most children are reluctant to take risks and experiment with an unfamiliar language - the teacher designs writing activities which begin within a structured framework. Gradually as the child acquires competency over the lexical and syntactical structure of the second language, more open ended communicative activities are taken up. Use of the mother tongue is also allowed with gradual insistence on second language usage as the child becomes more confident.
6. **We need to recognise the importance of having audiences** respond to the meaning of what the child has written. Writing involves a constant sharing with others; talking and sharing about ideas and getting a feedback on whether those ideas have worked or not. Children need to write for many different purposes. They need to write for real audiences - for themselves for both younger and older children, for adults they know and for some general unknown audience as well.
7. **We need to provide demonstrations of what is involved in being a writer.** In order to help children develop as writers, we need to share in the writing process by being writers ourselves. By providing demonstrations of writing in action, by being partners in the creating process, we do more to help children figure out how to be writers in this way than all our correcting of their mistakes can ever hope to do.

15.3.2 Some Underlying Principles

1. Whether the child is writing in his mother tongue or in the second language, the child writes best about something she knows or has experienced or cares about.
2. Once a child has acquired confidence in the usage of a language, she should be free to choose what she wants to write about.
3. There is no one correct style of writing.
4. Children own their pieces of writing. Teacher's must respect this. Teacher's do not have a right to mutilate a child's piece of writing with red marks.
5. The teacher must focus on the content of the children's writing i.e. the ideas, the expressions, the details and the flow of ideas. These issues are more important than technical matters like writing conventions, or spellings and handwriting.
6. Children should be allowed to use invented spellings. The teacher and other children help the child to arrive at conventional spellings. The teacher however, needs to be sensitive to the special needs of non-standard speakers and provide the additional help they require. Formal structured reinforcement is provided from time to time.
7. There is no absolute level of proficiency that the child must attain. The teacher rejoices with each child at the progress she makes from any given point.
8. The teacher should also write some pieces with the children so that she can share the child's difficulties and triumphs.

15.4 MOTIVATING CHILDREN TO WRITE IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE

1. Create an environment which provides lots of opportunity for a range of reading and writing. This means that children need to read many different kinds of writing in order to learn the diverse forms that writers use for presenting their

ideas. Children need to look at books, both factual and fictional, they need to look at magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, notices, letters. Keep collecting different kinds of interesting written materials poems, ads, limericks, riddles, letters, the childrens own writings. Display the writings on the walls of your class. If there aren't enough display boards, paste the backs of old calendar papers and use those to pin the written material on. Put up interesting pictures. Keep changing these so that the children's level of interest is maintained. Make sure the displayed material is at the child's eye level. Interesting labels, greeting card messages, menu cards all interest children. Use material from day to day life. Children may not be able to read everything that is put up but if the display is attractive — children are drawn to it. They learn new words, new formats, they learn to write things in different ways. From time to time draw the children's attention to something you want to share. Try and change the displayed writings once a week or at least once every ten days. Let the children start getting excited about new displays. Displayed pieces of writing can be repeated. Children love to recall something they have seen earlier. They like repetitions. Ask children to help put up displays. Involve parents. The visual stimulation in the classroom plays an extremely important role in generating ideas for writing.

2. Make the classroom atmosphere friendly and non-threatening. If children are too shaky about writing in English get them to speak. Let them discuss, share, exchange ideas in a meaningful way, in pairs, in groups or with the whole class. Creative talking is a stimulus to creative writing. If children can communicate orally, the teacher can convince them that they have something to write about. Be careful not to block the children's ideas no matter how far fetched or unrealistic they may be. Sometimes a few children dominate classroom conversations, try and make sure this doesn't happen. Use different devices; for example you could have a press conference on some particular issue of interest to children. Let the other children ask questions, let the confident one's answer. Simple classroom debates, word games, guessing games, work as good starters for writing activities. Children begin to explore the new language with fun and enjoyment. They begin to gradually feel free to use it.

Check Your Progress 2

How does one create a writing environment in the class room?

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15.4.1 Some Ideas

Working with words : children need to develop a vocabulary base, which can be used in their writing. The following are samples of some activities that can be used as starters for developing a child's vocabulary in English, to enable the child to take part in subsequent writing activities.

1. Word ladders : choose a word from a page in the text book and write it in the middle of the blank page. Ask the children to confine themselves to certain pages of the lesson and find words that begin with the ending letter of the previous word. These are written in a ladder form as shown. Once children get stuck with ending letters, they turn to the beginning letters. See the illustration. See who can make the longest ladder. Let the children use as many words from their ladder to write a story/ poem/limerick. See who can use the maximum number of words.

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          F A T H E R
            E       A
              L     C
                G N O L       E A G E R
                  E           U
                    T             N O W
    
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Children can be asked to work in pairs. To make word ladders more challenging, restrict the words only to nouns, or verbs, etc. Experience shows that children do not tire of word ladders!

Extend this activity by asking children to find synonyms or antonyms for the words in the ladder.

2. Fuzzy words : Explain to the children that when we describe an object, person or place we must try and use clear descriptive words. Give them a short descriptive paragraph. Ask them to replace all the fuzzy (unclear) words like nice, good, bad with exact words. Help them do this together. Let the children share the exact words and make a list. Now let them become fuzzy word spotters. Everytime anyone in the class hears or reads a fuzzy word, let them note it on a fuzzy word page and find a more suitable word. Share the lists or put them up for display on a chart. Watch the children's collection grow!

3. Sense Words : Let the children think of an object or event they want to write about. Let each child then make a 'sensory chart' around it, to find suitable words that tell how it looks, sounds, smells and so on. This could initially be done on the board as a while class activity. Later children could work on sense words in groups. These words could then be used by children in their writing. Words must come from children. Let them find words.

An example of sense words for RAIN are given in the chart below. These words were generated with children from Class four.

WORDS	SIGHT WORDS	SOUND WORDS	SMELL WORDS	TASTE WORDS	TOUCH
RAIN	FALLING	SSSHH	COOL	CLEAN	WET
WATER	POURING	PITTER-	FRESH	WET	DRIPPING
	BLURR	PATTER	MUDDY	COOL	SLIPPERY
	USHH	DRIP-DROP			STICKY
	FLASH	SPLISH			
		SPLOSH			

4. Rhyming words : Let children make rhyming words chains. Begin with a word, let the next child add a rhyming word, then the next. The child who get stuck starts with a new word. Let children make chains and write their rhyming words. Let them use these words in little rhymes.

5. Topsy turvy ads : Let each child bring an advertisement with not too much writing on it. Let them change every word that they can with its opposite. Let them re-write their funny ads and put them on display. Let the children read the different ads and see which is the funniest one.

6. Who am I? Riddles : Children love making riddles. Give them a simple format to begin with

I am

I am

I am

What am I?

Let children make their riddles in class and then ask each other the answer. See who has the one that's most difficult to guess.

7. Questions : Give the children a word. For example 'tomorrow'. How many questions can they think of, that have the answers tomorrow.

8. Thematic words : Draw a happy world and fill it up with happy words. A sad world with sad words and so on. Extend this to words that describe oneself when one is happy. Write about something that made you happy and so on.

9. Favourite words : Let each child write any five favourite words. Let them show how many different things they can do with their five favourite words.

There are endless word games, word puzzles and word activities.

Use ideas from the class, from the children to create activities to suit your purpose. Making friends with new words', can become an ongoing class activity. Children could be asked to display their new words in interesting ways, on the bulletin board. They could also be asked to make their own dictionaries, and keep adding new words. Telephone or alphabetic address books are very useful for this purpose. Try and use the new words in a follow up writing activity so that the children become familiar with them. Let the children have the final choice of what they'd like to write. Let there be many kind of writings at the same time. Let children work in groups and help each other. Offer help and support whenever it is asked for.

From words move to sentences

1. Stretching a sentence : Take short sentence. I am thin. or This is a boy. Ask the children to add words to go on stretching the sentence, see how long they can make it. The sentence must continue to be structurally correct.

2. Complete sentences

I wondered

I noticed

I couldn't really understand

I remember

I began to think

I was surprised

I wish

I love the way

I love the way

I hate

From sentences to structured writing -

I wish

I wish

I wish

I wish

then I would be as happy as

Change the words of a well known rhyme. Change the words of a simple song. Take a tune and make your own song. Write limericks. From a relatively structured language environment children should be gradually led on open ended writing activities where the choice of the topic, the genre, the audience is made by each child.

15.5 PROVIDING MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES AND USING THEM

The linear model for language development, which assumes that skills are acquired sequentially i.e. listening → speaking → reading → writing is now out of favour. The newer more flexible model favours learning to read and write as naturally as one learns to listen and speak. Recent research has begun to realize the weakness of the traditional text book based, teacher centred classroom. Any practising teacher knows that real, meaningful writing is seldom practiced in a traditional classroom. "Writing" instruction there, consists of workbook exercises, filling in blanks, answering questions and practicing writing. Children may be asked to write a paragraph or composition on a given topic, within a pre-determined framework. There isn't enough opportunity to use the language in a meaningful way. Children also do not get a chance to explore and discover the patterns of words, of sentences, and the rules that make the language a coherent system.

Children need to have something to write about, something to share. It is here that the real challenge lies. The task of the primary school teacher is to provide a range of experiences across the curriculum. She must support these experiences with suitable vocabulary and descriptive words to build up a good language base. These experiences must be provided by opportunities to recreate and relive the experience through drama music, discussions, reading and writing. The more varied and numerous these experiences are, and the more couched they are in language, the sounder the language base that the children will develop. Reading and writing then come about without tension.

Stimulating experiences which touch the emotions of wonder, interest, curiosity, concern and joy, which involve the whole body of the child and draw him into interaction with his peers should form the core of every literacy programme. A multicultural society such as ours offers a variegated environment — a wide variety of dress, festivals, food and life styles. All these can be tapped by a resourceful teacher with the help of parents. Images, symbols and metaphors from one language creep into another and bring in a new variety and richness. The kind of experiences vary. It could be a walk in the rain, a film, a visitor to the class, — may be a pet, an interesting science project, a cooking experience with the help of a mother celebrations of birthdays and festivals, putting up a special programme for grandparents, a visit to an exhibition, making of a model, a craft activity, a debate in school, a puppet show. It's really upto the teacher to turn every opportunity into a language experience. It's important to talk about these experiences, to share them and follow them up with a writing activity. This could be a thank you letter, it could be an article for the school magazine, it could be a description for a friend. The important thing is to make the writing activity an activity with a purpose. It must be written for someone. Let the child decide.

15.6 DEVELOPING A WRITING PROGRAMME

In the real world of classrooms, there are often rigid guidelines imposed by state educational policies, by school managements or other policy makers and educators. Teachers' performances are measured by the "syllabus coverage" and performance on achievement tests. Teachers' struggle to mark all the checklists, cover all the books and workbooks and prepare children for their examination. Children are busy studying about reading and writing and focusing on specific skills, rather than actually practicing reading and writing in meaningful ways. We continue to search for ways and means of implementing a language programme based on sound theory in our class-

rooms. We need to make adjustments in our existing curriculum to find a place for meaningful reading and writing activity. If a teacher is convinced that it is important it can be done. To develop a meaningful reading/writing programme one requires:

1. A daily time slot of preferably 45 mins. to 1 hour.
2. A calendar of experiences.
3. Parental support
4. Conviction

Some Practical suggestions

a. An activity based programme is not more expensive if one taps the available resources effectively. Walking trips to the neighbourhood, parent help, old magazines books and calendars are all resources that help. Use the wasted paper from photocopiers and printing presses to write on.

b. A class of 50 students is certainly daunting. To ensure that the teacher does not back out from activities and revert to rote teaching, the school climate needs to be supportive. When all their colleagues are taking the children to the local market or the nearby post office or planning unusual creative work, the new teachers are quickly caught up in the atmosphere. Such an atmosphere however, cannot be created by a single teacher, it has to be the joint effort of the entire school, and needs to be reflected in the schools policy. Parent volunteers are a wonderful resource. They can be tapped to accompany the children on field trips, celebrations, cooking experiences. A register can be maintained to ensure that parents are available whenever an experience is planned. In fact some functions can be planned and organised entirely by parents. This has been found to be very effective as parents also begin to get actively involved in the learning processes of their children.

c. Some activities are not possible to conduct with 50 students. Dividing them into smaller groups becomes necessary. By the time they are in Class three, a group of four children can satisfactorily complete an activity on their own. The teacher must give clear instructions and then move from group to group helping and supporting. For younger children, parent volunteers or senior students would be required to help, otherwise the teacher is compelled to stick to more structured activities.

d. Any activity based learning is noisy. We know that language cannot be learnt silently. So we simply have to accept the fact that if we are to use the language-experience approach the noise level will be high.

e. A calendar of experiences needs to be worked out and planned within the timetable. It can be linked up with other subject areas and project work. Children need to get clear instructions. There must be a discussion before and after. The experience must be followed up with activities which lead to writing. Volunteers must be contacted and all arrangements made in advance.

Correction : It is not possible for the teacher to look at every piece of writing that every child does, particularly if the class is large and the children are going to write at least four times a week, if not daily. Children need to be actively involved in the process of correction and evaluation, in fact these skills are an essential part of the writing process. Children at the elementary school level can be taught these through a writing programme which allows them time for drafting, revising and proof reading. Suggested ways of doing this in the class have been discussed in the unit on evaluation.

While correcting written work, the teacher would need to look at the content, the format, the appropriateness of the writing style to the type of text, lexical and grammatical items. She would take up individual discussions whenever required. She would not put red marks all over the writing, but would write comments in the margin in pencil. She could also use a coded systems of correction with different symbols to indicate different kinds of corrections. The children should be made familiar with this, and could also use it while doing self correction. The teacher would base formal

instructions on the insights she gains about the children's linguistic needs after she has gone through the children's writings. Children requiring special attention would be taken up separately.

15.8 THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The teacher needs to perform various roles, in order to create a stimulating classroom environment which promotes writing.

The teacher needs to:

1. Help students think about their topics before they write by talking about them with her or with one another. Exploring their topics through talking helps students:
 - a. discover the meaning they want to express
 - b. organise their thinking about what they want to say.
2. Encourage children to write about what is meaningful to them. Keeping diaries and journals helps children to choose topics which they care and feel about.
3. Move about the room as students write, responding to their work while it is incomplete. Ask students questions that help them discover where their meaning is incomplete or their content disorganised. When they have communicated well, show them your appreciation. Encourage children to talk about their writing, it helps them to clarify their thoughts and ideas.
4. Help students to see one another as writers and assist one another with their work. Even very young children can listen to or read someone else's writing and respond to it intelligently. We need to help children respect each other's writings and offer helpful suggestions. This process helps children to develop critical abilities. Occasionally it's a good idea for a teacher to have a demonstration for the whole class, where some children's writing is discussed. This helps children to know what to look for in a piece of writing.
5. Prepare a writing folder for each student. Preserve all drafts of all the students' work in their individual folders. Children can see their own progress when their writings are arranged in a chronological order. This is very encouraging for students as they begin to view writing as a growth process.
6. Provide real audiences. This has been discussed at length earlier. Sometimes children write for themselves, but more often they write to communicate with others. Writing is more likely to be improved when it is written to be read by a real audience. This also generates a greater involvement in the writing.
7. Relate language study to real language use. When children have a need to use something they are more apt to remember and use it. Writing for a meaningful purpose encourages children to make sure that their writing serves the purpose it is intended for or in other words the target audience is able to receive what the child wants to convey. This pushes children towards learning the conventions of standard language use. The teacher also needs to draw children's attentions to these conventions from time to time either through formal instructions or informally through individual discussions.
8. Use a variety of evaluation tools. Students improve as writers when they write frequently. The teacher needs to evaluate the children's writings in a variety of ways. First by noting the characteristics of their writing while it is developing and by keeping copies of all their work readily available, so that it is possible to note each child's progress and instructional needs. Responding to children's efforts as they write helps to improve their writing.

Check Your Progress 3

What are the main features of a good writing programme?

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15.9 LET US SUM UP

We looked at writing as a more sophisticated tool of communication than speech. It gives children an opportunity to communicate their thoughts and ideas more precisely and effectively to a specific audience, since it provides opportunities for refinement, which are not possible with speech. In the above unit we stressed the fact that a good writing programme builds on the innate desire of a child to communicate. It needs to tap the child's urge to write about things that are meaningful to him. The classroom environment needs to recreate a natural and non-threatening environment, which allows freedom to the child to communicate purposefully, without getting totally bogged in the mechanics of writing. The teacher needs to provide extra support, where ever required. Writing is also greatly enhanced in a stimulating environment, where children have rich resources of experiences, displays, discussions etc, from which to draw ideas for writing. What such a programme requires is not large material resources, but a motivated and resourceful teacher, who is excited about writing and brings this excitement into the classroom in various ways.

15.10 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

Writing is any form of communication that involves the written word. It involves children with the real happenings of their minds, words, hearts. It permits children to communicate over time and space. It also benefits thinking. Children learn to focus and reflect upon their thinking. Written words can be inspected, reconsidered, rearranged. Students can explore their feelings and deal with real life experiences through writing. Regular purposeful writing leads children to recognise and learn standard grammatical forms and standard usage. Finally research indicates that children who learn to write also become better readers.

Check Your Progress 2

The valve that opens fluent, effective writing communication is an environment where children can risk exposing their real lives. Where the act of telling what one is really thinking and feeling is treated with the utmost respect. Where children are not afraid and anxious about making mistakes, but instead are being constantly guided to learn from their mistakes.

In such a writing environment there is -

- * acceptance
- * open-communication
- * absence of stress
- * loads of stimulation through displays, activities, and meaningful experience.

Check Your Progress 3

The two most important features are time and support.

Learning to write well requires time. It requires writing frequently, preferably every day. Writing must have a chance to grow — to change, to be revised. The ability to use standard grammatical forms and standard usage does not develop in a day or two, it takes months and months of constant usage. Good writing involves integrating thinking and language with the purpose for writing.

Writing also requires support. Teachers' can offer support in the following ways -

1. Talking to children about the content of their writing, before, during and after the actual writing has taken place, helps children to clarify their thoughts.
2. Providing meaningful experiences which stimulate ideas for writing.
3. Providing a real audience as well as real reasons for writing. This makes it worth while for students' to improve their writing.
4. Helping children choose topics, by getting them to write about things they know and care about. This helps a child to discover own voice as a writer.
5. Relating the study of punctuation, spelling, language conventions to language use. Standard usage and editing skills are best learnt when their study relates to communicative purposes.
6. Sharing the excitement of writing. The teachers eagerness sparks the children.
7. Respecting children's writings.
8. Encouraging inventiveness.
9. Providing a free and non-threatening environment in which children can write without stopping to correct. Very often childrens ideas come faster than their thoughts. They go back subsequently and revise, correct and redraft the writing.
10. Finally caring about writing and using all possible resources, ideas, materials to create a rich and stimulating writing environment.