

Supporting our Children as Writers

April 27, 2009

julle.folkert@farmington.k12.mi.us

6 Strategies to Increase Writing Achievement

- Build Oral Language skills through conversations
- Read to our children and insure that they independently read throughout the year
- Provide focused and effective feedback about our child's writing

6 Strategies to Increase Writing Achievement (cont.)

- Read like a writer using excellent models of writing
- Use writing to promote thinking
- Utilize choice to motivate children to write

Strategy #1: The Power of Conversation

A recent study shows that the average American child spends less than five minutes each day engaged in conversation with a member of his/her family.

The Power of Conversation

Ask yourself...

- How many nights a week do you sit down and enjoy dinner as a family?

- How much time do you spend in conversation with your children?

Note: Asking questions that require a "Yes" or "No" answer doesn't count (i.e. "Do you have any homework?")

Idea Bank: Conversation Starters

Each person at the table randomly selects a slip of paper from the container in the center of the table. After reading the idea on the slip and thinking about it for a moment, one person shares their thoughts about the idea on his/her slip. Each person at the table can take turns adding their thoughts, as well. After everyone has the opportunity to share, the next person begins the process with the idea on his/her slip.

The Power of Conversation

Conversations help to build....

- Listening comprehension
- Vocabulary
- Complexity of sentence structure
- Conceptual understanding
- Critical thinking skills
- Trusting, caring relationships

Strategy #2: Read to your Child and Insure that your Child is Independently Reading each Day

"Reading is to the mind what
exercise is to the body."

~ Sir Richard Steele

The Impact of Summer Reading

- The best predictor of summer loss or summer gain is whether or not a child reads during the summer
- Children need "just right books" - books that match their skill levels and interests.
- When a child reads as few as six appropriately leveled books, s/he is likely to fend off summer reading loss and maintain the reading gains made during the previous school year.
- Reading more than six books over the summer leads to even greater success. When children are provided with 10 - 20 self-selected children's books at the end of the regular school year, as many as 50% not only maintain their skills but actually make reading gains.

Idea Bank: Set a Summer Reading Goal with your Child

- Find books that your child is interested in
- Utilize Farmington Public Library's book list suggestions (see kid's page) www.farmillb.org
- The following link has multiple links with recommendations <http://childrensbooks.about.com>

Strategy #3: Provide Focused, Effective Feedback About Our Child's Writing

When providing positive feedback:

- Specifically identify what the child has done as a writer and show him or her an example within their writing piece
- Connect this accomplishment to the goals of effective writing (see the "What is Good Writing" sheet in the folder), so s/he understands what was done well in order to repeat it again in future writing

Strategy #3: Provide Focused, Effective Feedback About our Child's Writing (cont.)

When providing constructive feedback:

- Together, determine one specific area of focus within your child's writing that can improve (see the "What is Good Writing" sheet in folder)
- Connect this focus to the goals of effective writing, so s/he understands why we want to work on this area
- Model/discuss how we could work toward achieving this goal

Positive Feedback Example

Student Writing – Taken from "Chores":

"Dusting is the worst: dust, set down, pick up, dust, set down. There are SO many things to dust, and it's not fun."

When I read this, I noticed that you really showed me what the dusting experience was like and how boring it is. This helped me to picture you dusting and it supported the big idea in your writing piece that chores are boring.

Constructive Feedback Example

Student Writing – Taken from "Chores":

"Chores aren't the worst, but they're definitely not the best!"

Focused area to improve: When I read this sentence I didn't feel like I was ready for it to be finished. You had given me so many details throughout the rest of the piece, but it just seemed to end. It's a great ending sentence but is missing something.

Goal: We want our writing to flow well from the beginning, through the middle, to the end and feel balanced.

Plan: Let's think about how can we help the reader pull together the ideas in your piece and end with this sentence? Do you have any other thoughts about chores to share with the reader?

Providing Feedback

"I think I did pretty well, considering that I started out with a blank piece of paper."

- Steve Martin

Strategy #4: Reading Like a Writer

“Writers take their reading very seriously. When they read, they discover topics for their own writing. They become interested in new genres and formats. They study authors’ techniques to learn how to improve their own writing. They develop mentor relationships with their favorite writers, aspiring to be more like them.”

- Shelley Harwayne

Reading Like a Reader

- **Reading like a reader.** We might think of this as the “normal” way of reading where we try to figure out what a piece of writing means by understanding the words a writer is using. But even this “normal” way is more complicated than it seems.

Reading Like a Writer

- **Reading like a writer.** When we read from the perspective of a writer, we focus less on *what* the writer is trying to say and more on *how* the writer is saying it. Specifically, we look at the techniques the writer is using to get his or her message across and how those techniques affect us as we experience the text.

Idea Bank: Reading Like a Writer

Use this strategy, as well as the suggestions on the "Read Like a Writer" sheet when you read the following types of fiction and nonfiction text with your child:

- Picture books
- Informational books
- Chapter books
- Magazine articles
- Newspaper articles

***Hip, Hip Hooray for the Return of the Hula Hoop* by Craig Wilson**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IDEAS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What types of details does the writer use? - How does the writer achieve his purpose? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word Choice/ Voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What techniques does the writer use to make the word choice more specific, more memorable, and more effective? - How Does the writer put personality into the piece?
---	---

Strategy #5: Use Writing to Promote Thinking

"Writing is thinking on Paper"
~ William Zinsser

Use Writing to Promote Thinking

Writing is an effective tool to clarify and deepen your child's thinking about:

- Setting and achieving goals
- Understanding mathematical concepts
- Current events within their lives and the world around them

Idea Bank: Use Writing to Promote Thinking

- Give a math problem to your child and have them explain in writing how to solve it
- Have your child write a persuasive piece of writing to convince you to do something that they have been nagging you about (i.e. extending their bedtime, letting them do something, buying them something that they want)

Strategy #6: Utilize Choice to Motivate Children to Write

If our ultimate goal is to get our children to write well, we will be most successful by giving them the ability to choose what they want to write about.

Idea Bank: Opportunities for Choice

- Create an informational book about a topic of interest
- Create a graphic novel
- Begin scrap booking a special event or trip
- Create a journal to reflect upon a sport or hobby

"What we really want to see is children who have lots of ideas for their writing. Children who begin to read like writers. Children who are excited about writing and confident that they can write. And, glimpses of another author- or of craft - in a child's writing. We want them to try on lots of shoes. We want them to walk around in all the shoes they want, for as long as they like, until they begin to find shoes of their own."

- Heather Lovelace,
first grade teacher
