

Writing - The Process at Pukekohe East

Writing is a skill we all need to learn to do and as with other skills, it comes easily to some and is just plain hard work for others. The process starts as soon as we are born, listening to people speak, listening to stories and music. These all have an impact on how our language experiences grow. The more we talk to our children about a variety of subjects, the wider their vocabulary will be and the more they will be able to understand what the words mean. It will be second nature for them to use the vocab themselves.

We are also helping to make the child's memory longer and more easily accessed. This memory will be invaluable to the children as they learn new skills, retain other skills and practice using the skills. Children need to be able to transfer the skills they know to new learning so that the learning is scaffolded. Adding on little bits at a time until the child becomes competent and sound at using a skill.

When we talk about writing at school we are meaning the creative use of our brain, to record, list, describe or write a narrative. *We aren't talking about handwriting.* As you can probably imagine it is great that the child can write legibly – so that we can read it – but the main process when writing is getting down the ideas in a sequential way with punctuation that adds to the meaning of the script.

In each room there are exemplars for each stage of writing. These show the progressions from NE right through to when a child leaves school across New Zealand. Children, (in particular the older children) are encouraged to compare their writing with what is in the exemplars. Does yours look like this? Do you have the appropriate punctuation? Are you using words that challenge you or just using words that you know you can spell? Am I using the same language that I use in my everyday speech in my writing or am I dumbing it down? It is particularly good when a child does this as they become more accountable for their own writing, and it's not all teacher speak.

These are the exemplars.

[\(View New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars online\)](#)

Across all levels different approaches and genres are used to sustain the interest throughout the year. Conferencing individual children, leads to learning intentions that are appropriate to each child and the teaching is pertinent.

At all levels of the school Modelling books are used by the teacher, (both teacher made and bought from publishers), these form a base that the children can always refer back to.

Reading Eggs and Reading Eggspress back up the skills being taught in the classes. The activities reinforce and help to maintain the skills so that the children can recall them more quickly when writing.

This afternoon we hope to give you an insight into how writing is taught here at our school at the different levels.

Juniors:

Firstly we need to feed in to the children about what we are writing about. The better stories always come, when the child knows a lot about the subject. We do a lot of discussing, reading of other versions of a story or finding facts out about the subject. We then model how we would write a story in a large book. We pretend we are the child and think out loud imitating how we would like the child to think when they work independently.

1. Think of a sentence that will lead the reader into the writing – giving them some idea about what you are writing about.
2. Sound out the first word. Write the first sound, then the other sounds you can hear. Usually it's the first sound, the last sound, then the medial sound.
3. Go back and read your story to remind you of your sentence – this will also help the child check that it sounds right and no words have been left out.
4. Continue in this way until the sentence is finished. The child then needs to think about what would happen next in the story, and creates the next sentence to flow on from this.

In the Juniors we use pictures as our plan. This is what jogs our memory as to what we are writing about. So our stories can be written over 3/4 days, as we can check with our plan and our writing to see where we are up to.

This process is slow to start with but as the children get more confident they start to write or go on without needing an adult there. This is independent writing and often at this stage the children want long stories so can repeat. But if the plan/pictures are stuck too this eliminates this repeating from happening.

It is an absolute delight the first time the child goes on by themselves and the writing can be read. It is a cloud nine experience. When the child can also go back weeks later and read a story, that is also fantastic.

A few years ago our writing levels in the juniors didn't match the reading levels. Reading was always much higher than the writing levels, but this has gradually got more balanced as the transference of skills across the curricula happens and children are made aware to make this transference.

Middle School:

Independence usually has been accomplished and the children can write on their own for periods of time. Skill teaching comes into its own as the children are able to add on to the base that they already have established. The children should be able to actively edit their work, so that it is sequenced better, makes sense and is succinct. By the end of Year Three this also leads onto being able to give feedback to their peers.

The students will be able to create content that conveys several experiences, items of information and or ideas relating to the topic or task, and includes details and or personal comment. The children will start to be able to choose the appropriate genre for the type of writing they are doing.

At this higher level the teacher will often restrict the amount that is written in order to get good writing and focus on the skill being taught at the moment. This is a relief for some children as the end goal is attainable and they find success as they can readily achieve this amount of writing. It also makes the writing more concise and the children have to think about how to write something using fewer words, but while still being creative. They learn about constructing sentences that are rich in vocabulary and have an impact. They spend a lot of time learning about punctuation and how it can be used to enhance the mood of a piece of writing. They learn to use language features such as alliteration, personification, similes and metaphors. Whilst editing is relatively basic, some children move on from correcting basic spelling and punctuation errors to a more sophisticated form of editing called 're-crafting' where they recreate a portion of the writing to improve on it.

At times we use research as a base for our stories. We study a particular animal or insect and write factual stories. This serves as a guide for struggling writers and gives them a purpose for writing, to inform others. Naturally this technique also broadens children minds, and improves their general knowledge.

Senior School:

In the senior school grouping of the children is far more flexible. These groups are based on each child's needs and change frequently because the levels at this end of the school are wider.

At this level students create content that is relevant, covers a range of ideas, experiences, or items of information, and often includes detail and or comment that supports the main points. The students can also choose the appropriate language and text structures for the purpose of the writing. They will be able to independently revise and edit their writing to clarify its meaning and add impact, often in response to feedback from the teacher and or their peers.

Also at this stage teachers have the added disadvantage of having some children who are over writing. They can't see the purpose or otherwise think they can't write, they aren't looking at the big picture – I can always learn something.

Teachers in the upper school have to find ways to hook these children in, to find ways where the children actually don't think they are writing – it doesn't look like it used to.

ICT has a big part to play in making both reluctant and enthusiastic writers want to write. It is highly visual, gives dynamic results, and the published work is a higher standard. The written planning on paper, the discussion, the thinking that goes into these pieces of writing is huge, but as the child is using a device he/she doesn't see it as work per se. Of course this is not the only method of delivery but it certainly helps to encourage all writing.

The stages in senior writing:

Planning is very important as in the junior and middle school but at this stage the children will have used a variety during their schooling. They will have models that work best for them and may often choose to work with this plan predominantly. A plan allows a writer to come back to the writing with breaks in between as this will remind them what they are writing about and how they are writing it. A plan can always be

added to and when a child re-crafts their work, (adding in, taking out, finding better words, using a new skill more appropriately), the plan comes into its own. I still use a plan when I write, so this is a life-long skill that starts in the New Entrants and continues as long as we are writing.

A draft is the first writing on an idea. Ideas come from the plan and are put into the correct structure and sequence depending on the genre being used at the time. Particular genre, have their own structure and language features and through the years at school children will learn when to use the appropriate genre for the type of writing they are doing at the time.

When the draft is finished, editing and re-crafting begin. Editing refers to the punctuation, spelling and grammar issues. Re-crafting looks at could I have written this more concisely? Could I have used better, more vivid vocabulary? Have I got all the language and structural features in place? The editing and re-crafting uses symbols, to show shifts and movements across the work.

Once the editing and re-crafting is done peer and teacher feedback is given. The children then need to act on this feedback and if they agree with it then they need to make further changes.

Once all these parts of the writing process have been completed, the work is then shared with an audience. This may be an oral presentation or the work may be published using a variety of ways.

Whole School:

How do we get the levels that we say your children are at?

Because we are working with the children each day and because of our experience using the exemplars we can tell where each child is at. We also have the knowledge of how they work across the other curricula and this adds to our judgement.

But how do we know that your child is the same as any other child from across New Zealand?

Twice a year we test the children to give us beginning and ending data. This shows us how much the child has progressed during the year. Each child writes for 40 minutes on a given topic. In the juniors to Year Four it is on a recount topic and the Year Five and Six children have a genre that is chosen by the management team at the beginning of the year. After the work is finished two samples from each class are collected by me. I then collate these un-named, with no levels on them, pieces of work. Each teacher is given a sample pack and goes home to mark. The next two staff meetings are taken up with the moderation process. We compare, discuss, and justify why we have the mark that we do. We use the exemplars, rubrics and documents to reach decisions about each piece of writing. The teachers at this school come out with very similar results, which shows that we are all on the same page.

After this moderation process is finished, we then all go and mark our other pieces against the rubric and exemplars. It is a time consuming process but ensures that our children gain a mark that is reliable.

As with every new skill, the more we practise writing the better we get. It is really important for children to see you reading so that they think this is an activity that is part of life, and equally so, is that they see you writing. Not many of us sit down and write essays, but we do write lists, plan events, sort out the family's finances, write letters to the bank/lawyers. Let the children see you doing this real writing, let them see there is a purpose to learning to write in the real world. Give any writing that they do the enthusiasm that it deserves.

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