

Children's Writing

Early Literacy Initiative

Resource Book 3



Editors

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early literacy initiative



TATA TRUSTS

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Azim Premji School of Education,
Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad.



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This Resource Book is part of a series brought out by the Early Literacy Initiative anchored by the
Azim Premji School of Education at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad.

Introduction

That Indian children are not learning to read or write proficiently is fairly widely known. The ASER annual reports document this dismal picture year after year—with little improvement over time. “Fixing” early literacy is not easy. The solutions don’t lie in simplistically finding the “right methods,” or teaching the “right skills.” Early literacy and language learning in India occur in complex landscapes characterised by rich linguistic diversity, and riddled with deep socioeconomic divides, poor teacher education, and a somewhat poorly functioning educational system. Debates related to issues such as medium of instruction, language planning and policy making abound. In this context, there is an urgent need to facilitate conversations around important issues as well as to contribute to knowledge creation and dissemination.

The Early Literacy Initiative (ELI) is a project anchored by the Azim Premji School of Education at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad with a view to address the need for building awareness and knowledge related to early language and literacy in India. The initiative is funded by the Tata Trusts.

ELI undertook two kinds of print-based initiatives to address the need for disseminating knowledge in a usable form for practitioners – the creation and distribution of thematic blogs and practitioner briefs. This work is available at the ELI website: <http://eli.tiss.edu/>, and is also compiled into ELI Resource Books.

Thematic Blogs. Five themes were identified as centrally relevant to the domain of early language and literacy in India (see below). We invited original blog pieces related to each theme from a variety of stakeholders working in the domain—from practitioners to academics. Members of the ELI team also wrote pieces for these themes. Care was taken to address various aspects of each theme through the invited pieces. While putting together the themes, the ELI team created brief annotated bibliographies for each. Talks, presentations, essays and opinion pieces by ELI team members related to each theme were also collected. A total of 45 original blog pieces and approximately 150 annotations were created across the five themes and are represented in the five ELI Resource Books.

The five books are:

ELI Resource Book 1. Multilingual Education in India

ELI Resource Book 2. Children’s Literature

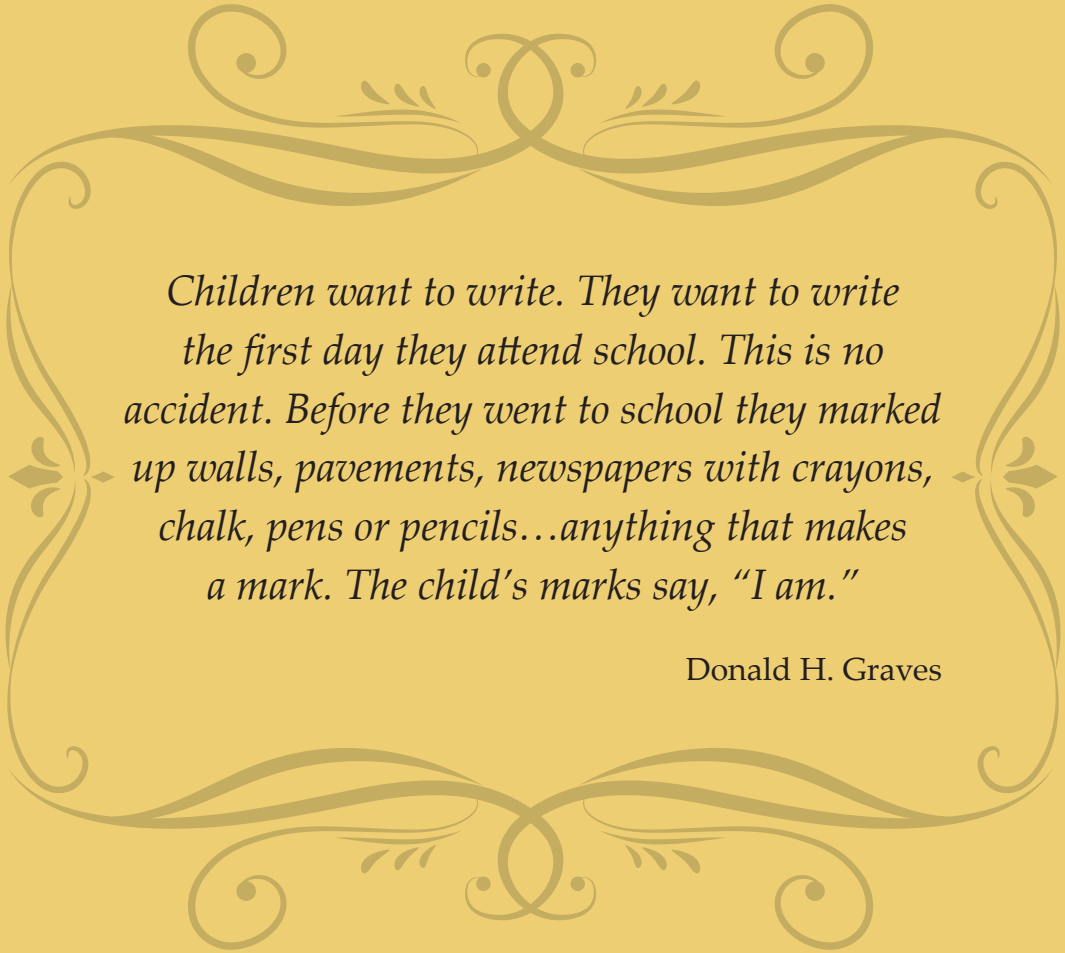
ELI Resource Book 3. Children’s Writing (this book)

ELI Resource Book 4. Decoding the Script

ELI Resource Book 5. Comprehension

Practitioner Briefs. The blog pieces, while written in an easy-to-access style, are more focused on building perspectives. On the other hand, the practitioner briefs are a collection of “How-tos” for people working in the field. The briefs draw upon perspectives to help practitioners imagine relevant practices on the ground. A total of 21 briefs are compiled into seven thematic booklets. Each thematic booklet consists of a set of three to four briefs.

While both blog pieces and practitioner briefs were written originally in English, the intent is to eventually translate them into regional languages to make them widely available to practitioners. We hope that this consolidation of original and accessible writings on early language and literacy for Indian contexts will be of help in your work!



Children want to write. They want to write the first day they attend school. This is no accident. Before they went to school they marked up walls, pavements, newspapers with crayons, chalk, pens or pencils...anything that makes a mark. The child's marks say, "I am."

Donald H. Graves

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BLOG PIECES

Introduction to Children's Writing

Shuchi Sinha

In this piece, Shuchi Sinha introduces readers to the theme of Children's Writing. She discusses why it is important to begin re-imagining. Children's Writing in Indian classroom the piece also introduces readers to other topics discussed in this resource book.

What do we mean by “children's writing”? We are not referring to children's mastery of the script—learning to write *aksharas*, words, or to copy-write sentences. We are not referring to their ability to spell correctly or to write neatly. In this booklet, we explore ideas related to teaching children to write to express and communicate in a way that is relevant and meaningful for them (see Figure 1). The challenge is to work in a way such that children identify themselves as life-long writers, writing not just for formal schooling, but also to communicate, express and reflect in their day-to-day lives.

Let's look at a few key topics that this resource book engages with.



Figure 1. Children engaged in writing, drawing and expressing. **Image Courtesy:** Roshni Choudhary, Telugu Intervention Project, ELI, TISS Hyderabad; and QUEST, Maharashtra.

What are Children Writing in School?

The standard system of assessment in the Indian school system is heavily biased towards the written form. Thus, children spend many hours in early years learning how to perfect the script, and later on, on how to use this knowledge to write answers, essays, compositions, and the like. In her blog piece, "What do Children Write in Class?", Diksha Kharbanda describes children's writing in a government school in Telangana. She observes that most of the writing tasks given to children concern themselves with copywriting and rote-learning.

Most Indian children learn to write this way. This approach, as I am sure many of us remember from our childhood, turns writing into a detached and burdensome process. So, learners often discontinue writing once it is no longer a requirement of their formal education.

There are also stories of hope, as we see in Divi Singh's piece, "Developing Writing Skills in Primary Students." Divi, a teacher at a private school in Bangalore, uses differentiated instruction to make writing relevant and accessible to different students. She uses a range of strategies, such as creating a strong connection between children's exposure to literature and writing, holding literary discussions, exposure to different genres of writing exercises and so on, to enhance her students' interest. As a result, many students in Divi's classes are writing at will, and creating written texts that are closer to their lives, interests and needs.

A simplistic comparison of Divi's classroom to that described by Diksha would be dangerous. These classrooms are drawn





But in our schools, our students tell us they don't want to write. They need not bother to tell us; we can feel their apathy as they crank out stories that are barely adequate; we can hear their question, 'How long does it have to be?' We forget that we, too, would yawn and roll our eyes if we were asked to write about our summer vacation or our favorite food. We do not consider how we would feel if the only response to our hard-earned stories were red-penned 'Run-ons.'

Lucy Calkins (as cited in Hechinger, 1985)



from two extreme ends of the spectrum of school types in India. The classroom Diksha describes is in an under-resourced government school, with under-trained and over-worked teachers. Divi teaches at a private school with students from upper-middle class families.

Our intent, therefore, is not to compare, but to raise awareness and start conversations around how teachers could find support and motivation in shifting writing curricula to more meaning-based forms. Ideally, curricular reform and teacher education could be important sites for taking on such work. In the absence of work at these levels, we need to make focused efforts with teachers and teacher educators to develop a nuanced understanding of children's writing, along with supporting and empowering them to work creatively within systemic constraints.

Emergent Writing

The idea that a child begins to write only when she has learnt the letters correctly and spells words accurately ignores a crucial phase of learning: when a child scribbles, draws, and invents spellings to represent the physical and social world around her. This developmental aspect of children learning to write is mostly ignored in our understanding and practices.

According to the emergent literacy framework (Strickland, 1990; Strickland & Morrow, 1989), early attempts of the child to express herself in the written form—drawing or scribbling or using inventing spellings—count as attempts at writing (see Figure 2). Many developmental phases can be observed in a child's journey through emergent writing. In their blog piece, "Children's Writing: How Does

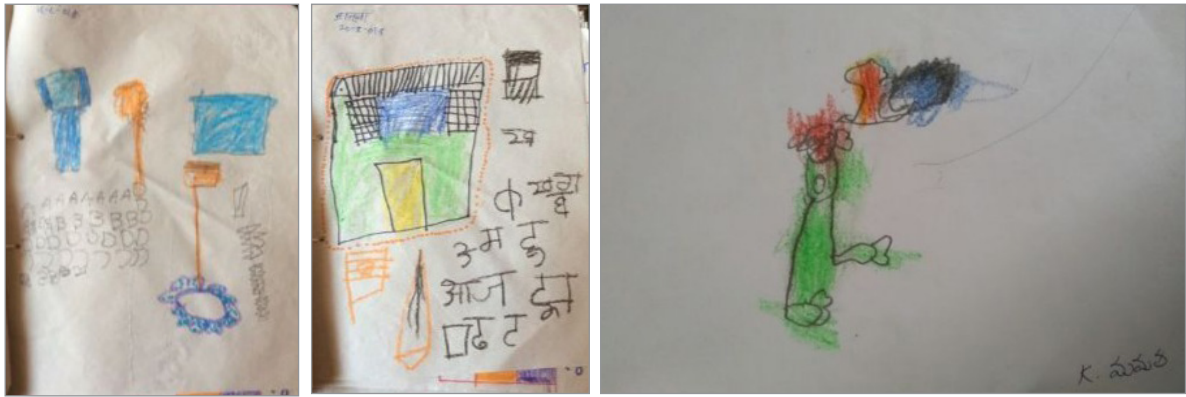


Figure 2. Samples of Emergent Writing. **Image Courtesy:** Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan, Phaltan; and Roshni Choudhary, Telugu Intervention Project, ELI, Hyderabad.

it Emerge and Why is This Significant?”, Sneha Subramaniam and Sajitha S. introduce us to eight phases of emergent writing identified during the longitudinal research Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL)¹ in Maharashtra and Karnataka.

The emphasis on precision, correct forms, spellings, and so on, snatches away from the child the natural joy she may feel in exploring the written world, connecting her exploration to her experiences. Even though children have not learnt to write formally, they are constantly engaging with and expressing through drawing and talking. Jane Sahi, in her blog piece “Children Making Sense of Writing,” discusses the close relationship between children’s drawing and writing during the emergent writing phase. The blog looks at pieces that can be created by children when they are given the space and support to explore in a safe, accepting and inquisitive environment.

Writing and Talk

Writing builds itself on a foundation of good talk. Children bring with them a readiness to talk about a variety of topics related to stories they know, experiences they’ve had, and their questions and thoughts. Not only is it important to create spaces for children to talk, but the teacher should also be conscious of building links between the talk, and reading and writing (see Figure 3). Shubhra Chatterji, founder of Vikramshila Education Society, Kolkata, shares experiences of creating a culture of rich, authentic and critical talk in her piece “Children’s Talk and Authentic Writing.”

¹ The Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL) project was designed to provide a much-needed mapping of practices, issues and challenges that arise in the teaching and learning of early reading and writing. It was conducted in two socioeconomically underprivileged sites, Yadgir (Karnataka) and Wada (Maharashtra). Over 700 government school students were tracked over three years (from Grades 1-3) as they learned to read and write in Marathi and Kannada (Menon et. al, 2017).



Figure 3. “Reading and writing float on a sea of talk.” (Britton, 1983, p.11).

Image Courtesy: Sajitha S., SAJAG, Kalyan, Maharashtra.

Elaborating on the link between talk and writing Shailaja Menon writes about the importance of nurturing children’s oral narrative skills in her blog “Narrative Development in Young Children: Links between Oral and Written Storytelling.” Children’s ability to write strong narratives is built on their understanding of oral narratives. When children develop a sense of narratives, they begin understanding a sense of time, space, sequence, cause and effect, and so on, in the structure of narratives. These understandings reflect in their writing.

Writing Assessments

We conclude this theme with a piece on assessment.

Traditionally, writing assessment has been limited to the correction of spellings, handwriting and grammar. This means that there is a gap in the feedback children need to strengthen their writing for effective communication and meaning-making. Students should be encouraged to share their writings with each other, and to provide healthy feedback. The ability to look at one’s writing as well as the writing of their peers carefully helps create a classroom of strong readers and reflective writers.

The 6+1 trait approach developed by Ruth Culham (2003) is one method you can use to assess children’s writing qualitatively. This approach moves beyond looking at just spelling and grammar. The LiRIL research team adapted it to make it more suitable to for assessing children’s writing in the Indian context. In her blog “Assessing Children’s Writing: The Traits Approach,” Shailaja Menon describes the LiRIL approach.

Way Forward

Most of our classrooms have a high pupil-teacher ratio, and multiple learning levels in one group. Added to these are the constraints of syllabus completion within a fixed duration, culminating in a standardised system of assessment that largely evaluates grammatical knowledge, spelling, compositional skills, and the capability to read and comprehend grade-level textbooks literally. This reality is often disheartening and unsupportive for a teacher hoping to create space for a more meaningful pedagogy.

The reclaiming of pedagogy is not the teachers’ decision alone. It requires widespread systemic shifts in the way we look at reading and writing. In the absence of this, we risk ruining the chances of our children ever developing a love for writing; and we commit an injustice to our teachers who wish to teach well too.

The intent of this introduction has been to help us see children's writing as composed of complex aspects that go beyond just teaching and learning of form. We hope these pieces, along with annotated resources, help initiate dialogues and discussions around the significant issues around children's writing in early language classrooms.

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What do Children Write in Class?

Diksha Kharbanda

What is the nature of writing instruction in primary grade classrooms? Diksha Kharbanda writes about her experiences with observing writing pedagogy in a government school. Along with presenting her classroom observations, Diksha also analyses children's writing samples collected from this classroom.

In recent times, there has been a shift in focus in writing from copying words and sentences and improving handwriting skills, to writing for expressing ideas, communicating thoughts and meaningfully engaging with writing. Recent research in children's writing has shown that children should be given an environment in which writing is experienced as a meaningful activity. Writing instruction should encourage children to understand what role it plays in their lives.

For the past five months, my teammate (Abha Jeurkar, an M. Phil student with ELI) and I have been engaging with the teachers of government schools that ELI works with in Hyderabad (see Figure 4). Abha and I work with them on the teaching of English. For an understanding of what is happening in the field, I undertook an investigation to explore the kind of writing tasks children engage with in the primary grades (Grade I to Grade V) of one of these schools. For this investigation, I selected English notebooks of five children from Grade I to Grade V. In this blog piece, I will share some observations from these notebooks and our experiences of working with Grade I teachers on the teaching of English. I will conclude with some reflections on the pedagogy of children's writing while learning a second language.



Figure 4. A classroom picture from one of the government schools where the author worked. **Image Courtesy:** Roshni Choudhary, Telugu Intervention Project, ELI Hyderabad.

Grade 1 classrooms of the sample schools—all four in Hyderabad—have 20 to 30 children, on average, from diverse linguistic backgrounds. There were a majority of Telugu language speakers, followed by speakers of languages like Hindi, Urdu and Lambada. The teacher mostly conducted classes in Telugu and occasionally included other languages during discussion. Children had little exposure to English outside the classrooms. In keeping with the recommendations of the NCF position paper on the Teaching of English (NCERT, 2006), we thought it wise to start with building oral language capabilities in English, transitioning to written activities in later grades.

Although we had a discussion with the teachers about building children's writing capabilities on a foundation of orality, and the need to provide them with meaningful opportunities to write, teachers seemed to have different beliefs about writing.

Teachers' Beliefs about Children's Writing

- By the end of Grade 1, children should know how to write the letters of the alphabet.
- Children should practice writing to improve their handwriting.
- Children have to write the alphabet or spellings of some words as homework.
- Children this young cannot write.

Given these beliefs, I felt a need to examine children's notebooks and understand how these beliefs informed the writing instruction and tasks they were given.

Children's Notebooks

The notebooks presented a glimpse into the kind of writing tasks children engaged with on an almost daily basis. Table 1 describes the nature of tasks in the notebooks.

Table 1
Nature of Tasks Observed in Classroom

Grade	Nature of Tasks
Grade 1	Practised writing letters of the alphabet (see Figure 5) Repeated spellings of words from the first chapter — <i>Ammu, Bittu, book, cat, dog, family</i> "Father" and "Mother" are written in English and Telugu Only some children have practiced writing their names
Grade 2	Simple antonyms Copied sentences from the book or other sources like the blackboard Practised writing the alphabet (see Figure 6)
Grade 3	Copied lessons from the book Practised spellings of words (see Figure 7)
Grade 4	Copied lessons from the book Copied questions and answers from blackboard Copied words and their meanings from the book (see Figure 8)
Grade 5	Copied lessons and poems from the book Copied questions and answers from the blackboard Copied exercises given in the book Some children have practised writing small letters of the alphabet (see Figure 9)

Can you identify something common across all four grades? Irrespective of grade level, children were engaged in mechanical writing tasks that included copywriting from different sources like the textbook, or blackboard; or repetitive writing of letters of the alphabet, or spellings. Children may have moved from writing words to sentences to full text from Grade 1 to Grade 5, but how does it influence learning?

We will now look at children's responses to these tasks for a better understanding. We share samples of the nature of children's responses and of their writing, and attempt analysing them.

Children in Grade 1 had written letters of the alphabet multiple times, a task given largely as homework. Letter formations may not be accurately or finely created. Some letters may look more like scribbles. However, before we criticise children for not writing "correctly," we need to understand that they go through developmental phases of phases.* Children as young as five to seven years old are in an emergent phase of writing: they are getting used to using pencils and are slowly moving from scribble-like to letter-like forms.

Besides letters, children's notebooks also showed they had practised writing some words from the first chapter of their schoolbook, like *Bittu*, *Ammu* (characters in the book), cat, dog, book, family, father, and mother. Some of these may be relatable

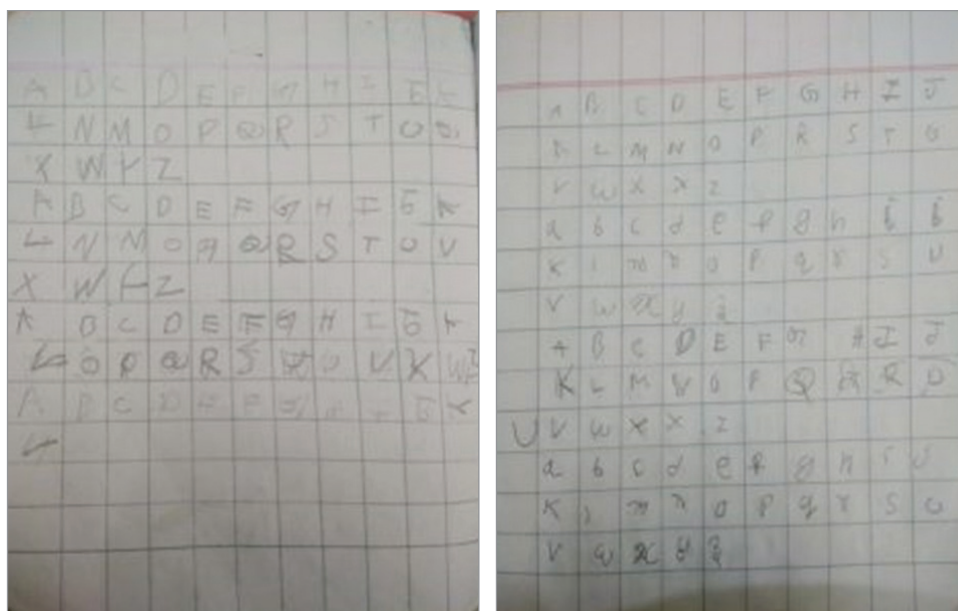


Figure 5. Repetition of the letters of the alphabet in both upper case and lower case, in Grade 1.²

² Images of all writing samples in this piece have been provided by the author, unless specified otherwise.

* See ELI's Practitioner Brief 16, "Emergent Literacy" to know more about the different phases and the different means you could use to support emergent writing in the classroom. Access the brief here: http://eli.tiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ELI_Practitioner-Brief-16_Emergent-Literacy.pdf

to children, and hence easier to grasp in English. However, instead of asking them to just write the words repeatedly, children could be given opportunities to explore writing them in their own ways. They might scribble, make drawings or try to invent their own spellings. Their experimentation with writing could have made the exercise a more meaningful experience. We wonder how many of these children can recall these spellings or letters later. We need to think if such tasks serve any purpose for language learning and writing.

From Grade 2 onwards, children's notebooks are filled with text copied from different sources, like the textbook and blackboard. The text varies from sentences to lessons to question and answers. Handwriting becomes more legible as we progress from Grade 2 to Grade 5.

Again, we need to pause and think about the purpose of writing in classrooms—is it copying a few sentences and lessons, repeating some words, improving handwriting (as the teacher limits her comment to handwriting in Figure 8) or should it be more meaningful, contextual and relevant to the child?

With some understanding of teachers' ideas about writing—shared earlier—and after examining children's notebooks, one can infer that the focus of writing in these classrooms is restricted to copywriting. Such tasks may be helpful in developing skills to write legibly, or in recognizing some words later, but not much more than that. These tasks make writing detached from children's contexts and make it meaningless to them.

Next, we consider how we can make space for children to engage meaningfully with writing.

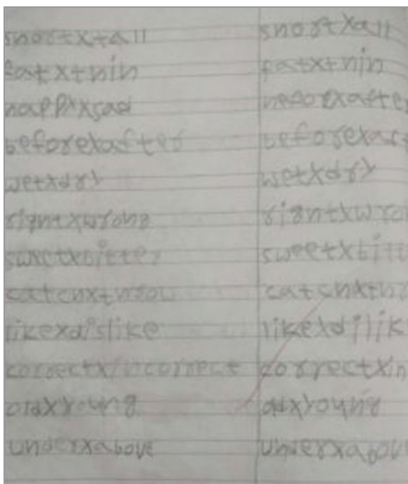


Figure 6. Writing sample from Grade 2.

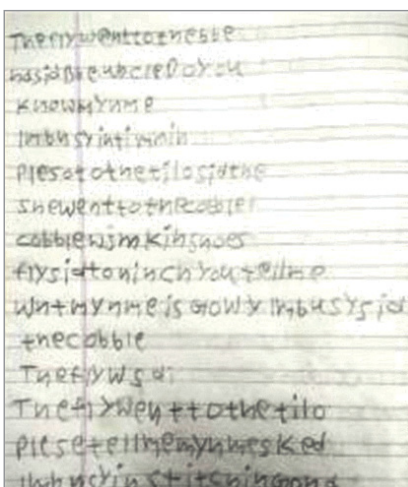


Figure 7. Writing sample from Grade 3.

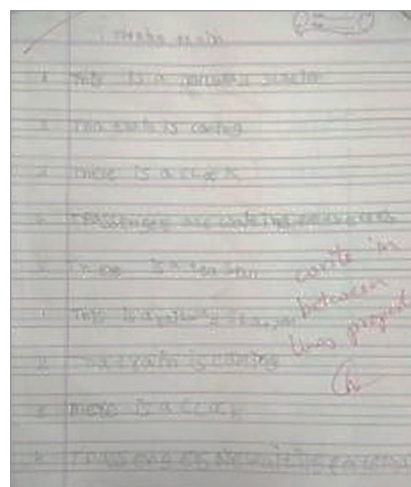


Figure 8. Writing sample from Grade 4.

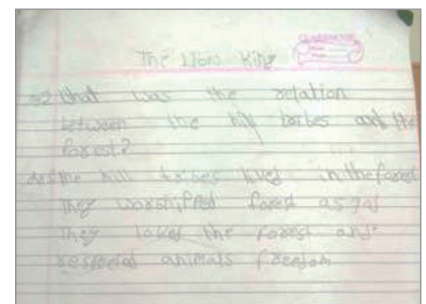


Figure 9. Writing sample from Grade 5.

Be aware that young children's drawing and writing are highly integrated. Often, writing will begin with a picture, which is later supplemented by written symbols. In some cases, pictures and symbols may be intertwined to provide a mosaic of graphic representations. (Strickland & Morrow, 1989, p. 427)

Drawing Tasks

While supporting teachers with teaching English, we made an attempt to include some drawing tasks to allow children to express themselves and to explore drawing for teaching language. During some of these tasks, we observed that students liked to draw tiny images, usually arranged in a line. It was almost as if they are words strung together, like in a sentence (see Figure 10). However, instead of asking the child about her style of drawing, in one such instance, the teacher insisted she draws larger images. The student hesitantly obeyed.

How did this incident influence the student? I felt she became somewhat hesitant in expressing herself in the class. In learning to draw or write, children go through development phases. They may not draw (or write) as adults expect them to, but adults can use these opportunities to probe into children's thinking and language learning processes. But the teacher preferred to let children copy pictures and the words related to it from the blackboard. We tried to help children freely express their thoughts, but feedback from their teacher continued to restrict them to certain forms of responses.



Figure 10. Children's drawing follows a linear pattern here.

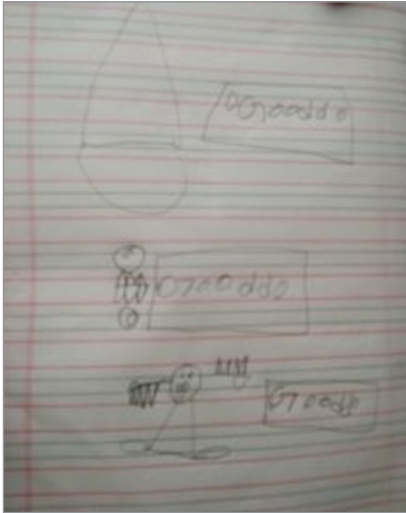


Figure 11. A child's attempt to write a familiar word *guddu* from a story.

During another class we planned, children were asked to draw characters from a story read aloud by the teacher. The child labelled all his drawings “*guddu*” (For *guddu*, which means egg in Telugu, referring to the mother bird’s egg in the story). This is how the child attempted to write one word that connected him to the story. Instead of noticing that, the teacher laughed at him and sent him away (see Figure 11).

This is one of many such events when the teacher failed to take an opportunity to support children in engaging with meaningful writing experiences.

From my observations in the classroom and on analysing the notebooks, I feel there is a need to think about how an environment can be created to encourage children to write more meaningfully, to express their ideas and communicate their feelings (see Figure 12).

Allow children to share what they compose. Be it drawing, scribbling, or the beginnings of letter formation, treat it as written communication—a means of expressing ideas. (Strickland & Morrow, 1989, p. 427)



Figure 12. Children engaged in drawing and writing. **Image Courtesy:** Shuchi Sinha, *Adharshila Learning Centre*, Sakad, Madhya Pradesh.

Supporting Children's Writing in Class

- Setting up a writing centre in class equipped with different kinds of papers, writing material, letters of the alphabet, and providing children with opportunities to visit it every day.
- Allowing children to share what they have composed—drawings, scribbles, or letters, which may not be “correct,” but are means of expressing ideas.
- Giving children the space and encouragement to express themselves through invented spellings.
- Engaging in dictated writing, where the teacher scribes what children say aloud.
- Engaging in shared writing, where the teacher and children compose and write together about a common/shared experience.

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Children Making Sense of Writing

Jane Sahi

In this piece, Jane Sahi discusses how teachers can make writing meaningful for young children. She believes that paying attention to their emergent writing, which will help children make sense of writing and help them to use it to communicate, is a crucial step towards that.

One thing that children seem to learn efficiently in almost every school is how to write or, more precisely, how to copy a script. Children are expected to copy increasingly lengthy answers into their notebooks from the blackboard, from a guide, or from each other. These efforts are often not corrected by a teacher but by the class monitor.

Children are not expected to read what they have written, much less comprehend it. A recent experience of working in a government-aided Kannada-medium school with fourth standard children revealed that about half the class was hardly able to decode what they had copied. A few did not seem to have even grasped the concept of a letter-sound relationship.

In this context, writing becomes a mechanical and time-consuming exercise disconnected from purposeful learning. This sort of mastery of writing—copying—does have a symbolic significance because the community and the children recognise that this skill is identified with power and status. However, its benefits as a tool for empowerment may continue to be out of reach if children remain unable to read what they write or write without purpose.



Figure 13. Samples of a child's early scribbles.³



Figure 14. The drawing was described by the child as, "playing in the sand."

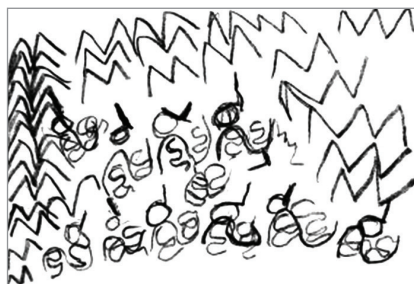


Figure 15. Scribbles resembling letter-like forms and pattern.

Vygotsky argues that written language is often taught in an artificial and mechanical way that is inappropriate for the young child. He concludes his essay, "The Pre-history of Written Language," by saying, "Children should be taught written language and not just the writing of letters" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 119).

Perhaps, one reason for children's difficulties in writing meaningfully is that they are propelled into writing too quickly, even before they have made connections between the spoken word and its visual sign. This leap into literacy, in the fullest sense, may be particularly difficult for children who have little meaningful exposure to print outside the classroom. If a young child has not seen print in use at home or in the community—watching a parent or sibling make sense of the newspaper, a wedding invitation, a hoarding or an application form—the child may need extra support to see how it works and why it has its uses.

The situation may be aggravated if the child is writing in an unfamiliar language, such as English or the dominant regional language not spoken at home or in the community. If children cannot speak with ease the language which they are expected to write, they are placed at a severe disadvantage. This is likely to become worse as the demands for writing increase as the child moves from grade to grade; the child may not even expect to understand any meaning beyond complying with the teachers' requirements.

The challenge is to find ways to support children in the classroom to go beyond copying so that the links between the spoken word, reading and writing are made. A young child's first markings—lines, dots, loops and spirals, in sand, on paper or slate, with stick, finger, pencil or chalk—can be the beginning of their exploration into communicating visually (see Figure 13).

These first scribbles can move in many directions. The forms may gradually take on a shape or movement that the child describes as something specific. For example, the child said this picture was "playing in the sand" (see Figure 14).

The scribbles may also begin to resemble letters or numbers the child may have seen at home or in school. In Figure 15, we can see a range of markings the child is playing with as patterns. The markings are placed in relation to each other but not in a form we recognise as standard writing.

³ All images in this blog piece have been provided by the author, unless specified otherwise.

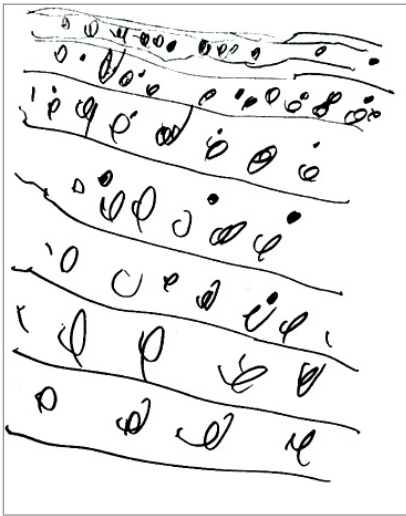


Figure 16. The child begins following convention of writing left to right and top to bottom.

In time, the child may take more steps to imitate some conventions of writing. In Figure 16, we see a clear sense of orientation from left to right, following the conventions of the writing in many languages. We should note that writing in different languages can be orientated differently, such as Urdu or Arabic from right to left and Chinese in vertical lines. We also see variety in the symbols, even though these may be of the child's own making.

Another significant step is when the child attaches meaning to his or her emergent writing. In other words, the child has an insight into the notion that what is spoken can be written down and preserved. When asked about the drawing in Figure 17, the four-year old girl said it was a poem, but it was a secret. These are no longer random scribbles but evidence of a growing sense of the link between visual signs, sounds and the word.



Figure 17. Child attaches meaning to her writing by drawing, and scribbling letter-like forms alongside.

The child's first image making often includes pictures, letters and numbers; there is not a sharp distinction between drawing and writing. It is fascinating to note that in Chinese there is a different development—the image is crystallised to represent not the sound but the word.

In the classroom, apart from providing opportunities for children to experiment with markings, image making and imitation writing, and valuing these developmental steps, the teacher can make the links between the written word and what it represents explicitly. Children's names are often a powerful starting point. Other ways of making these connections would be to label things in the classroom or to make a display and label objects children have selected on the way to school or around their homes.

Picture dictionaries also help children to see the written word in a meaningful context (see Figure 18).

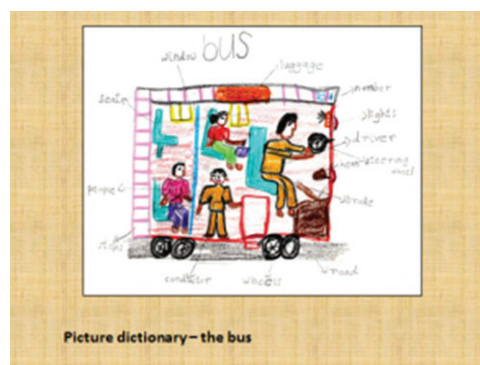


Figure 18. Samples of picture dictionaries.

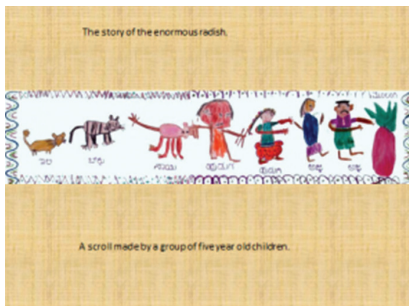


Figure 19. Sample of a frieze made by a group of five-year old children.

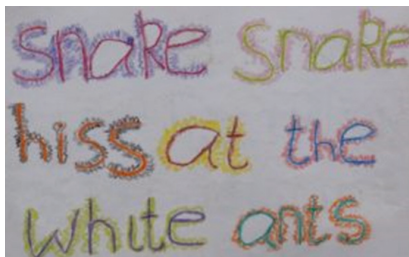


Figure 20. A line from a chain story.

Children might also collaborate to make a frieze of a story and label the key characters, or each write a key sentence to tell the story (see Figure 19).

Children should be able to read what they write, whether it is the sentence, a part of a jingle or a tongue twister. It helps, sometimes, for children to write the words in different colours so that they can point to the word, and see that words are within a flow of language but also separate (see Figure 20).

Teachers or helpers can act as scribes. This may include writing down significant words the child wants to collect—as Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1986) suggests in her descriptions of what she calls “organic writing”. Children can also dictate captions for their pictures or longer texts that tell of their experiences or stories. Young children are sometimes surprised by the magic of hearing their own spoken words when their stories are shared aloud.

Children gain confidence in writing if they are allowed to make mistakes and teachers do not demand perfect, unduly lengthy, “standard” writing too soon. Children are often required to write in excess of what is helpful. One strategy that ensures that all children try to write independently is for them to write what they want to express and then, if needed, the child dictates what they have written. The teacher makes a correct copy below, without scarring the child’s efforts with red ink.⁴ This can provide the child reading material that builds on, and extends, their experiences. It also serves the teacher as an indicator of how to support the child to become a more proficient writer (see Figure 21).

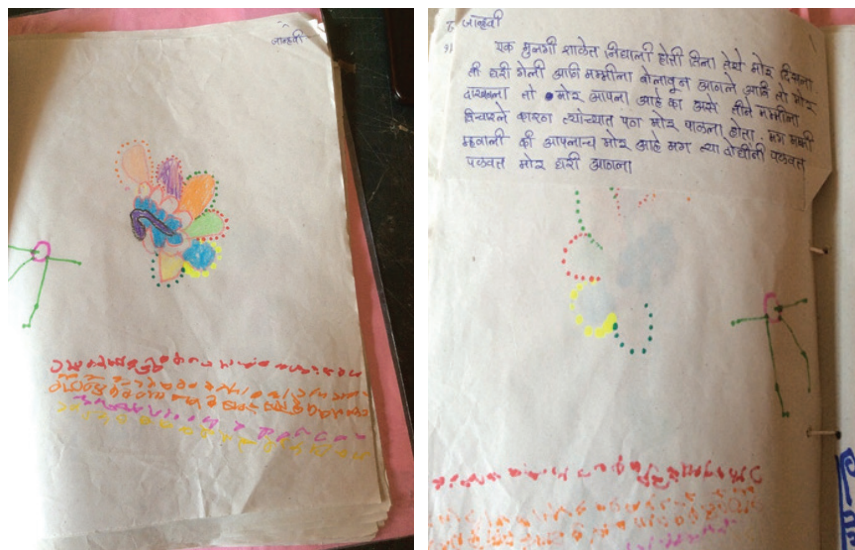


Figure 21. An example of a teacher scribing a child’s narration of her drawing. **Image Courtesy:** Kamala Nimkar Balbhavan, PSS, Phaltan, Maharashtra.

⁴ I first observed this process at PSS in Phaltan, Satara District, when Dr. Neelima Gokhale displayed children’s work of this kind.

The skills of good handwriting, correct spelling and clarity in expression are vital for children to learn; but if that is to be accomplished, it must be through the child engaging with reading and writing in a meaningful and personal way that motivates children to grow in the skills of communication and comprehension.

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Children's Writing: How does it Emerge and Why is this Significant?

Sajitha S. Kutty and Sneha Subramaniam

In this piece, Sneha Subramaniam and Sajitha S. demonstrate, using samples, the different phases of Emergent Writing that a child goes through in learning to write an Indian script.⁵

In this blog piece, we share the journey of children's writing as it emerges in the Marathi script. We look at how it moves from squiggles, to shapes, to *akshara*-like figures, to invented spelling and finally to conventional writing.

It is very important for the elementary language teacher to be aware of these different phases of children's writing. It helps us understand not only how children learn to grasp a pencil and make meaningful shapes but also tells us about how children grapple with linking spoken language and sounds with written, conventional spelling.

The Writing Task

As part of the Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL) assessments, we gave children one of the two pictures shown here (see Figure 22) and asked them to write a story about what

⁵ The blog is based on research by Menon, et al. (2017). Literacy Research in Indian Languages: Research report of a study of literacy acquisition in Kannada and Marathi (2013-2016). Bangalore: Azim Premji University and New Delhi: Tata Trusts. Specifically, it has been excerpted and adapted from The LiRIL Teacher Guidebook on Children's Writing. Please see http://eli.tiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/LiRIL-Guide-Part-III_Childrens-Writing.pdf for more detailed descriptions of children's writing and classroom recommendations for teachers. The entire LiRIL report can be downloaded at http://azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/SitePages/pdf/Liril_Final.pdf

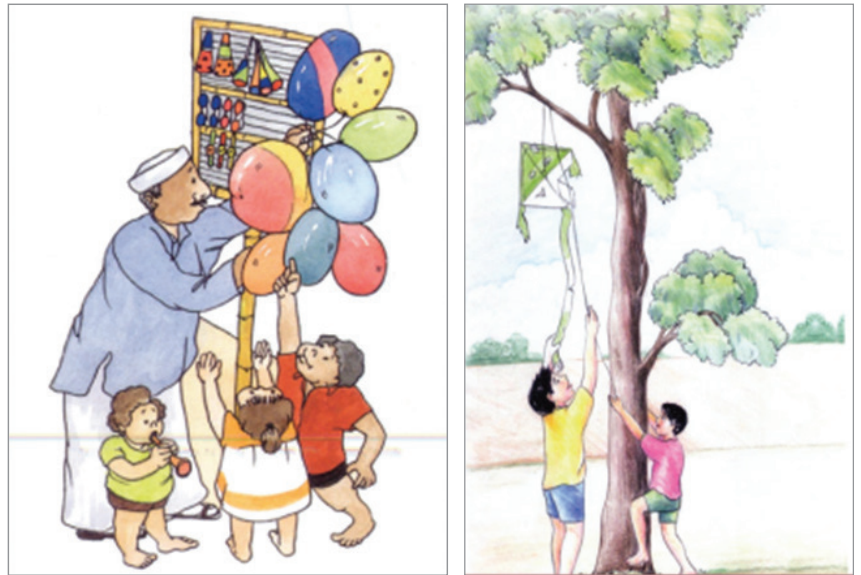


Figure 22. The pictures given to children for the LiRIL prompted writing task.

they saw. We administered this assessment twice a year, over three years, as the children in our sample moved from Grade 1 through Grade 3.

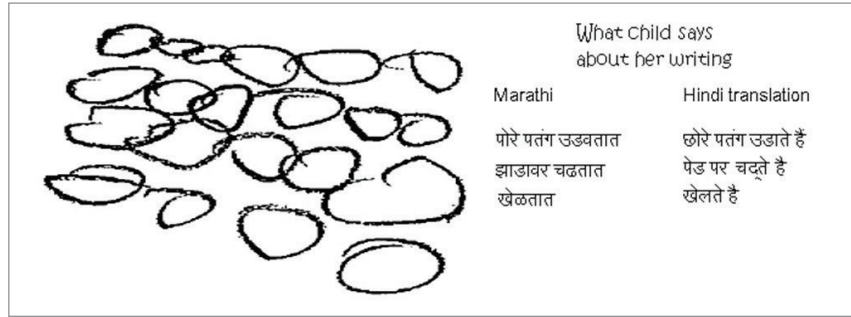
Each year, children were shown Picture 1 in the first administration; and Picture 2 in the second. We encouraged children to draw if they were reluctant to write; or to both draw and write if they so wished.

When we couldn't read what a child had written or drawn, we asked the child to tell us what they had written, and we wrote down what they said.

All this happened in Marathi. In the blog, we will show you the children's original writing in Marathi and a translation of what they wrote in Hindi. Each sample is followed by an explanation.


These samples are drawn from the writing of several different children, and hence do not represent the development of one child's writing over time.

In the earliest phase of writing (see Figure 23), the child draws or makes random scribbles. Here, she has drawn separate shapes connected and organised line by line, similar to the way in which we write. The scribbles don't look like letters. The child describes what she has written in minimal phrases, and these link to the picture of the boys flying the kite.

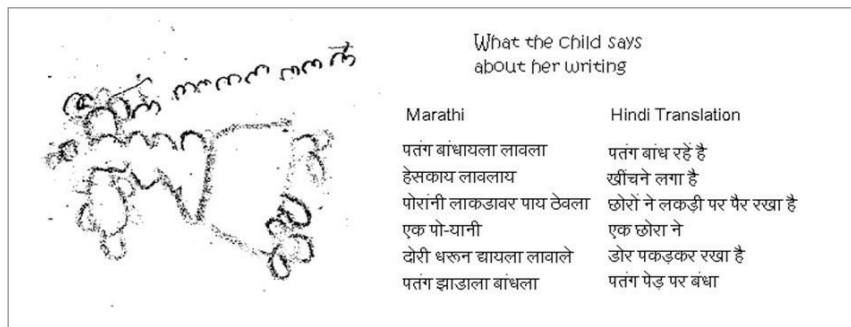


Boys are flying the kite
(They) climb trees
(They) play

Figure 23. Scribbling: Random shapes.⁶ (Drawn during the beginning of Grade 1.)

In Figure 24 we see that the child has started making letter-like shapes. In this picture  is like the *akshara* ल. The child makes an attempt at drawing the tree in the picture she is given. The proportions are not yet like the image being drawn.

Orally, the child can describe the picture in brief sentences and phrases. These sentences and phrases accurately describe the picture, but there is not much flow or imagination in the way the thoughts are expressed.



(They are) tying the kite
(He has) started pulling it
The boys have put their feet on the wood
One boy has held on to the (kite) string
Tied the kite to the tree

Figure 24. Drawing and scribbling: Letter-like forms. (Drawn during the beginning of Grade 1.)

⁶ Images of writing samples and their translations have been provided by the LiRIL team.

In Figure 25, we see the child has started writing some conventional *aksharas* and numbers. Some *aksharas* are accurate, some are mirror images and some not yet fully formed. The child's picture now shows some proportion and detail.

When asked about what she has written, the child "reads out" the *aksharas* and numbers; but some are incorrectly recognised.

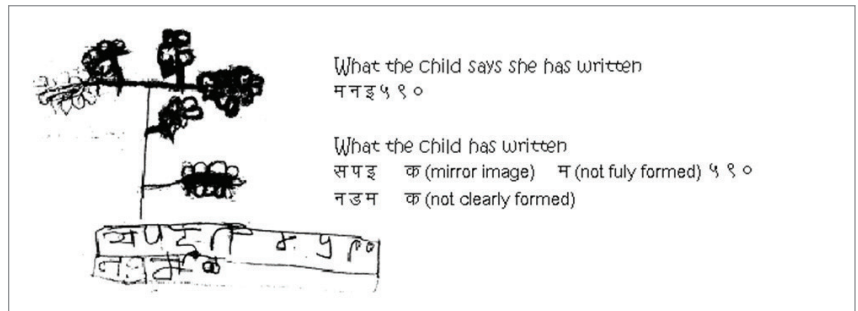
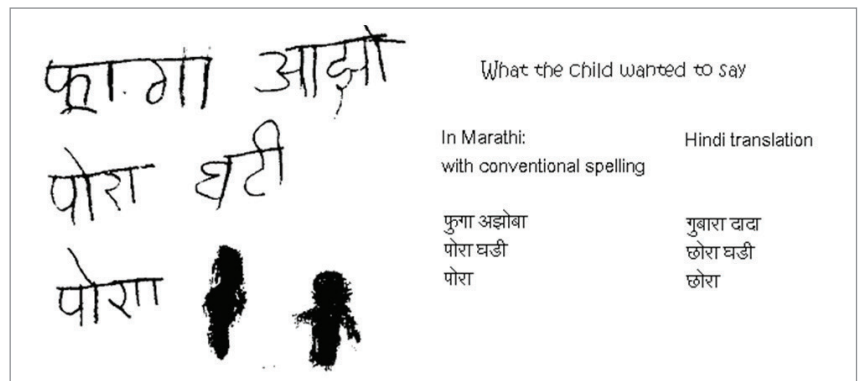


Figure 25. Drawing and writing of letters and letter-like forms. (Written during the beginning of Grade 1.)

In Figure 26, the child has started writing conventional words. She uses invented spelling when she writes (adding extra *maatras* or leaving out *aksharas*). She now uses regular spacing between words.

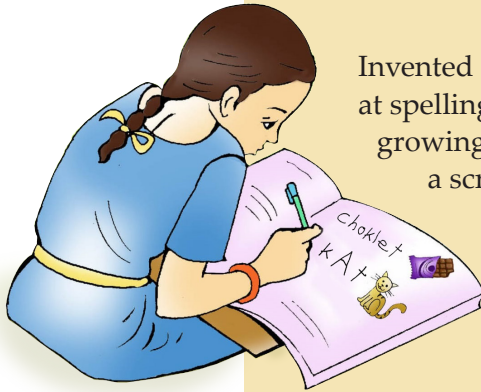


Balloon uncle (grandfather)

Boy, watch

Boy


Figure 26. Invented spellings. (Written at the end of Grade 1.)



Invented spellings refer to children's early attempts at spelling independently. It is a result of their growing knowledge of the symbols and sounds of a script, and the relationship between them.

For example, we may find a child spelling chocolate as 'choklet', or 'cat' as 'kat', reflecting their awareness of sounds and letters of a language.

In Figure 27, the child's spelling is mostly correct with simple words. She does not separate all the words yet; some are clubbed together. There is no punctuation, so sentences run into each other. The writing is more like informal, quick speech than formal writing. Her picture now has proportion, detail and a three-dimensional look. Descriptions are brief, but accurate.



What the child wanted to say

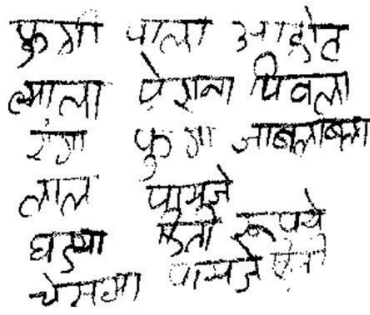
In Marathi: with conventional spelling	Hindi translation
भाऊ झाडावर चढत आहे एक दादा पतंग उडवत आहे	भाई पेड़ पर चढ़ रहा है एक भैया पतंग उड़ा रहा है

Brother is climbing a tree and one brother is flying a kite.

Figure 27. Conventionally spelled words appear. Written at the beginning of Grade 2.

The child's spelling (as seen in Figure 28) continues to be mostly correct with simple words. She still finds *maatras* somewhat difficult. She sometimes uses the wrong *maatra* or adds or omits an *akshara*. But, overall, her spelling is more accurate.

She uses multiple sentences that start in different ways. Interestingly, she starts experimenting with dialogue in her story. She also plays with sentence structure, adding questions (although she does not use punctuation marks yet).

	What the child wanted to say	
	In Marathi with conventional spelling	Hindi translation
	फुगेवाला आहे (त्याला) पोराना पिवळा रंग फुगा, जाभळा रंग फुगा व लाल रंग फुगा पाहिजे। घड्याळ किती रुपये? चमका पाहिजे। किती?	गुबारा वाला है (उसे) छोरो को पीली रंग गुबारा, जामुन रंग गुबारा, लाल रंग गुबारा चाहिए। घड़ी कितना रुपये? चश्मा चाहिए। कितना?

There is (a) balloon seller.

Boys want yellow colour balloon, purple colour balloon, red colour balloon

How much rupiya (money) for the watch?

I want spectacles. How much?

Figure 28. Conventional spelling appears. Written at the end of Grade 2.

As seen in Figure 29, at the beginning of Grade 3, the child's spelling is almost entirely conventional, except for words that are spelled a little differently from how they sound in informal language (she has confused पाहिजे with पायजे).

Her sentences vary in length and structure. The child now moves from description to dialogue in her story. She explains what has happened (and builds some context) and then gives details of the interaction between her and the balloon-seller through dialogue. There is a sense of sequence in the story. With the word मुझे, there is a sense of what the writer wants. This gives the story some feeling and voice.

<p>In Marathi: with conventional spelling</p>	<p>Hindi translation</p>
<p>एक फुगेवाला दादा फुगे घेऊन आला मला लाल फुगा पाहिजे. त्याची किंमत काय आहे? वीस रूपये आहे. मला हिरवा फुगा पाहिजे आहे.</p>	<p>एक गुबारा वाला पैया गुबारा लेकर आया मुझे लाल गुबारा चाहिए। उसका कीमत कितना है? बीस रूपये। मुझे हरा गुबारा चाहिए।</p>

A balloon man came with balloons.
I want a red balloon. What is the price of this?
20 rupees. I want a green one.

Figure 29. Conventionally spelled writing. (written at the beginning of Grade 3.)

We can see in Figure 30 that the child's voice comes across strongly. The writing is peppered with exclamations of अरे that really give you a feel of the children's reaction to what has happened. There is a sense of live action as the children observe what has happened (हमारा पतंग तो पेड़ पर अटक गया). They think aloud about what to do (अभी क्या करें), assess the situation (पर पतंग बहुत ऊपर है) and decide on a course of action (हम खींचके देखते हैं).

From dialogue and the thinking that forms most of this writing, suddenly, the last sentence moves into a description. We move from hearing a story, to being told a story. This shift shows a maturity in writing. It shows that the writer has a sense that a story is both about what is happening (and getting the reader involved through conversation) and how things are described. This writer now shows an understanding of how stories are written.

<p>In Marathi: with conventional spelling</p>	<p>Hindi translation</p>
<p>अरे आमचे तर पतंग झाडावर अटकलेल आहे. आता काय करायच्य? अरे, पण पतंग खूप वरती आहे. अरे पण ते तर फाटलेल आहे. आता काय करायच्य? आणि चढायला कठीण आहे. अरे बापरो मी नाही चढणार. हे आपण हेसकून (खेचून) बघ्या. आणि मुले हेसाकतात (खेचतात).</p>	<p>अरे हमारा पतंग तो पेड़ पर अटक गया। अभी क्या करें? अरे! पतंग बहुत ऊपर है। अरे! पतंग फट गया है। अभी क्या करें? और चढ़ने भी मुश्किल है। अरे बापरो मैं नहीं चढ़ूंगा। हे, हम खींचके देखते हैं। और बच्चे खींचते हैं।</p>

Figure 30. Development of feeling and voice. (Written at the end of Grade 3.)

It is interesting to look at children’s early writing attempts and see the phases they go through, isn’t it? At first, the writing looks a lot like scribbling, then the child makes connected shapes and then *akshara*-like shapes, before he or she starts writing recognisable *aksharas* (See Table 2 for a summary of the phases discussed in this piece).

Invented spellings are also quite interesting because they represent children’s initial attempts to match sounds and *aksharas*. Sometimes they get it right, sometimes wrong, sometimes partially right or partially wrong. Simpler words appear first, then more complicated words and punctuation.

From the very first sample, we see the child’s ideas developing. From phrases, to simple descriptions, to fuller descriptions and dialogue, the child’s writing becomes richer. Knowing this, it becomes necessary for teachers to talk to children about their writing and hear their stories even when they are very young.

Writing down children’s stories can help encourage early writers by showing them that their words and ideas can be put down on paper. By writing stories they dictate next to their drawings and invented spellings, we also show children that what they say matters to us. Finally, this becomes an opportunity for us to model ‘correct’ spelling and punctuation without discouraging children from continuing to use invented spellings.

Table 2

Summary Table of the Development of Emergent Writing Described in the Blog Piece⁷

Phases	Description
Scribbling: random shapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child draws or makes random scribbles. • Scribbles don’t look like letters (See Figure 23).
Drawing and scribbling: letter-like forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child starts making letter-like shapes. • These shapes are strung linearly, showing developing idea of writing conventions (See Figure 24).
Drawing and writing of letters and letter-like forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child starts writing some conventional <i>aksharas</i> and numbers. • Some <i>aksharas</i> are accurate, some mirror images and some not yet fully formed. • Child’s picture shows some proportion and detail (See Figure 25).
Invented spellings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child has started writing conventional words. • Child uses invented spelling. • Child uses regular spacing between words (See Figure 26).

⁷ These observations hold true for the LiRIL study and do not necessarily apply to all children.

Phases	Description
Conventionally spelled words appear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child's spelling is mostly correct with simple words. • Some words are clubbed together. • No punctuation; sentences run into each other. • Writing is more like informal, quick speech than formal writing (See Figure 27).
Conventional spelling appears	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child's spelling continues to be mostly correct with simple words. • Child still has some difficulty with <i>maatras</i>. • Child plays with sentence structure. • Child experiments with dialogue (See Figure 28).
Conventionally spelled writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child's spelling is almost entirely conventional. • Her sentences vary in length and structure. • She moves from description to dialogue. • There is a sense of sequence in the story. With the word मुझे, there is a sense of what the writer wants. • Some feeling and voice are present (See Figure 29).
Development of feeling and voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child's voice comes across strongly. • There is a sense of live action and movement in the narrative. • Writing reflects child's understanding that a story is both about what is happening (seen in dialogue, movement etc.) and how things are described. • Writing reflects a maturing sense of how a story is written (See Figure 30).

Reference

Menon, S., Krishnamurthy, R., Sajitha, S., Apte, N., Basargekar, A., Subramaniam, S., Nalkamani, M., & Modugala, M. (2017). *Literacy research in Indian languages (LiRIL): Report of a three-year longitudinal study on early reading and writing in Marathi and Kannada*. Bangalore: Azim Premji University and New Delhi: Tata Trusts.

Developing Writing Skills in Primary Students

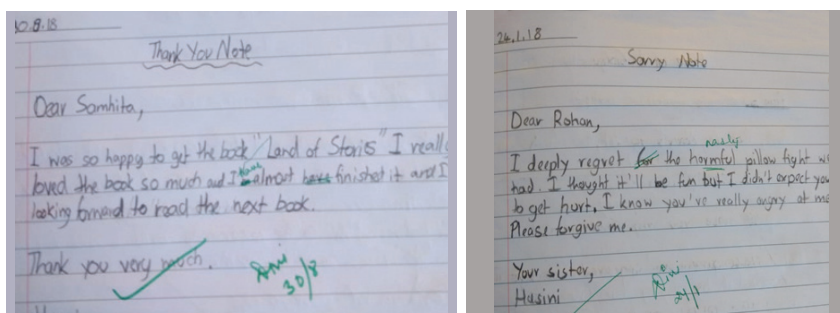
Divi Singh

This piece is a reflection on teaching writing and its relationship to reading. Divi Singh, a teacher from Bangalore, takes us through the strategies she uses while engaging with students at different phases of learning to write.

Developing writing skills for expression and communication through creative writing is an important aspect of the English curriculum in *Kunskapsskolan Educational Program (KED)*. KED is the Swedish pedagogical approach towards learning followed in various Kunskapsskolan schools across the world. I teach English to Grade 4, 5 and 6 at Kunskapsskolan, Bengaluru, which caters largely to an English speaking, elite population.

At the outset, it is very important to understand that even though writing and expressing oneself in any form, oral or written, are social processes, each child learns in a different manner and at a different pace. Keeping that in mind, I follow differential teaching methods in my classrooms. The idea is to address all kinds of learners using diverse instructional methods. I come across different kinds of students; there are ones who struggle to form basic sentences, ones who express themselves quite fluently, and ones who have amazing ideas, but can't pen these thoughts cohesively. (Figure 31, represents some writing samples from the authors' classroom).

Figure 31. Writing Samples from Divi's class.⁸



⁸ Images of all writing samples in this piece have been provided by the author.

Encouraging students to experience reading like writers allows them to internalize the sound and structure of good writing. In turn, they will be able to craft better pieces and read with a better understanding of the author's purpose. (Mayo, 2000, p. 77).

Exposure to Reading and Writing

Encouraging students to read and exposing them to different genres of writing is of immense importance.

Using the library as a resource

I would like to cite instances and strategies that have helped me introduce my students to reading. When I had to teach a poem by R. L. Stevenson to Grade 5 students, I decided to have the class in the library as I had spotted a collection of books by R. L. Stevenson there. I started by introducing the students to Stevenson and then asked them to find some books by him in the library. I did point towards the particular section. A few picked up his books and were quite interested. We had a short discussion on the books and author before we moved on to our poem.

This activity helped raise the interest quotient of the students; they saw the picture of the author and read a note on him, a few were interested in reading more and, after class, quite a few issued the books they had just picked up.

Another instance is when the students from Grade 4 were reading a summary of *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. We had an interesting discussion on the story and then I informed the students that an abridged version of the novel was available in the library. Later, I found out that two students had issued the book and had enjoyed reading it. Reading the book gave them a thorough understanding of the story and introduced them to a wide range of vocabulary, which would help them in their writing. Being aware of the range of books in the library helped me.

Discussions about literature

Communication sessions form an important part of the English curriculum at school. During these sessions, we have discussions on a range of topics. In one such session, we were discussing boarding schools. I remarked that I had enjoyed reading Malory Towers by Enid Blyton as a child, and after reading it, I wanted to head off straight to a boarding school and indulge in my own share of mischief. We had a short discussion on the book. I concluded the session by informing the students that those interested in reading the book could pick it up from the library. A few did and are now on the third or fourth book of the series.

These strategies have helped immensely in developing an interest in reading in my students. Building an active interest in reading also helps make the process of writing interesting (see Figure 32).

In literature discussions, we stop and dwell on the text for longer periods, and we talk in more extended ways, expressing our comments and queries as well as listening to and responding to others' ideas. Teachers who have stories to share, rather than simply delivering the lesson, do everything they can to up the ante on talk, because they know that through language—the 'tool of tools', children come to express and expand their thinking. (Wolf, 2014, p. 112)

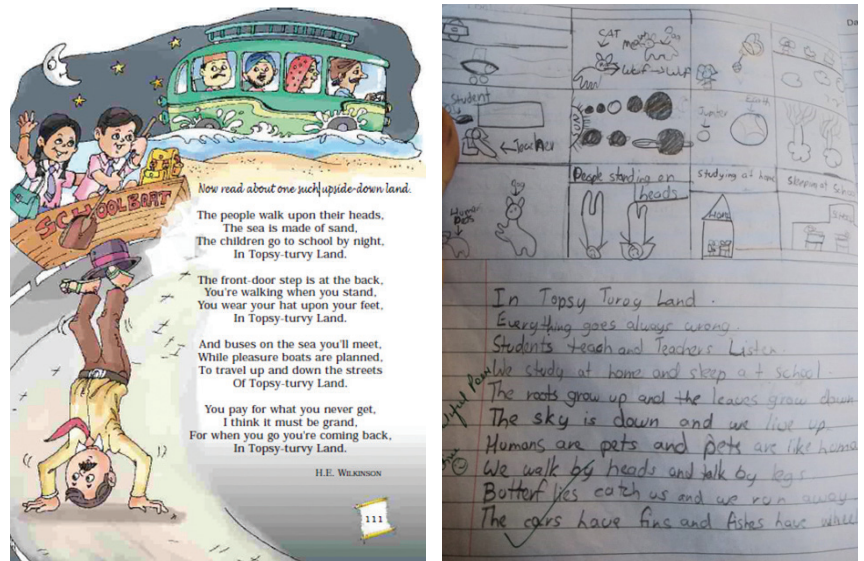


Figure 32. A child writes a poem titled *In Topsy Turay Land*, in response to H.E. Wilkinson's poem.

When it comes to writing, there are students who are comfortable enough to write paragraphs and are just beginning to write stories. Then, there are ones who love reading and eagerly look forward to writing sessions. Irrespective of which phase of learning to write a student is at, exposure to diverse genres of reading and writing is pertinent. The teacher can have a discussion with the student about a book she has read to drive the concept of plot lines and characters home, and how they can be woven into a story. This eventually helps them internalise written forms and develop their writing skills.

Writing book reviews

As a teacher and facilitator, I take a keen interest in the reading progress of students and, quite often, I ask them to review a book they have recently read. (See Figure 33 for examples of my students' reviews).

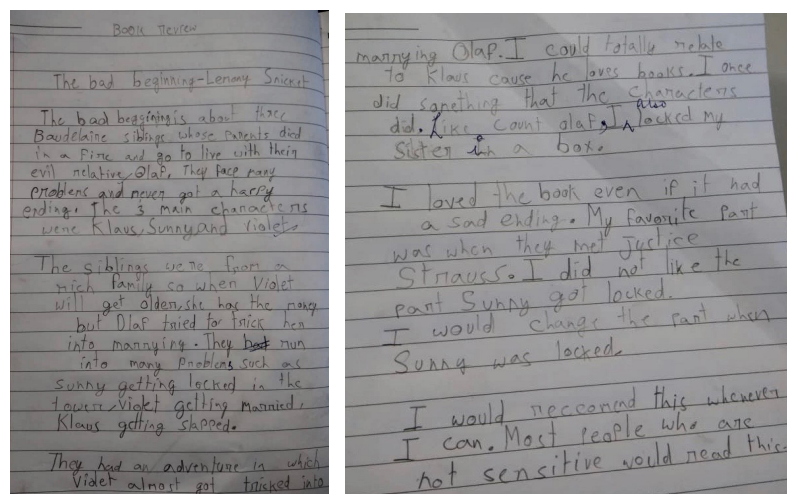


Figure 33. Book reviews.

I share a format for book review, with basic questions for students to answer.

Write about the plot.

Who is your favourite character and why? Sketch your favourite character.

What did you like or not like about the book?

This step is very important before moving on to a more independent book review process.

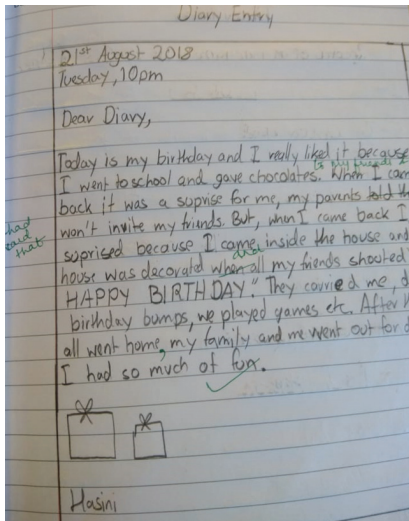


Figure 34. Example of a daily journal entry.

Journals

The more you write, the better your writing skills become. Asking students to write a journal is a great way to encourage them to develop their writing skills (see Figure 34). As a teacher, you can give students an idea about of how to begin their journals and on what occasions to write in them. Or, students could put down their thoughts freely. They don't need to fish for ideas or worry about being imaginative. Writing frequently, even a small paragraph, will go a long way in improving writing skills. They don't need to write about their daily routine; they could write about an event that affected them, a movie or a book that made them think, an interesting person they met, what made their day great or not so great. Some topics I suggested to my students were - highlight of my day, what I learnt today, my trip to ABC, the most boring part of my day, do I miss going to school (during vacations), and how I enjoy vacations.

Writing on topics of interest

Connecting student interests with their writing is a way to motivate students to write. I have encountered students who don't want to put a pen to paper. This method works wonders with them. Giving prompts to such students helps them write and gradually develop their skills. I have a student who is interested in dinosaurs and paleontology. I try to incorporate his interests in the written work I give him. It could be picture composition or story writing. Of course, I encourage him to write on other topics as well, but dinosaurs come to the rescue quite often.

As writers, they (students) must acknowledge language as a powerful cultural tool that empowers them to manipulate, direct, shape, and stir a reader's thoughts. As readers in turn, they must expect to be frightened, titillated, amused, outraged, saddened, stimulated, shocked, engrossed, confused. This kind of engagement and expectation is probably more promoted than taught. It is not something imparted as information; rather, the inclination to be engaged emerges through special kinds of contexts, dialogue, and interaction (Sager, 1989, p. 41).

To summarise, here are the key elements of my writing programme:

- Differentiated instructional methods to cater to individual students.
- Motivating students to write by connecting the topic with their interests.
- Encouraging students to read books by introducing them to different authors and genres.
- Interactive sessions with students about their ideas or events around them, and how they can express their thoughts about these in writing through different forms, like stories or essays.
- Encouraging students to keep a journal or diary.

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Narrative Development in Young Children: The Link between Oral and Written Storytelling

Shailaja Menon

This piece looks at the development of narratives in children's writing. Children's oral language development is closely related to their writing. Thus, to support children's writing, Shailaja Menon argues that it is essential to support the development of their orality.

Most Indian classrooms and curricula focus almost entirely on teaching children the *form* of writing — spellings, punctuation and handwriting. They forget to teach children to write in order to express, to communicate, and to narrate. Yet these are the key *functions* of writing, the reason most of us write. We need to focus on these functions in our early language classrooms so that children can express themselves proficiently in the written form for a variety of purposes.

In this blog piece, I argue that children's oral language development is related to their attempts at writing. Therefore, one key way to support children's writing is to support the development of their orality. One of the key aspects of oral development young children master during the pre-primary and the early school years is the art of telling a story, a narrative. Giving children opportunities to listen to — and discuss — stories, to tell stories of their own, and to express these stories in writing is important for supporting the development of both orality and writing in them (see Figure 35).



Figure 35. Children at a story telling session. **Image Courtesy:** KathaVana, Bangalore.

What is a Narrative? Why is it Important?

A narrative is a story in which a speaker or a writer relates an event, incident, or experience. Western scholars report that children’s sense of narrative emerges early in life, because narratives are ways by which we remember/make sense of events in our lives (Applebee, 1978; Bruner, 1991; Wells, 1986). They help young children to develop concepts of time — what happened first, and what came later. They help children understand what event caused what outcome (cause-and-effect relationships). For example, in Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are*, the little boy causes mischief around the house; as a result, his mother sends him up to his room without dinner (see Figure 36).

What I want to suggest is that stories have a role in education that goes far beyond their contribution to the acquisition of literacy. Constructing stories in the mind - or *storying*, as it has been called is one of the most fundamental means of making meaning; as such, it is an activity that pervades all aspects of learning. When storying becomes overt and is given expression in words, the resulting stories are one of the most effective means of making one’s own interpretation of events and ideas available to others. Through the exchange of stories, therefore, teachers and students can share their understandings of a topic and bring their mental models of the world into closer alignment. In this sense, stories and storying are relevant in all areas of the curriculum (Wells, 2009, p. 214).



Figure 36. Images from *Where the Wild Things Are*. **Image Courtesy:** *Where The Wild Things Are* (Maurice Sendak, 1963, Harper)

... the child also uses language for creating a universe of his own, a world initially of pure sound, but which gradually turns into one of story and make-believe and let's-pretend, and ultimately into the realm of poetry and imaginative writing. (Halliday, 1975, p.20)

Narratives can help children see a story from someone else's perspective, something that may not come naturally to young children. They aid in vocabulary development because stories require more complex language than day-to-day conversations do. Therefore, when they are exposed to storytelling, and are given opportunities to narrate their own stories, children develop conceptually, as well as in terms of oral language.

What is interesting about narratives is that both oral and written language contain stories. So, if a child has been exposed to storytelling in the oral form, she can apply this knowledge of how stories work to the written form. In that sense, it serves as a useful bridge from orality to literacy.

Many Western scholars have studied how children's sense of narrative develops in oral language. However, not as many people have examined how narratives develop in children's writing; nor is there much work that shows links between children's oral and written narratives.

The Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL) Study

From 2011-2016, my colleagues and I conducted a five-year longitudinal study in Yadgir district (Karnataka) and Palghar district (Maharashtra) to understand how children learned to read and write. In the course of this study, we showed pictures to children (grades 1-3) and asked them to write a story about the picture. We did this exercise six times during the course of three years – twice each when they were in Grades 1, 2 and 3. We also showed 24 second graders a wordless picture book (*The Story of a Mango*, NBT) and asked them to narrate the story in the book orally. Thus, we were able to understand how children’s oral narratives relate to their storytelling in the written form.

Children’s Narratives in Oral and Written Forms

What we found was not very surprising, though interesting – there was a close (though not perfect) relationship between the kind of narratives children wrote, and the narratives they told. Let’s look at this relationship with examples from three children’s storytelling attempts. All the children whose writing is represented here were from Palghar district, Maharashtra, and they were in the middle of second grade when we collected these samples. They responded in Marathi, but we have translated their orality to English, and have translated their writing to Hindi and English so that audiences across the country can understand them.

Rasma’s storytelling attempts: Rasma⁹ scored quite poorly on various reading and writing indicators collected during the LiRIL study. When Rasma was shown *The Story of a Mango* and asked to narrate the story, we noticed that she resorted to



Figure 37. Girl points out mango to boy with slingshot. **Image Courtesy:** *The Story of a Mango* (Debasis Deb; National Book Trust, 2018)

⁹ Names of children have been changed.



Figure 38. Picture prompt for writing.

labelling elements in the picture, rather than telling a story. Figure 37 shows an example of a page from this book where a girl spots a ripe mango hanging from a tree in Frame 1, and in Frame 2, she points out this mango to a boy with a slingshot.

Rasma responded to the picture as follows:

Rasma: Tree, girl, mango.

Researcher: And?

Rasma: Boy, girl, bird, branch, rubber, leaves on the tree... nothing else...bangles.

Researcher: What else can you say?

Rasma: Leaves, branches of the tree, to kill the bird (pointing to the slingshot), girl is pointing her hand.

What do we observe about Rasma's orality? We notice that when shown a wordless picture book, Rasma is not able to narrate the story the pictures tell; rather, she labels the pictures in words and phrases.

Now, let's take a look at her writing. Figure 38, shows the picture prompt.

Here is what Rasma wrote in response to seeing this prompt (see Figure 39).

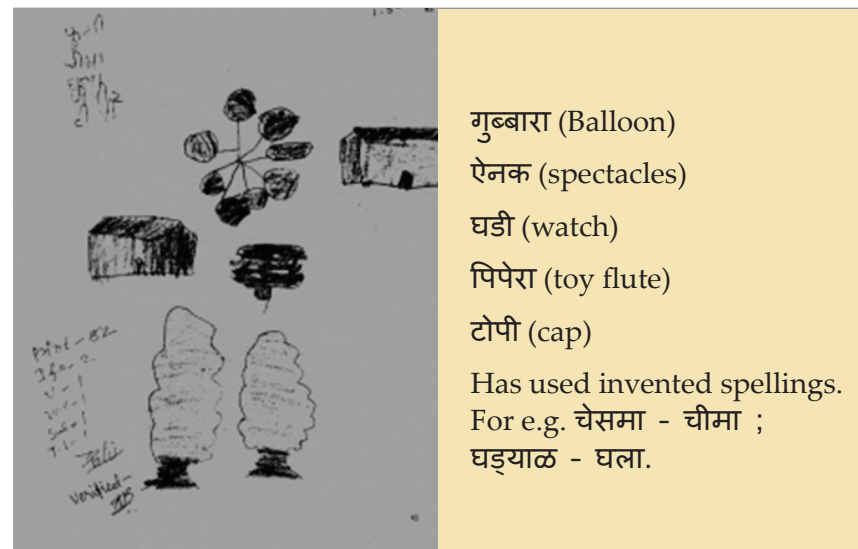


Figure 39. Rasma's writing. ¹⁰

¹⁰ All images of writing samples in this piece have been provided by the LiRIL team

What do we notice about Rasma’s writing? Figure 39 shows that Rasma has tried to write “balloon”, “spectacles”, “watch”, and so on – objects that can be seen in the picture shown to her as a prompt (Figure 38). It is well known that young children often use invented spellings in their early writing attempts, so that is not surprising. But what did strike us is that when shown a picture and asked to write a story about it, Rasma resorted to the strategy that she had used orally – of labelling elements of the picture, rather than narrating a story.

Darpana’s storytelling attempts: Let us now look at Darpana, a student who was rated average on various reading and writing indicators used in the LiRIL study. How did she fare? We showed Darpana *The Story of a Mango* and asked her to tell us the story in the book. Figure 40 shows two pages from the book.



Figure 40. Girl points out a mango to boy; bird snatches mango on a tree with a beehive. **Image Courtesy:** *The Story of a Mango* (Debasis Deb; National Book Trust, 2018).

Here is what Darpana said in response to the two pages shown in Figure 40.

D: लडके ने आम गिराया। लडकी ने देखा।

(The boy made the mango fall. The girl watched.)

Researcher: और? (And?)

D: कौआ खाने लगा। (The crow started eating it.)

D: आम .. आम गिराया। मक्खी है। पूरे है।

(The mango...the mango fell. There are bees. That’s all.)

What do we notice about Darpana's storytelling? Is it different from Rasma's? While Rasma labelled elements in the picture, Darpana's narrative is a little more elaborate. She is describing events and actions shown in the picture in sequence, but what we notice is that there is still no sense of a story or plot. For example, in the first frame of Figure 40, she doesn't mention the bird eyeing the mango; and she is not able to predict what might happen with the beehive. She simply narrates a sequence of events.

How does this student write? Figure 41 gives us a glimpse.

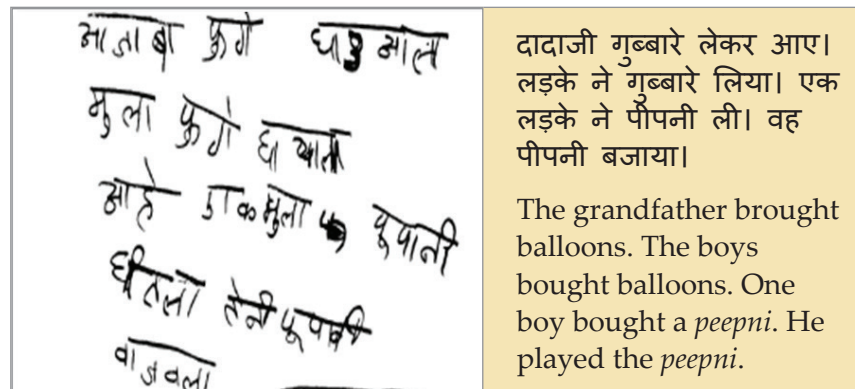


Figure 41. Darpana's writing.

Again, we see a close parallel between Darpana's attempts at orally narrating stories and her ability to narrate them in writing. She describes events in sequence in which there is no evident plot.

Mukund's storytelling attempts: Finally, let's look at the storytelling attempts of Mukund, a high performer on multiple literacy indicators assessed in the LiRIL study. Figure 42 shows a single frame from *The Story of a Mango*, and Mukund's oral narrative surrounding this frame follows.



Figure 42. Crow drops mango into a nest full of eggs, while squirrels watch.
Image Courtesy: *The Story of a Mango* (Debasis Deb; National Book Trust, 2018).

Here is what Mukund said in response to the picture.

उसे मक्खी ने काटा। वो चिल्लाने लगा। वो आम घोंसले में गिरा। वहाँ बहुत बहुत पेड़ थे। एक छोटा सा घोंसला था। अंडे भी बहुत थे। मक्खी ने उस पंछी को काटा। वहाँ उस पेड़ पर बहुत बहुत सारी गिलहरियाँ थीं। गिलहरी ने देखा कि अंडों में एक छोटा अंडा है। और एक बड़ा अंडा है। इसमें बड़ा अंडा कैसे आया? वह भी पीला पीला और लाल सा। एक गिलहरी को याद आया कि यह तो आम है।

“The crow was stung by the bees. He started screaming. The mango fell into the nest. There were many, many trees there. There was a small nest. There were also many eggs. The bees stung the bird. On that tree, there were also many, many squirrels. The squirrels notice that in the midst of the eggs is one small egg. And there is one big egg. How did the big egg get there? That too, a yellow and red egg! One squirrel remembered that this was a mango!”

When we analyse Mukund’s orality in this picture, we notice that the narrative is quite advanced. He has gone beyond describing a sequence of events to imagining and narrating a story. For example, the part about the squirrels thinking about the strange-looking egg in the nest has come out of his imaginative reading of the picture. He also builds a plot related to the story when reading the pictures throughout the book.

How did he fare in his writing? Figure 43 gives us a glimpse.

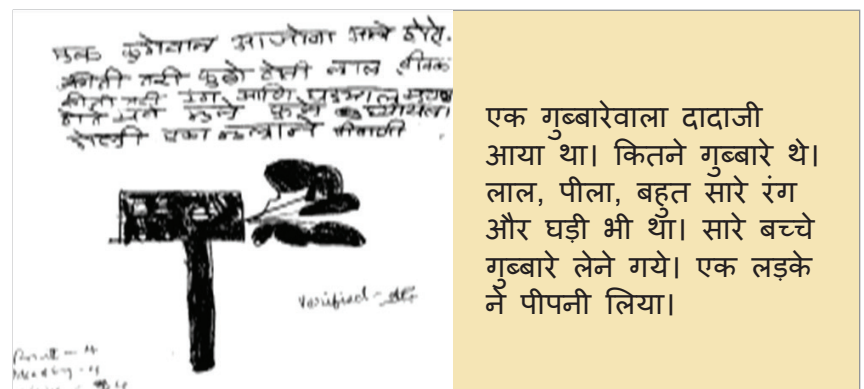


Figure 43. Mukund’s writing.

We notice that Mukund’s storytelling is more constrained when he writes, compared to his oral narrative. We can classify this as a “basic” narrative, where the story has a beginning and a middle, but a very abrupt ending. There is some elaboration of ideas (e.g., the colours of the balloons), but not a very rich plot.

The Development of Narratives in Children

Several Western scholars (e.g., Applebee, 1978; Stadler & Ward, 2005) have identified a sequence in which children's ability to narrate stories develops. The LiRIL study has validated the existence of such sequences in Indian children's narration of stories, both orally, and in writing. Here is the sequence that we were able to observe (adapted from Stadler & Ward, 2005):

- Does not respond.
- Labels pictures — no narrative (e.g., 'girl,' 'boy,' 'tree').
- *Heap stories* — reading actions in single picture frames — no connection between pictures on different pages (“bird is flying,” “man is sitting”).
- *Sequence stories* — simple text-based narrative is present — but usually focused on characters. Plot may not be accurately re-told (“This story is about cats and rats. The cats are chasing rats.”).
- *Basic narratives* — able to comprehend and re-tell narrative at basic level (main idea, plot, characters). Story may or may not have a coherent ending.
- *True narratives* — able to re-tell narrative at advanced levels (with supporting details, inferences about character's emotions, etc.).

Sadly, most children in the LiRIL sample were not able to go beyond reading actions in single picture frames, with no connections between pictures on different pages. In other words, they were reading pictures, but they were not telling stories. We noticed that the written attempts of most children in our sample, even at the end of Grade 3, were characterised by:

- Lack of connectedness or structure; no development of storyline
- Poor/routine vocabulary
- Lack of voice

It seems as if the curriculum was failing children in teaching them to write. But, more importantly, our data suggests that it was also failing to develop a sense of coherent orality in children's attempts at telling narratives.

Implications for the Classroom

A sense of narrative appears to be a foundational knowledge base that children could use flexibly across their oral and written work. I have tried to show that children's ability to tell stories in writing is heavily dependent on their ability to tell stories orally. This, in turn, is likely to be dependent on whether they have had many chances to listen to stories read or narrated by others. Our data points to the idea that students in Indian classrooms don't get many such opportunities — to listen to stories, to tell stories, or to write stories. This is a real loss for their language and conceptual development. So, one clear implication is that children in pre-primary and primary grades need to be given more such opportunities in their classrooms.

A second implication is that teachers need to become aware of the relationships between oral and written language development, and to use these to strengthen children's writing. Strengthening orality is important to strengthening writing.

A third implication can be derived from Mukund's example, where his oral narrative is more advanced than his written story. This suggests that while strong orality is necessary for strong writing, it may not be sufficient. Even children with good oral skills may not become good writers unless given guided practice. Leaving them to do "free writing" or "creative writing" may not be enough. Most children need to be guided in understanding, analysing and producing good narratives.

I would like to end by pointing out that while I have focused on the development of the narrative genre in this piece, ideally young children would also need to be similarly trained in other genres of writing. The narrative is only an obvious and convenient place to start.

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Children's Talk and Authentic Writing

Shubhra Chatterji

What we write doesn't exist in isolation. It is deeply embedded in our talk, thoughts, emotions and experiences. In this piece, Shubhra Chatterji writes about how a culture of talk, reading and exposure to diverse experiences creates a space for rich and authentic writing.

Recent research shows direct links between children's oral language development, the foundational stages of literacy acquisition, and later success in reading and writing. In our work with children, we give a lot of importance to talk not only because of its benefits for literacy acquisition, but also because talk, in itself, is of great importance (see Figure 44).

Being able to think and talk about things without feeling inhibited or anxious is a liberating experience, and we find that this brings about a perceptible change in a child's personality. Freedom of expression means freedom of thinking and that can be an empowering process for those from marginalised backgrounds.

Authentic writing, I feel, is also about freedom of expression, where children are able to write spontaneously about things they want to write about. I have always believed that when the purpose of writing is clear to children, they take it up without fear or inhibition because they are not overly concerned about the surface features of writing or making mistakes. This helps them acquire fluency and confidence and their writing improves over time. Seeing progressive results is a big motivator for both the teacher as well as the child who learns to appreciate her/his voice and agency of expression.

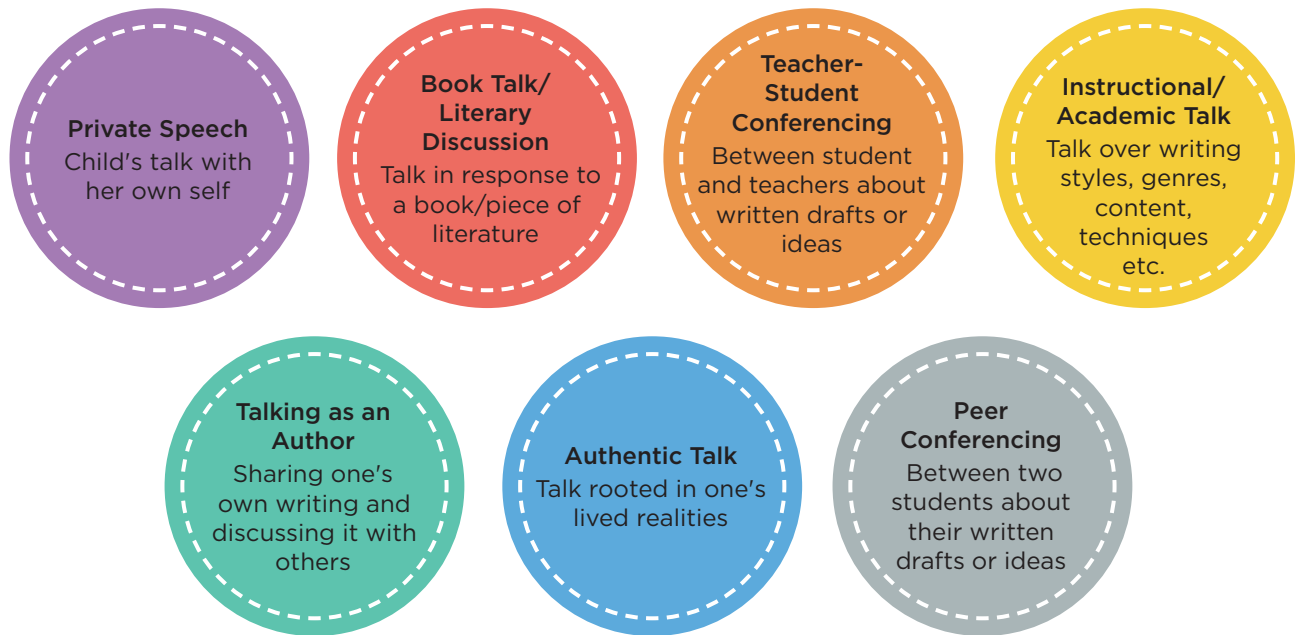


Figure 44. Example of types of talk that can be used to support writing in classroom.

In her paper titled, "Oral language: The rooting system for learning to write", Anne Dyson likens the teacher's role to that of a gardener: "...tending to the child-writers growing amidst the talk." (Dyson, 1981, p. 784)

In our rural school in Bigha (see Figure 45), a village in the district of Burdwan, children come from the scheduled caste or Muslim background, mainly from families whose livelihoods are linked to agriculture or fishing. To make education meaningful for them, we try to connect the children's home and school and interlink the value they each represent. The school has a mango garden, a vermi-compost pit and a kitchen garden (see Figure 46) maintained by the children. Such experiences become an integral part of their learning, and they talk and write about things they experience, sometimes as a report, an anecdote or a simple



Figure 45. Picture from the school. **Image Courtesy:** Vikramshila Education Society.

...As I continued to follow the children, their relationships with each other grew. And I began to realize that I could not tell the story of any one child's growth as a writer without including the stories of other children as well. The children's imaginary worlds were increasingly embedded within their ongoing social world. Thus, there were two new kinds of talk to attend to—talk involving others in one's own world, and talk involving oneself in others' worlds. (Dyson, 1988, p. 6)

observation such as, "Today I saw a lot of white ant-like insects at the base of my mango tree."

In the early stages of literacy acquisition, it is important for children to make the connection between speech and writing, as both are forms of self-expression. Classroom conversations sometimes act as strong triggers for writing. I am reminded of a particular example when, one day, a child came to school traumatised as his elder brother had met with a serious road accident and had to be hospitalised for treatment. As the child was talking about his experiences, other children joined in and started talking about different accidents they had seen or experienced closely — traffic accidents, accidents while working, roofs falling down, and accidents involving fire, drowning and snakebites. The teacher let them talk and later asked them to write down their experiences. The writings were then read out, shared and eventually made into a booklet. These booklets are preserved as records, and also serve as reading material for children (see Figure 47).



Figure 46. Kitchen garden.
Image Courtesy: Vikramshila Education Society.

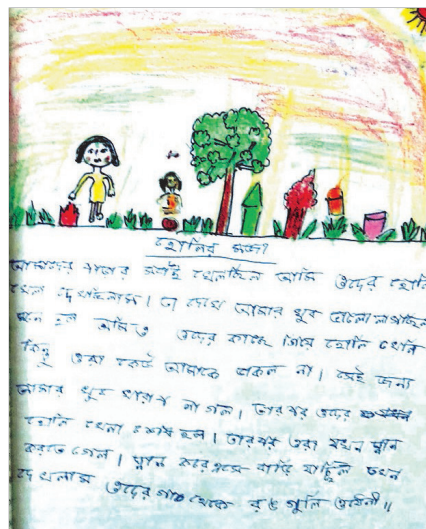


Figure 47. Samples of booklets made from children's writing—accidents, picnic, the story of our village pond, a hailstorm, bhokatta (kites). Image Courtesy: Vikramshila Education Society, Kolkata.

Writing as an Extension of Speech

We find that when children are able to talk without feeling inhibited or anxious, it helps them to be spontaneous in their writing. In some instances, we found they were more open and uninhibited in their writing. When this happens, it is a wonderful social education for us to go through children's writing on a variety of topics. Some years ago, I remember reading some pieces that gave me insights into how a child interprets the world around her/him. In a piece of writing on Durga Puja, a child had started with the sentence— "I do not like Durga Puja very much as I do not get new clothes. My friends get." The picture drawn by the child was symbolic—the Durga image was tiny, almost like a spider with her multiple arms, and the traditional *ghat* (*kalash*) and banana leaf decoration at the entrance was disproportionately big. It then struck us that this was a Muslim child who was denied entry into the inner room, and this was his perspective on an event in which he felt excluded and could not understand why.

In a piece on Holi, a child openly talks about her sense of hurt and exclusion (see Figure 48).



Everyone was playing Holi in our neighbourhood. I was watching them. It was fun! I felt I could also go and join them and play Holi. But they did not call me. I felt very sad. They finished playing Holi. Then they went and had their bath. But I saw that they still had colour on their body.

- Suhana Yasmin (Class 3)

Figure 48. Child writes on Holi. **Image Courtesy:** Vikramshila Education Society, Kolkata.

For us teachers, listening to children talk and going through their writing can be a learning experience. West Bengal is extremely politically conscious—the voting day has a great impact on children's minds—more perhaps than any puja or festival. They talk about it frequently. It was an eye opener for the teacher once, when a number of children described the voting day as a festival while writing about it. Going through their writing, we came across some striking, common features—mothers wake up early in the morning to cook, everyone in the family takes an early bath, mothers put on new sarees to go vote—one could see the festive mood at work! And in almost all the writings, we found references to violence and fighting.

It was voting day. Our school was closed. Our mothers had all gone to vote. I had gone too. There were many people. Many old people had come riding bhatbhatias. Our mothers came back home after casting their vote. I came back too. Sohail was with me. Some people were fighting on the road. Then the police came. The police called the military. The military came and gave everyone a thrashing. Budo—grandpa's son was peeping through the window. The police thrashed Budo, grandpa's son, too. Voting continued till 10 'o clock at night. All the people who were there ate muri and pakodas. —Rabiul Sheikh (Class 4)

When classroom talk is related to a child's lived experience, it has the potency to develop higher order thinking. Through talk, children not only learn to reflect on their experiences, to share information, but also to value other perspectives. While arguing and challenging each other's observations, they learn to make new connections, to modify their thinking—all these are not only important building blocks for writing, but also a great preparation for democratic citizenship from early stages.

Helping children think about texts is as essential to the teaching of reading as it is to the whole of their lives, and the most powerful way to do that is through book talks based on read-aloud books. We teach children to think with, between and against texts by helping them say aloud, in conversations with us and with others, the thoughts they will eventually be able to develop without the interaction of a conversation.

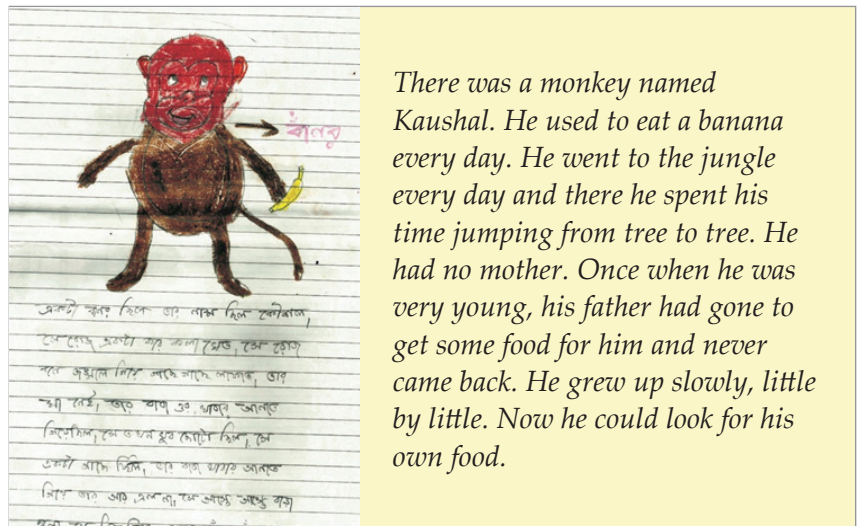
(Calkins, 2001, p. 226)

Talk and Writing around Books

The talk that happens around books is also very important – sometimes stories help children to connect with something similar they have experienced and at times stories help to give free rein to their imagination and innermost feelings. Personally, I have been very moved by an experience around a story session.

One day, two of my colleagues had gone to work with children in one of our supplementary learning centres (for slum children) in Kolkata. The children were told a somewhat funny story about a lion who was angry because he was very hungry. All the animals in the forest tried to placate him with whatever they could bring: a carrot, a chilly, honey, and so on, which fuelled his anger. The lioness brought meat and he was happy. The lioness made a snide remark about his petulant behaviour and the lion started laughing. Finally, all the animals were relaxed and happy and lived happily ever after.

The discussion that followed (led by the children) was not about who eats what, but about how the lion acted like a bully just because he was the king of the jungle. Children came up with various alternative endings. They were also in a mood to write their own stories. What came up was somewhat unexpected. A nine-year-old boy wrote this story and drew this picture (see Figure 49).

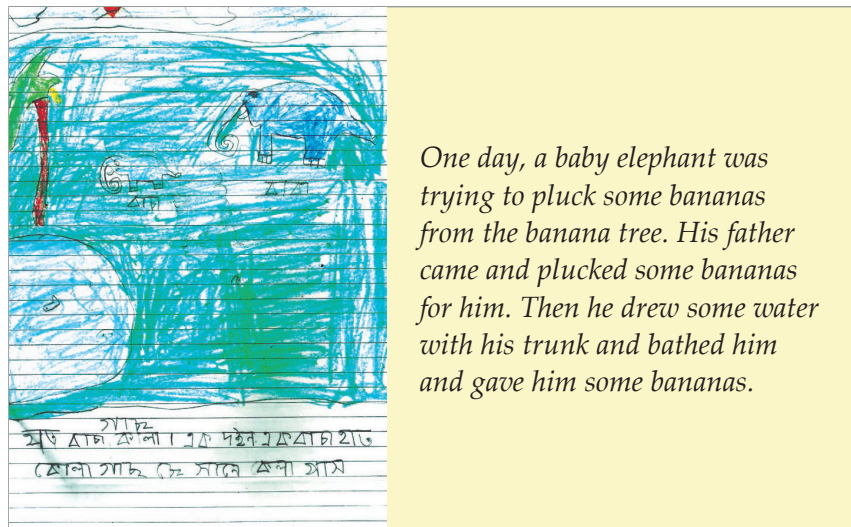


There was a monkey named Kaushal. He used to eat a banana every day. He went to the jungle every day and there he spent his time jumping from tree to tree. He had no mother. Once when he was very young, his father had gone to get some food for him and never came back. He grew up slowly, little by little. Now he could look for his own food.

Figure 49. Story about Kaushal, the monkey. **Image Courtesy:** Vikramshila Education Society, Kolkata.

Later on, we found out from the teacher that this child's mother had died when he was an infant, his father left him when he was quite young, and he was now being brought up by his old grandmother who could not take much care of him, leaving the child to fend for himself. We realised he had projected his painful experiences through the story he had constructed.

In the same session, a seven-year-old drew the picture of a father elephant and a baby elephant and wrote, "baby elephant banana tree, one day one baby elephant in front of banana tree" (see Figure 50). But here's how he read out his story:



One day, a baby elephant was trying to pluck some bananas from the banana tree. His father came and plucked some bananas for him. Then he drew some water with his trunk and bathed him and gave him some bananas.

Figure 50. Story of the father elephant and baby elephant. **Image Courtesy:** Vikramshila Education Society, Kolkata.

When we heard about this child's background, we were deeply moved. He had lost his father just three weeks earlier. A quiet child, this was the first time he has made any oblique reference to his loss. He had taken great pains to draw the picture, but he did not have adequate written language to express his deep emotions. The fact that he sought drawing and writing as the medium to release his intense pain was a revelation.

...early writing is only partly a paper-and-pencil activity. I saw no quiet, solemn-faced scholars, struggling to break into print. Rather, I saw (and heard) writers using both pencil and voice to make meaning on the empty page.

(Dyson, 1981, p. 777)

Voice

Writing is an inherently social process and, like conversations, needs an audience. Once the writing is done, teachers encourage children to put up their writing on the wall for other children to read and comment on. These samples are mainly first-person accounts where children describe and reflect on personal experience. This kind of writing helps children express themselves freely and find their voice. Prior discussion and conversation around the topic help them make a seamless transition from speech to script.

Here's a piece of writing that struck me as particularly lucid, well organised and with a definite voice.

We see fields and ponds every day. But to see them in school together with friends is great fun. So, one day we told our teacher — "Please take us out to the fields." Teacher said yes. Then we all went to the fields. We saw so many Kash flowers. So many trees were planted by the pond. I felt happy to see the garden, the pond and the trees. We were all very happy. We were looking at the sky. We saw that the sky had come down and touched the village that was on the far end of the field. We told the teacher. I asked him what this place was called. My teacher said that this far-off place is called the Digantarekha (horizon). He also said that behind the field are trees and behind those trees is a village. So many people live there in Digantarekha.

With his limited vocabulary, this child has somehow captured the wonder he felt at experiencing for the first time a place where sky touches earth, and one can almost hear him talk!

Learning to Differentiate between Speech and Writing

When children's writing is put up for sharing, or when they read out their writing for peers, the feedback they receive is very important. Their friends might say, "We could not understand what you are trying to say here," or "You start all your sentences with 'after this' (*tar por, tar por* in Bengali)—it sounds funny."

Usually this has to do with the differentiating features of writing—speech is dialogic whereas writing can be monologic. Also, in speech, we can make endophoric (contextual) references because it is taking place in a context common to all. Whereas in

writing, we have to explain the context carefully in order to be coherent and intelligible. This understanding evolves as children write and share their writing with others.

In the initial years, we encourage children to complement their writing with drawing as we have seen that in the developing stage, drawing acts as a natural extension of writing (and vice versa?). At times, drawing brings out the unsaid and the unwritten, as in the case of the child writing about his Durga Puja experience—that he has always viewed the goddess from a distance.

Different Genres of Writing

For slightly older children (in the upper primary classes) in our supplementary learning centres in the city, we encourage children to bring out their own magazine—a *Baal Akhbaar*. These children are part of citizenship groups and they read newspapers when they come to the centre. In *Baal Akhbaar*, they write about interesting pieces of news from the paper and their take on the news. They also write about news from their neighbourhood, descriptive pieces on festivals, poems, and at times they also share favourite recipes. We encourage them to be creative as these different kinds of writing provide them with the scope to experiment with different genres of writing in an authentic manner.


While speech and writing are both expressive skills, there are some important differences in the manner of expression, and this makes the relationship between the two somewhat complex. But we have seen that at the initial stages (primary classes), children with good oral language skills develop the capacity to fluently express their thoughts and ideas, and this fluency of producing

Providing Children a Safe Social World to Write in

As, we as teachers plan for the children in our care, we need to focus on more than children's products and writing processes. We must examine their social processes—the health of the classroom communities that we help create and individual children's comfort within those communities. We might consider the opportunities we provide for children to interact, not only about but during writing, and we might consider the social groupings that might make a difference for individual children—a special writing partner or small group, for example. For it is the children themselves and their relationships with each other that, for many of them, can provide the key to school writing growth. Our goal, then, is to assist children in finding supportive, comfortable worlds within which their writing might make a difference to other people and to themselves. And then that writing may take root, grow, embed. (Dyson, 1988, p. 25)

words and sentences helps them write effortlessly once they have mastered the basic physical (motor) skills needed for writing.

It is through continuous exposure to reading and proper scaffolding by the teacher that they gradually master the skills associated with good writing. I will end my piece with a writing sample of child, who is also extremely articulate in his speech. We see many elements of good writing in this work—ideas, voice, organisation, fluency of expression, vocabulary, and some mastery over aspects such as handwriting, spelling and grammar in his work (see Figure 51).



One day in the morning, I was coming back from my private (tuitions). Suddenly I saw a snake charmer entering our village with a damru. I saw that the snake charmer came and stood in the field where we play. He kept playing his damru. Slowly many people came and gathered. He was carrying a white sack on his shoulder. He kept his sack on the ground and one-by-one took out the snake baskets. He opened the first basket and showed the head of a black snake. The snake was lying curled up. The snake charmer poked the snake on the belly, and it hissed. All young children were scared. The man started playing the flute and the black snake was swaying. The snake charmer said it was a cobra. It has a lot of poison. They live in sacks. I was feeling very scared. After that I never touch any sacks.

My friend said I have seen this snake earlier.

Then the snake charmer asked us to bring some rice. The snake charmer told us about tabiz. Everyone took a tabiz. He also said those whose houses have many snakes, will have to put the tabiz in a bottle and bury it in a hole in front of the house. They will not see any snake ever again. Hearing this, I took one. I went home to give the tabiz. When I came back, the snake charmer was gone. I asked Khoiduldadu, "Which way did he go?" Dadu said he had gone into the village.

Figure 51. A child's writing about the snake charmer. **Image Courtesy:** Vikramshila Education Society, Kolkata

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Assessing Children's Writing: The Traits Approach

Shailaja Menon

In this piece, Shailaja Menon writes about the assessment of children's writing through the 6+1 Traits Approach. This approach was used and adapted during the LiRIL Study, making it more applicable in the Indian context.

Many of the earlier pieces in this book have stressed on the importance of giving children sufficient opportunities to write for a variety of purposes. Some pieces have described the nature of emergent writing and have suggested allowing young children to use scribbles, drawings, talk and invented spellings as writing to begin to express themselves.

So, it is clear that teachers should provide children with a variety of such opportunities to write. Teachers should also monitor children's writing and provide feedback to each child to help them become stronger writers (see Figure 52). But if good handwriting and correct spellings are no longer the ways by which teachers can assess students' writing, then what criteria should they use?

In this piece, I discuss the traits approach to assessing writing. To put it simply, traits are what we believe to be the characteristics of good writing. The idea that writing can be discussed in terms of several dimensions or traits came up in the 1970s and 1980s when educators began a search for classroom assessment strategies that are helpful to writers. Various dimensions were proposed, researched and revised. In 1999, these were formalised as 6 + 1 traits of writing. In 2003, Ruth Culham further revised and elaborated on these traits.



Figure 52. Children need to be given constructive feedback to help them become strong writers. **Image Courtesy:** Shailaja Menon.

According to the 6+1 approach, the six main traits are ideas, organisation, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and grammar, and conventions. The “plus 1” trait is presentation—how children present their stories on paper.

What do each of the six traits mean? Let’s look at each one, by turn.

The Six Traits



Ideas. Ideas make up the main message of a piece of writing. Children should be encouraged to write pieces that have clear ideas. Initially, ideas may just be presented as labels (kite, boys, trees, etc.) or as simple descriptions. For example: “पतंग उड़ा रहा है। पतंग अटक गया।” (Flying the kite. The kite is stuck.) When the idea is more developed, then children are able to write with interesting details. For example,

“...फरि से कोशशि की। फरि भी पतंग नीचे गरि नहीं। फरि उन्होनें डोरी ली और हल्के से खींचे पर पतंग नीचे आया नहीं।”

(They tried again. Still the kite didn’t fall. Then, they took the string and pulled it gently, but the kite didn’t come down.)

Details like “हल्के से” (gently) give us specifics on how the characters are moving—gently, with patience and effort—to try and coax the kite down from the tree. This helps us understand their effort better.



Organisation. Organisation refers to how ideas are arranged in writing. As mentioned earlier, in the initial phases of writing, children often just label the picture: “पतंग, लड़का, पेड़” (kite, boy, tree); or describe the picture: “एक पतंग है। दो लड़के हैं।” (There is one tree. There are two boys.) Sometimes, there is no particular organisation to the description, and ideas appear without any ordering. Younger children (and poorer writers) may start writing a story but may end it abruptly. Later, we see children’s sense of sequence start to develop. Children begin to use words that give a sense of sequence, like “फिर” and “बाद में” (then, and later). When organisation is mature, children’s stories start to have a clear beginning, middle and end.



Voice. Of all the traits, none is more difficult to teach than writing with voice! When we talk about voice in a piece of writing, we are talking about communicating a mood or feeling through writing.

For example, is the writer trying to communicate excitement? Is she trying to make the reader feel scared? Or happy? It is difficult to detect the voice when the writer is merely labelling the picture or coming up with very basic descriptions. However, when the writer starts to include dialogue, for example, “घड़ी कितने रुपये?” (How many rupees for this watch?), we get the sense of questions and conversation, of what people are actually saying and we can imagine the tone or feeling with which, it is said. This becomes even stronger when the writer, directly or through a character, clearly expresses what she wants or how she feels. For example,

“अरे! हमारा पतंग तो पेड़ पर अटक गया। अब क्या करें?”
(Oh, no! Our kite has got stuck in a tree! What shall we do now?)



Word Choice. The words a writer uses in her writing are important. When young children write, they may begin by using common, everyday words. But as they develop as writers, they may have a larger set of words to choose from. Good writers choose to use words that are distinct, interesting and accurate. They make you take notice of what the writer is trying to say and draw you into the writing. A mature writer uses interesting verbs: “पेड़ पर फूल खिले थे।” (Flowers were blooming on the tree); adjectives: “उसकी रस्सी बहुत लंबी थी।” (Its rope was very long); and adverbs: “हल्के से खींचे।” (pulled gently).









Sentence Fluency and Grammar. Sentence fluency is how a piece of writing sounds when you read it. Does it sound like “real” language, or does it sound forced and artificial? When young children start writing, they may start with short sentences that have the same structure. For example: “एक पेड़ है। दो लड़के हैं। एक पतंग है।” (There is a tree. There are two boys. There is a kite.) Mature writers use varying sentence structures to keep the reader interested: “हवा आयी और दोनों बच्चों ने पतंग उड़ाया। और पतंग पेड़ पर अटक गया। उसने चढ़ने की बहुत कोशिश की। पर चढ़ नहीं सका।” (The wind blew and both children flew the kite. And the kite got stuck on a tree. They tried very hard to climb the tree. But they were not able to climb it.)



Conventions. This trait refers to the mechanical correctness of the piece and includes five elements: spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, grammar usage, and paragraphing. This trait is the one that we usually teach children in Indian classrooms. Are children able to write “correctly”? Can they spell words? Do they use punctuation (full-stops, question marks, etc.)? Do they use correct grammar? Do they separate longer pieces into paragraphs?

Table 3
Summary Table of Six Traits of Writing

Traits	Explanation
 Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represent main message of piece of writing • Should be strong and clear • Should have supporting details
 Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represents the arrangement of ideas in writing • Clear beginning, middle and end
 Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates mood or feeling of writing • Represents writer’s originality and authenticity
 Word choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refers to accuracy of words in conveying thought and feeling. • Words should be distinct, interesting, accurate • Good word choice can transport reader into the world text is trying to create
 Sentence fluency and grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represents flow of sentence and how it reads • Mature writers use varying sentence structures to keep reader interested
 Conventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refers to the mechanical correctness of a piece • Includes spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar usage, and paragraphing.

The Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL) team (Menon et al., 2017) adapted the writing rubric from Culham's original to assess students in rural Maharashtra and Karnataka. We piloted the rubric on 250 children in these two states and we revised it to suit the responses we got from the field. Children in our sample did not write very much. Therefore, we added a dimension called "Total Amount of Text" to the original rubric. Of course, we agree that longer pieces of writing are not necessarily better writing. But we found it useful to have this dimension to capture how children went from writing nothing to writing at least a little over the three years that we tracked them (from Grades 1 to 3).

Again, because the children wrote so little, their ratings on "Ideas" and "Organisation" were identical in many cases. Therefore, we clubbed these two traits, even though they are actually quite different. We also revised the descriptions of different levels of writing to suit our sample population's responses.

We have appended our rubric to this piece (See Appendix on p. 60). We invite you to experiment with using it to assess children's writing in your classroom. You may find that some dimensions or descriptions need to be modified or adapted to your students' needs. That is fine—you could use this as a base for your own experiments.

Using the Traits Approach in the Classroom

Why is the trait approach useful in assessing and providing feedback on children's writing? We can see at a glance that typical Indian classrooms only emphasise the last trait—conventions. Most Indian classrooms have not taken care to guide children on any of the other aspects of good writing. The assumption is that some children are naturally good writers, while others are not. When I was a young child in school, my writing attempts came back with "Good," or "Excellent," or 8/10 written on it; while some of my classmates may have received "Poor," or "Fair," or a different set of scores. How did we make sense of this? We assumed that some of us were naturally good writers, while others were not. I think our teachers assumed this too. No one seemed to know how to help *all* children become better writers.

The trait approach demystifies the aspects of good writing and provides teachers with specific descriptors that help them see where their students are on different traits of writing. For

example, one child may be spelling perfectly, but may have very poor ideas. This child would need to be coached on how and where to get strong ideas for writing from. Another child may have great ideas and a voice, but poor spelling. This child would need help with spelling. A third child may have terrific ideas but may not know how to organise these ideas in a way that makes sense to readers. This child would need help with organisation. Thus, the trait approach permits us to respond to the different strengths and needs of learners in our classroom in a fairly nuanced manner. This is so much more useful than “6/10” because three different writers may have got “6/10” for three completely different reasons.

Some Considerations in Using the Rubric in your Classroom

Before you use the rubric in your classroom, ensure you have a strong writing programme in place. What would the characteristics of such a programme be?

1. Children write often and for a variety of purposes. They write regularly and are not just being asked to copy answers and spellings from the board. They write to express, communicate and learn.
2. Children begin to write early – even before they can spell! If the children in your classroom are very young, too young to write conventionally, you encourage them to draw, scribble and talk. They dictate stories to you regularly, which you write down and assess for the quality of ideas they are expressing.
3. Children listen to you read out a selection of children’s literature. Good writers get their ideas, vocabulary, ideas for sentence formation, and so on from having heard many stories read out or told. They learn that stories are sequenced in a certain way, they learn ways to make their stories more fun, interesting or powerful from having heard and discussed lots of stories. When they begin to write non-fiction, again they will use ideas they have come across in their reading. So, you give the children lots of exposure to good fiction and non-fiction.
4. They get to choose. Good writers don’t always write well to topics given by others. How many times did you really want to write about your summer vacation or Diwali in school? Maybe you were dying to tell your friends a story about an interesting uncle who visited, or a favourite pet who died.

We need to find ways to reveal to students what adult, experienced writers do –to reclaim the tradition of demonstration that allows young people to apprentice themselves to grown-ups. Observing adults as they work is an activity of enormous worth and power when it illumines what is possible. When we, as English teachers, demonstrate the uses of writing in our lives, we answer the most important question of all about writing: Why would anyone want to write? We give our students another taste of the complexities and satisfactions of composing a life. (Atwell, 1998, p. 369)

But your teacher would only let you write about Diwali that day. Give writers in your classroom a chance to write about topics they care about. Authentic reasons for writing sometimes produce excellent pieces of writing. Let the writer be emotionally connected to what they are writing about.

5. You use multiple samples of a student's work to assess their writing. You have writing folders of each child's work so you can see the child's progress over time. That way, you don't base your assessment on a single piece of writing. You discuss their writing with each child every few months, using the folder as the basis of your conversation. You talk about the patterns and trends you notice. You give them tips and set expectations.
6. Be a writer yourself! There is nothing more dishonest than an adult asking a child to do something that they won't do. If you are not willing to develop your writing, how can you expect children to develop as writers in your classroom? Therefore, before assessing children's writing, you spend a few months writing for yourself, seeking feedback from more experienced writers in your community, and understanding the needs and challenges writers face. Once you do this for a while, you are in a better place to start a writing programme, and to assess children's writing.

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LIRIL Writing Rubric (Adapted from 6+1 Traits Approach)

Trait 1 - Ideas and Organisation

Scribbles with Dictated Writing				Presents Ideas in Written Form			
No evidence of oral or written ideas	Labelling stage of oral dictation	Oral elaboration of ideas	Labelling of pictures	Simple description of actions	Emergence of storyline	Developing storyline	Well developed, well organised story
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No oral or written response. Written scribbles or drawing with no oral elaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written scribbles, marks, letters and non-label words (written down), accompanied by limited oral description upon prompting, typically oral labelling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written scribbles, marks, letters and non-label words, accompanied by extensive oral description upon prompting. Multiple ideas are shared. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Labels pictures or states ideas vaguely in writing. Some meaningful words are present, but there is not enough syntax to make judgments about organization. No coherent storyline is present. (The child may write "A kite", "A boy", "here is a tree", etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describes the picture in phrases or sentences. Sequencing of ideas is not present. Coherent storyline is not evident. Syntax is present but no sense of continuity in thoughts expressed. ("A boy is climbing the tree" or "The boy is going to take the kite") 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main idea is present, but storyline is still emergent. Supporting details may be present, but do not coherently flesh out the main idea. Sequencing of ideas not present. Transitions not present. A beginning may be attempted, but writing may lack clear middle or end. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big idea is clear. Supporting details are present. Simple storyline is present with clear beginning, middle and end. Focus is generally on topic with few missteps. Sequencing may be imperfect, but reader can follow. Characters, settings, plot, themes may be present in a simple way. (Sometimes the child is included in the story while sometimes she is not) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big idea is clear and fleshed out well. May have creative or imaginative elements. Supporting details are relevant and add to the big idea. Focus stays on topic. Some evidence of attending to character, plot, setting and /or theme. Structure showcases main idea and helps orient reader. Well sequenced. Transitions are smooth and varied. Clear opening and conclusion are present.

Trait 2 - Voice

Largely Oral	Labelling	Simple Descriptions	Voice-Emerging	Voice-Developing	Voice-Proficient
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter sequences or non-meaningful word sequences make it difficult to rate this dimension. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not enough text is present to convey a mood or feeling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General feeling is captured in words or pictures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling is more clearly specified but may be minimal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feelings are present in parts, but not throughout the writing. Writer's voice is clear. Engages the audience to some extent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writer's feelings about subject are loud and clear. Expression of feeling is carried throughout the piece. Compelling to read.

Trait 3 - Word Choice

Largely Oral	Labels	Simple, General Descriptions	More Specific Descriptions	Interesting Word Use Emerges	Precise, Memorable Word Choice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter sequences or non-meaningful word sequences make it difficult to rate this dimension. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very few words are used for labelling or signifyin what is in the picture prompt. Rudimentary vocabulary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very limited, mundane word choices. Wording is sometimes repetitive. Descriptive words may not be present. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocabulary is mostly routine, but a greater variety of words begins to emerge. Descriptive words may be present. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wording is becoming more specific. A few unusual/interesting words may be present. Adjectives, adverbs, pronouns and connectives are beginning to emerge (not all of these categories may be present in a single piece). Repetition occurs infrequently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Striking memorable phrases. Precise, vivid and interesting word choices. Word choice contains moments of sparkle; everyday words used well. Wide vocabulary. Repetition occurs rarely or is selected for effect. Word choice conveys mood and sentiment appropriately.

Trait 4 - Printing, Spelling, Punctuation and Paragraphing

Scribbling	Mock Handwriting	Mock Letters	Conventional Letters	Invented (phonetic) Spellings	Conventional Spelling - 1	Conventional Spelling - 2	Conventional Spelling - 3	Conventional Spelling - 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Random marks or scribbles. • Or refusal to write. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children produce lines of wavy scribbles or circles as they imitate adult writing (letters or form). <p>Some of the wavy scribbles may have conventional letter-like shapes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children make letter-like shapes that resemble conventional letters. • Writing sometimes can be more vertical than horizontal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's mock letters become more and more conventional, real <i>aksharas</i> emerge. • The children may or may not recognise these <i>aksharas</i>. • Children often create "strings" of <i>aksharas</i> across a page and "read" them as sentences or a series of sentences. • These <i>aksharas</i> may or may not be clustered into words and words, when present, may not be meaningful • End punctuation marks may or may not be visible. May not be used purposefully. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognisable <i>aksharas</i> and meaningful words are present with approximate spellings. • Words may or may not be spaced correctly. • Children apply sounds to <i>aksharas</i> to approximate the spellings of words (e.g., first or last sound of words may be represented). E.g. गण दूने for गण दूने देते • <i>Maatras</i>/<i>jodaakshar</i> omission is a common category that may be rated at this level if consistent across student's writing. • End punctuation marks may or may not be visible. May not be used purposefully. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixture of conventionally and phonetically spelled words. • Errors may be present even in common/simple words but may or may not detract from understanding. • Words with <i>maatras</i>, <i>jodaakshar</i> may be spelled incorrectly or words may be misspelled due to <i>rasaa-deergh</i>. • Spacing, mostly present, may have few deviations. • Punctuation may or may not be visible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the child has only used simple words in the writing but spelled correctly, apply this rating. • Difficult words like words with <i>jodaaksharas</i> may be spelled incorrectly. • Errors do not detract from understanding. • Spacing is consistently present. • Punctuation may be emergent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child has spelled most words accurately. • To get this rating, the child should spell some difficult words correctly. E.g, <i>jodaakshar</i>, words with multiple <i>maatras</i> etc. • Spacing is consistently present. • End punctuation is consistently used for the most part. Other punctuations (comma, inverted commas) may be present. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the words are correctly spelled and spacing is perfect. • End punctuation is consistently used. Other punctuations (comma, inverted commas) may be present.

Trait 5 - Sentence Fluency and Grammar

No Formation of Sentence	Incomplete Sentences (Labels)	Simple Sentence Structures –1	Simple Sentence Structure – 2	Beginning of Use of Connectives	Complex Sentence Structure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter sequences or non-meaningful word sequences make it difficult to rate this dimension. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meaningful words stand alone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simple sentence structure is used for the most part. Complete sentences may not be present or may be mixed with phrases. Rhythm is not present. Connectives are not present. Sentences may be repeated. Some grammatical markers are present. Grammatical errors may or may not be present. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally simple sentence structures. Sentence patterns could be repeated (e.g., they may begin the same way). Rhythm could be choppy. Sentence length and complexity might increase at this stage as compared to previous stage (e.g., there may be 1 or 2 sentences of 5+ words). Grammatical errors may or may not be present. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some variability in sentence patterns appears at this stage. Simple connective words may be present, indicating more complex sentences. Fluidity in rhythm may be present, i.e., could be present in some sentences and not in others. Some grammatical errors may be present, but do not detract from understanding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sentences vary in structure and length. Complex sentences are present. Connective words are present and show some variation. Grammar is accurate. Rhythm is fluid, easy to read aloud.

Trait 6 – Text Length

No Sentence Formation	Incomplete Sentences	Simple Sentence Structure, Less Text-1	Simple Sentence Structure, More Text-2	Varied Sentence Length, Longer Composition	Longer Sentences, Long Composition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No text, scribbles, or 1 – 3 recognisable letters not grouped into words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 or 2 lines of text, meaningful words or recognisable letters (4 or more) are put down. Lines may or may not make up coherent sentences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 2 sentences. Sentences may be short in length. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 or 4 sentences. Sentences may be short in length. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5-8 sentences. Sentence length varied. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9+ sentences. Sentence length mostly not limited to very short sentences, except where appropriate.

Children's Writing – Concluding Thoughts

Harshita V. Das

As I set out to work on this piece, I realised I'd learned several nuances of good writing over the course of curating this theme. The act of writing not only helps us express ourselves and narrate experiences, but it also *helps crystallise ideas and gives us clarity of thought*. This is not just an incidental benefit of writing; it's at the very heart of the process. Writing gives us the satisfaction of communicating what we know or have learnt with people who matter to us.

The pieces curated in this theme try to debunk some commonly held misconceptions about children's writing. We have tried not only to reflect on some practices we see in our classrooms but



“Writing is a medium with which people communicate with themselves and with others at other places and times. When I write, I write to learn what I know because I don't know fully what I mean until I order the words on paper. Then I see ... and know. Writers' first attempts to make sense are crude, rough approximations of what they mean. Writing makes sense of things for oneself, then for others.”

(Graves, 1985)



have also come to an understanding that writing is a *process* and not a mere *product*. It is a process of engaging with the writer and his/her ideas, re-visiting them, refining them and realising the writer's intentions through the piece (see Figure 53).



Figure 53. The process of writing requires engagement with the learner and her ideas. **Image Courtesy:** Shailaja Menon

Let's touch upon some key aspects the pieces discussed.

Focus of instruction—skills or tools
 The ideas of orality, literacy and emergent writing
 The purpose of assessments

Writing Instruction— What is the Primary Focus?

Should we see the mastery of a set of basic skills as the primary goal of elementary grade writing, or should we focus on cultivating higher-order ends—meaning making, and using it as a tool for empowerment? Writing instruction can focus on both.

As Jane Sahi points out, the mastery of writing letters and words (or *copywriting*) has a symbolic significance in our society: it is a skill identified with power and status. But when we lose sight of its ability to also function as a tool for empowerment, we risk making the higher-order ends of writing more distant, a dream that is out of reach of most children. So, here we emphasise that writing has to be a process that is purposeful. We have to go beyond the goal of developing a set of basic skills related to writing. It must become a form of expression that gives one the power to articulate one's thoughts, ideas and imagination in a compelling manner.

Orality and Emergent Writing

Shailaja Menon suggests that it is important to give children opportunities to listen to, discuss and narrate stories. Orality is necessary but not sufficient for developing writing in children. Children need adequate space and guidance to master narratives and stories in writing.

With very young children, Jane Sahi recommends the teacher become a scribe to aid this process of writing and expression, while with older children, other processes of facilitation could be used. Jane writes that young children are sometimes amazed when they see their thoughts and stories read aloud by someone else through the use of written language. The need and right to express fearlessly should not be snatched away from the child by making writing a dreary, tedious exercise. Every child should *want* to write: they should be assured of their voice being valued and they should be allowed to write about what resonates with them (see Figure 54).



Figure 54. Children need to be given a safe space to express themselves.
Image Courtesy: Shailaja Menon.

Squiggles, dots, lines and scribbles need to be recognised as children's writing. Sneha Subramaniam and Sajitha S. (LiRIL project) show us that children go through different developmental phases as they learn how to write. Thus, any attempt at putting down ideas on paper should be encouraged. At the same time, *guided practice* through a well thought-through *writing programme* is key.

Assessments to Strengthen Writing

As we've observed with Diksha Kharbanda's experience at schools, teacher beliefs about children's experimentation with writing impacts how it is taught, supported or thwarted.

We have examples of good practices in the classroom, for instance, as we see in the piece penned by Divi Singh. One strategy she uses in her classroom is to introduce the poet and his many books and poems, before teaching the specific poem—an idea worth borrowing. She shows us how careful thought and planning can go a long way in encouraging children to write.

The traits approach, described by Shailaja Menon in her piece on assessing children's writing, takes us beyond teaching conventions of writing. It gives us specific descriptors and helps us gauge where a child stands on each trait—ideas, organisation, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, grammar and other conventions of writing. A thorough understanding of this will help encourage children to become effective writers, no matter what genre they choose. The LiRIL adaptation of the traits rubrics present specific descriptors suited for the rural Indian context, and is a welcome value addition.

Having said this, there are some aspects we did not delve into as much as we'd have liked to. For instance, how do you support writing for children with learning disabilities? How do you support genres of writing other than the narrative form? How do you support writing in a multilingual classroom?

So, this is just the beginning of an important conversation that begs many more questions, some that we hope you will raise. And we hope you take this conversation to your contexts, make it yours—throwing it open to colleagues, administrators and students—and go on to experiment some more with teaching writing in your classrooms.

References

Graves, D.H (1985). All children can write. Retrieved from <http://www.ldonline.org/article/6204/>

**ANNOTATED
READING RESOURCES**

Annotated Resources on Children's Writing

Bertelsen, C. D., Murnen, T. J., & VanNess, A. R. (2013). Let me tell you a secret: Kindergartners can write! *The Reading Teacher*, 66(7), 574-585.



Confident that kindergartners can write, a teacher develops a writing programme rooted in well-researched literacy instructional strategies. The programme consists of three main stages—planning, whole-group lesson and individual writing lesson. After a brief overview of the stages, the paper details the classroom process as the teacher takes the different groups through the programme.

Bloodgood, J. W. (1999). What's in a name? Children's name writing and literacy acquisition. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 34(3), 342-367.



This paper presents a study conducted to understand the significance of students' names in literacy acquisition. According to the author, young writers often focus on their own names as they begin to enter the world of print. Sixty seven 3-6.5 year olds took part in the study, which was conducted across the school year. The study found that children's name recognition and production correlated with a wide variety of early literacy indicators, such as, alphabet knowledge, word recognition, concept of word, sight word recognition and emerging tracking abilities. Name letters represented a large proportion of children's random-letter written characters. Therefore, when we give young children an opportunity to engage meaningfully with their name as the focus, we help them make associations between letters and sounds. As they make progress, they expand their alphabetic knowledge and apply it to a wider range of literacy skills.

Cabell, S. Q., Gerde, H. K., & Tortorelli, L. S. (2013). How to write...? Scaffolding preschoolers' early writing skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 66(8), 650-659.



This article presents a framework for individualising early writing instruction in the preschool classroom. It offers a straightforward framework that a teacher can use to evaluate and strengthen children's writing. Using examples from four different kinds of students who teachers may encounter in a typical preschool classroom, the author discusses why it is important to foster early writing skills, how writing typically develops in young children, and how teachers can actively support this development.

Calkins, L. (2008). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.



In this book, Calkins explains setting up and using a writing workshop to support student writing in the classroom. Drawing upon the voices of children and teachers, she explains the processes involved in the writing workshop. The book has chapters on assessment, thematic studies, writing throughout the day, reading/writing relationships, publication, curriculum development, non-fiction writing and home/school connections. This is a book that is extremely useful for anyone interested in developing strong writers in their classroom. The writing is conversational and flows easily.

Dyson, A. H. (1988). *Drawing, talking, and writing: Rethinking writing development*. [Occasional Paper No. 3]. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Writing, University of California. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED292121>



In this article, Dyson argues that writing rooted in children's experiences with their social worlds, and is integrally related to their talking and drawing. The paper presents the "learning to write" trajectories of two students from kindergarten through second grade. Rich with anecdotes of their talk, samples of their drawing and writing, the paper follows their writing journeys.

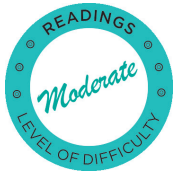
Dyson, A. H. (1990). Symbol makers, symbol weavers: How children link play, pictures, and print. *Young Children*, 45(2), 50-57.



From an early stage, children become effective and inventive users of symbols, including gestures, pictures, and spoken words. They invest certain forms—movement, lines, sounds—with meaning, and thus begin to use the movement of play, the lines of drawing, and the sounds of language to represent or symbolise people, objects and events that comprise their world.

The author discusses the complex developmental processes that allow children to use symbols not only to represent the world they experience, but to construct imagined ones. Emphasis is laid on the role of art and play in children's growth as symbol makers, particularly written symbols. She illustrates the developmental links children make between play, pictures and print.

Dyson, A. H., (1992). *From prop to mediator: The changing role of written language in children's symbolic repertoires*. [Occasional Paper No. 32]. Berkeley, CA: National Center for the Study of Writing, University of California at Berkeley.



This is a theoretical paper suited for teachers, teacher educators and anyone interested in understanding developmental progression in children's writing. The author illustrates that the development of written language is not a linear progression but intertwined with children's experiences of engaging with different symbolic media. She argues for giving children opportunities to explore the repertoire of symbolic means—drawing, play, dance—accompanied with talk, which forms the foundation for reading and writing. The paper also provides insights about the role of drawing in children's writing. In the end, the author discusses implications of this theory for developing curriculum for early childhood education.

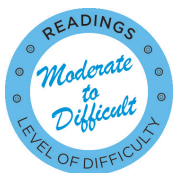
Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 32(4), 365-387.



Flower and Hayes conducted research to understand what guides the decisions writers make as they write. They argue that earlier theories emphasised on linear progression of the writing product. Instead, their research explores the processes of writing. This research laid the groundwork for the theory of cognitive process of writing, unpacking the distinctive thinking processes that writers use in the act of composing.

The paper is suitable for language teachers, teacher trainers and academicians.

Gunning, T. G. (1996). Writing and reading. *Creating Reading Instruction for all Children* (pp. 465-503). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.



This chapter is an elaborate discussion of what writing entails. It seeks to answer questions about the writing process, planning one's writing, choosing the right topic, revising, editing so on and forth. It also discusses the relationship between reading and writing. It's a painstakingly written chapter that helps teachers understand the process of writing, with ideas aplenty for practice.

Harp, B. (1987). When the principal asks, "Why are your kids writing during reading time?" *The Reading Teacher*, 41(1), 88-90.



The paper describes the importance of creating a link between reading and writing through simple, sharp pointers. It presents a strong case for why reading and writing should be interlinked.

Jangid, G., & Amritavalli, R. (2014). Whole language, story reading and children's writing. *The EFL Journal*, 2(2), 15-37.



This article presents findings from a teacher research story project inspired by whole language approach implemented for an academic year in Class I of a private, English-medium school in Hyderabad, India. The research explores supporting students' reading-writing connections using story inputs as prompts

The article compares data from the intervention site, a senior class from the same school, and a school where intervention was not administered. The concluding section summarises the findings from the study and raises critical points about curriculum, the teacher's role and teaching of English as second language. Teachers and other practitioners who want to understand the importance of providing rich inputs to improve children's writing will find the article insightful.

Moutray, C. L., & Snell, C. A. (2003). Three teachers' quest: Providing daily writing activities for kindergartners. *Young Children*, 58(2), 24-28.



Having observed a kindergartners' writing workshop for three days, a school principal encourages teachers in his school to create an environment to encourage children's writing. This led to the initiation of a daily 30-minute writing time for kindergarten classes. The paper describes the classroom environment and pedagogical strategies employed by three teachers throughout this programme in their classrooms. An important point made in the paper is that children also pick up basic literacy skills, such as, symbol recognition, symbol-sound relationship and more as they engage in meaningful writing.

Shanahan, T. (1988). The reading-writing relationship: Seven instructional principles. *The Reading Teacher*, 41(7), 636-647.



Teachers have always struggled with the question of what comes first—reading or writing. Is it even sequential? Could we think of a practice that involves integrating the two? The article proposes seven instructional principles based upon research on reading-writing relationships. These principles explain how to combine reading and writing in the classroom to best enhance children's literacy learning. Several instructional techniques have been recommended based on each of the principles.

Sipe, L. R. (1993). Using transformations of traditional stories: Making the reading-writing connection. *The Reading Teacher*, 47(1), 18-26.



In this paper, teachers in a classroom use transformations of popular children's stories to explore the reading-writing connection made by children. Here, transformation refers to ways in which an original story can be challenged, extended, deconstructed or illustrated differently to explore dominant thoughts, beliefs and ideas that emerge from a text. For example, popular transformations of *The Three Little Pigs*, *Cinderella*, and *The Emperor's New Clothes* challenge, complement or extend the original narrative in different ways. The teachers use these transformations for reading and classroom talk before engaging the children in the process of writing their own transformations.

The paper looks at the different processes—reading, enquiry, comparison, writing, feedback and editing—involved in writing transformations, with examples of the children's transformations.

Spence, L. K. (2010). Discerning writing assessment: Insights into an analytical rubric. *Language Arts*, 87(5), 337.



The paper analyses the method of assessment carried out by two teachers who use the Six Traits rubrics for assessing writing. This rubric considers ideas, organisation, voice, words, sentence fluency and conventions as important traits to assess children's writing.

The author emphasises that the method of assessment that teachers commonly follow doesn't sufficiently take into account the child's context. An argument is presented for creating contextually sensitive methods of assessment for children who learn English as a second language, instead of assessing them on standards created for native English speakers. The paper thus makes a case for incorporating children's socio-cultural and linguistic diversity and different narrative styles during assessment. An appendix provides a detailed rubric of the Six Traits Assessment.

Strickland, D. S., & Morrow, L. M. (1989). Emerging readers and writers: Young children's early writing development. *Reading Teacher*, 42(6), 426-27.



This brief article points us towards the idea of emergent writing. Children at the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten level begin experimenting with the expression of writing, if provided with an encouraging environment. Drawing, scribbling and invented spelling are some strategies applied at this stage. The paper, using a writing sample, points towards the child's existing print knowledge, along with providing tips to create an environment conducive for emergent writing.

Sulzby, E., & Teale, W. H. (1985). Writing development in early childhood. *Educational Horizons*, 64(1), 8-12.



In an early article on emergent writing, Sulzby and Teale argue against traditional beliefs about readiness and introduce readers to the emergent writing perspective. Using illustrations from children's writing, they take readers through the development of emergent writing. The article also highlights the relationships amongst reading, writing and speaking. The authors conclude with implications of the theory for policies on early childhood education and development.

Resources for Practitioners

Practitioner Guides

Pydah, A (2019). Children's writing : Creating books in the classroom. Hyderabad: Early Literacy Initiative, Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Retrieved from http://eli.tiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Creating_Books_in_the_Classroom_ELI_Handout_7.pdf

In this brief, Akhila Pydah, takes readers through a writing programme where children are given authentic and exciting means to write by creating their own books! Readers can learn from a number of examples and strategies that Akhila has presented and adapt the same in classrooms.

Sinha, S., Pydah, A., & Menon, S. (2019) Emergent Literacy. Hyderabad: Early Literacy Initiative, Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Retrieved from http://eli.tiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ELI_Practitioner-Brief-16_Emergent-Literacy.pdf

The *emergent literacy* perspective suggests that with adequate exposure to print, children could start picking up cues to read and write from birth. How can this be? In this brief, Shuchi Sinha, Akhila Pydah and Shailaja Menon, explain what the emergent literacy perspective actually is. While this brief doesn't restrict itself to a discussion of children's writing, and includes a discussion of related concepts such as print awareness and emergent reading, we have placed it under this theme for its detailed explanations and suggestions for supporting emergent writing.

Sinha, S. & Menon, S. (2019). Supporting children's writing in early grades. Hyderabad: Early Literacy Initiative, Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Retrieved from http://eli.tiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Supporting-Childrens-Writing-in-Early-Grades_Practitioner-Brief_11.pdf

In this brief, Shuchi Sinha and Shailaja Menon take us through the many nuances involved in teaching children how to write. They attempt to go beyond what is focussed on in most Indian classrooms - learning the *aksharas* and letters by rote where children learn to write without clearly ever understanding the purpose behind such practices. Instead, this brief focusses on teaching writing for the purpose of expressing and communicating meaningfully.

Subramaniam, S., Menon, S., & Sajitha, S. (2017). *LiRIL teacher's guide—Children's Writing*. Bangalore: Azim Premji University & New Delhi: Tata Trusts. Retrieved from: http://eli.tiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/LiRIL-Guide-Part-III_Childrens-Writing.pdf

This Teachers' Guide, summarises learnings from the LiRiL project related to the teaching and learning of writing in classrooms in Maharashtra and Karnataka. Teachers can prepare to teach writing effectively by understanding how children's writing begins and develops, and by examining what good writing is. This book also provides specific recommendations which can be put to use in classrooms.

Other Useful Columns

Colorín Colorado(n.d.). Helping young children develop strong writing skills. Retrieved from <https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/helping-young-children-develop-strong-writing-skills>

This article though written for parents, offers useful tips on supporting a child to become a strong writer. They also suggest day-to-day activities you could use and also recommend ways in which you could model good writing for children so they pick it up from you. It talks about the importance of responding to a child's writing and praising the efforts of her to write. They suggest these small actions go a long way in encouraging young children to become strong writers. Read on to know more.

Falconer, L. (2010). Encouraging preschoolers' early writing efforts: Take another look at that scribble. *Exchange*, 196, 84-86. Retrieved from <https://www.childcareexchange.com/library/5019684.pdf>

Can a child's squiggles or scribbles be any sign of what their future writing could be like? Leslie Falconer takes us through some of the important aspects of early writing of children and how these can be used to encourage writing as we know it. It also highlights the view that reading and writing go hand in hand; that is why you support one, the other too takes roots! The article presents different ways in which we could support writing, along with phonological awareness, print awareness, reading comprehension and so on.

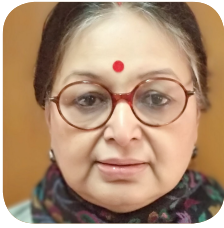
Preschool plan it (n.). Writing center to encourage preschool writing activities. Retrieved from <https://www.preschool-plan-it.com/preschool-writing-activities.html>

This article recommends ways in which a preschool teacher could set up a preschool writing center and suggests a few activities that teachers could use to support the development of writing in preschool children.

Stewart, D (2014). 6 ways to encourage writing in pre-school. Retrieved from <https://teachpreschool.org/2014/05/03/6-ways-to-encourage-writing-in-preschool/>

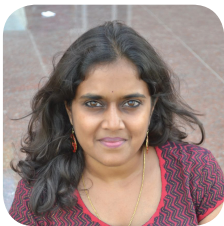
In this article you'll find useful recommendations to support writing in children in a preschool classroom. From using a child's name as a meaningful way to begin writing, to using fingers to write to support dexterity when the child moves on to use a pencil, to offering unique writing experiences, this article has some valuable ideas for the classroom.

CONTRIBUTORS



**SHUBHRA
CHATTERJI**

Shubhra Chatterji has been working in the space of school education since 1986. She has worked as a teacher, curriculum developer, pre-school incubation expert, teacher educator and designer of teacher preparation programmes. She is the founder-director of Vikramshila, a resource organisation that works across the country on issues of educational quality and equity. This organisation began its journey by providing teacher support to rural NGO run pre-schools. It has evolved alongside the children it serves, and now works across the K-10 spectrum in 10 Indian states. Most recently, Chatterji has provided technical expertise in rewriting the ECE curriculum for the ICDS system in West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir. One of her abiding areas of interest is language learning in the early years. She is an avid reader and enjoys watching good movies.



**HARSHITA
V. DAS**

Harshita V. Das works as a Project Coordinator with the Early Literacy Initiative. She has an M.A. in Education from Azim Premji University, Bangalore. She has worked as a teacher at an alternative school in Bangalore and has worked with preprimary and primary teachers in a low-income private school, where she supported them with the teaching and learning of English language. She has also volunteered at an NGO that works with children of a migrant labour community, where she co-taught Kannada and English, and has actively participated in the setting up and functioning of a library in the government school that hosts the NGO.

Her key areas of interest are critical literacy, language and culture, with an emphasis on the idea of balanced bilingualism. She is very fond of children's literature and the idea of engaging young children with it. When she is not going crazy collecting children's literature you can find her happily getting her hands dirty with clay and paint. She feels a deep connect with birds in the wilderness and stars in the vast sky.



**DIKSHA
KHARBANDA**

Diksha Kharbanda is currently working as a preschool teacher. Earlier, Diksha worked as a Research Assistant with the Early Literacy Initiative Project for a year where she worked as a teacher trainer for government school teachers. She was also a part of ELI's Blog and Dissemination Team. Diksha completed her M.A. in Education from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad in 2017. Her classroom experience with young children has helped her observe and better understand their responsiveness and learning capabilities. She has keen interest

in designing experiences for young kids which facilitate their learning in a fun and interactive manner.

Besides being a teacher, Diksha is an avid reader. She is usually found lost in children's books while sipping her coffee. She loves to travel, be amidst nature and soak in the vibes of the mountains, trees and rivers. She loves to draw and paint, collect stationery of different kinds and hot wheels cars. She wants to retain the child in her forever.



SHAILAJA MENON

Shailaja Menon is Professor and Programme-in-charge of the Early Literacy Initiative at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad. Concurrently, she also works as visiting faculty in the area of Language and Literacy at the School of Education, Azim Premji University, Bangalore. Shailaja has completed BA (Psychology) from Delhi University, M.Sc. (Child Development) from MS University, Baroda, and Ph.D. in Literacy, Language and Culture from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Prior to joining Azim Premji University, she has taught at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and at Jones International University.

She led a longitudinal project, Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL; 2011-2017), investigating the teaching and learning of early language and literacy in Maharashtra and Karnataka. She is a co-editor of the volume: *Childhoods in India: Traditions, Trends and Transformations* (2017).

At Azim Premji University, Shailaja offers courses related to early literacy, children's literature, child development and learning, curriculum and pedagogy in the early years, and research methods. Shailaja is also a key anchor of the bi-lingual annual children's literature festival, KathaVana, hosted by Azim Premji University (2012-present). She has served on the jury for the Hindu Literature for Life awards for Children's Literature (2016; 2017), and Sir Ratan Tata Trust's Big Little Book Award (2016). Shailaja's publications have appeared in international and Indian journals, and she serves on several advisory committees that are currently shaping policy and practice related to early literacy in India.

**JANE SAHI**

Jane Sahi has been working in the area of education for the last 38 years. She was born in England and moved to India in 1968 in search of a deeper understanding of Gandhiji's life and values. Gandhiji continues to be to a strong source of inspiration for her, his vision and theory of basic education in particular. In 2000 she wrote a book entitled *Education and Peace*.

She also set up an alternative school in 1975, Sita School, where the focus was on holistic, child centric education for every child. The school had an emphasis on learning through art. To Jane, her engagement at the school formed the basis of her work.

Jane has conducted a number of workshops on language teaching for the Centre for Learning, Bangalore, Teacher Foundation, Regional Institute of English, Bangalore, Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, Phaltan and Kiran Centre, Varanasi and Ashram Shala Schools in Chamrajnagar. She has been actively involved in the Alternative School Network, an informal group of individuals working in the field of education, for almost two decades now.

**SAJITHA**

Sajitha co-founded the NGO SAJAG and works with children and young adults on issues related to education.

Earlier, she worked on the longitudinal research project Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL). She contributed to understanding the issue of teaching and learning of early reading and writing of Marathi (in Maharashtra) by conducting classroom observations and interacting with children.

Prior to that, she worked with QUEST, Maharashtra, as Project Head of their flagship project on 'Balbhavans'. Balbhavans are supplementary learning centres attached to government schools. Children from grades 1 to 4 are given quality inputs in language and mathematics. Sajitha has also worked with women to help form self-help groups. She was with Samaj Pragati Sahayog, Madhya Pradesh, before working in the field of education. Sajitha has a Master's in Social Work from Tata Institute of Social Sciences and a bachelor's in economics from Mumbai University.

**DIVI SINGH**

Divi Singh has completed her BA (Language, literature and cultural studies in German) and M.A. with specialisation in Translation Studies from JNU, New Delhi. Her thesis in M. Phil was titled *Geetanjali Shree's 'Mai': Translation and Ethnography. Translation as cultural praxis* from Jawaharlal Nehru University. She had the opportunity to study at Bergische University, Wuppertal as part of her M. Phil course work. She has worked as an educator at a reputed school in Bangalore for two years. She is an avid reader and has particular interest in children's literature and translation studies.

**SHUCHI SINHA**

Shuchi Sinha is an alumna of Azim Premji University, Bangalore and has been working as a Communications Consultant with the ELI Blog and Dissemination team. Before this, she has worked as a teacher at Adharshila Learning Centre, a school for tribal children in rural Madhya Pradesh, and as an Academic Coordinator at the Organization for Early Literacy Promotion (Ajmer, Rajasthan), an organization dedicated to implementing meaningful early literacy ideas and practices in highly challenging contexts.

Amongst many things that interest her, she finds her heart almost always returning to examine the idea and possibilities of Critical Literacy. She believes that language holds tremendous emancipatory potential and possibilities, and that each child, irrespective of her context, must be given an environment to develop a sense of love and fearlessness of words.

**SNEHA
SUBRAMANIAM**

Sneha Subramaniam is an education consultant who has been studying and working with literature, language and literacy for 15 years. She currently works as a children's writer and curriculum developer for children between the ages of 3-10. She also works as a teacher education researcher and enjoys balancing her time between work for a university, private company and an NGO.

Sneha is interested in how language and culture can be used in dialogue to help children's development of reason and empathy. She is currently creating stories and curricula in this vein. As an educator, she works on realizing thought-provoking and meaningful text and classroom experiences for children from varied socio-economic backgrounds.

BLANK BEAUTY

*Beautiful blank pages
kiss our
imagination
with backgrounds
that demand precision.*

*Our black letters cross
on tightrope lines,
curving
without wavering
across deep, invisible currents.*

*These beautiful blank pages
are promises of our
reflections.*

*Our gentlest strokes
of darkness upon light.*

– Judith Pordon

Children's Writing enters most early grade classrooms in India only in the form of teaching correct spellings and good handwriting. Copywriting accurately and neatly from blackboards is also often emphasised. What are the assumptions behind these practices? Are young children not capable of writing to communicate, to express, to inquire? An entire body of scholarship and research suggests otherwise! The emergent literacy paradigm which has been gathering evidence over the last five decades in other parts of the globe, convincingly demonstrates that even very young children can be helped to meaningfully enter the world of print by drawing upon a mixture of talk, drawing, pretend-play and scribbling. As they gain competence, these "emergent" forms of writing gradually transition into more conventional forms; but, in the meantime, the young child has learned that writing is a meaningful social activity. The blogs presented in this book draw upon the emergent literacy perspective to provide a variety of insights related to the development, teaching and assessment of children's early writing in Indian contexts. We hope that they are useful to your thinking and work!