

Getting The Most Out of Interactive Writing

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The WHY of Interactive Writing

Teachers implement interactive writing as a transition tool to help children learn how to write. [or to shift writers from where they are to their next step] But, for interactive writing lessons to be truly powerful, teachers must move beyond procedural knowledge. They must refine their lessons to meet the needs of the group of children they are teaching as well as for the individual students within the group. The teachers' knowledge of students is what enables them to make just the right instructional decisions at just the right moment. The power of the "teachable moment" is that when children are working at the cutting edge of their abilities they are more engaged, there are fewer management concerns, and learning occurs.

When children work with very easy, known material, they may be "spinning their wheels" and not learning because they have lost interest. If children work with material that is over their heads they may become frustrated and escape by tuning out. Either way, children will not continue to make [optimal] progress as writers.

Overview of the Writing Process

(Taken from Interactive Writing by Andrea McCarrier page 3)

- A writer needs a **purpose** or reason for writing.
- A writer thinks about the **audience**.
- A writer selects a **form** for writing. (list, sign, letter, set of directions)
- A writer decides on a **message**
- A writer **constructs** text to express the message.
- A writer reflects and evaluates during the process. (**rereading**, with possible editing and revising)
- A writer considers text **layout**.

Commonly asked questions about Interactive Writing in the primary classroom

1. How long should my lessons be?

No longer than the attention span of your audience.

2. Is it ok to split a lesson or quit in the middle of something?

Absolutely!

There are 4 parts to the whole lesson:

1. Common Experience
2. Composing (planning)
3. Constructing
4. Rereading

Often it will take several days to complete all 4 parts.

Depending on the length of the text, the construction may span several days. It is possible to not have any writing occur during IAW on the day that you are planning/composing together.

While the composing step is the easiest to skim over or skip—I see it as very important because that is where the emotional buy in comes—the purpose is established.

3. Why do you use black markers? And is there a certain type of marker that works best?

I prefer black bullet tip markers. I have found that the fewer the distractions (colors) the easier it is for struggling readers/writers to attend to the print. The print also needs to be large enough for the whole group to read easily from a distance. Here is an excerpt from INTERACTIVE

WRITING by Andrea McCarrier, pg. 40:

We recommend using black, although dark blue or purple may work ok. Look at the writing from the point of view of the child. It is easier to read print if it is written in clear, dark letters on white or very light background.

I prefer the bullet tipped flip chart marker because it is easy for the kids to maneuver.

4. How long should my piece of writing be?

Consider what the GR book page looks like at your average student's reading level. If they are reading level A books with one line of predictable print, then that should be our goal. This does not mean that we can't write more on a certain topic, it may mean that it will be more useful if cut apart or spread out onto more than one page. The key is to produce something that the students can reread. The bang that comes with these IAW pieces is that they are readable and useful for WW weeks/months to come if displayed where students can see them. Don't forget to read them over and over for shared reading in the days that follow constructing them.

Puckett PV LC

Interactive Writing with Mrs. Miller's first grade class
Prairie View Elementary. Goshen Community Schools

As a team we were invited to observe Mrs. Miller's IW lesson. The day before the observation, we received the following email:

For Monday's IW lesson we will be in the composing stage. I have the goal of wanting to use language that encourages student authorship and ownership of the writing idea...I am interested in you listening for my language:

- 1. What phrases do I use that elicit engagement and ownership of students in the process?*
- 2. What do I say to help guide students in their sharing and discussion of ideas?*
- 3. What do I say that helps students come together to agree on an idea?*

T: Teacher S: Student

T: I've been thinking...your parents are coming in soon for conferences and I want them to know what great bug scientists you've become. Every morning as you arrive you stop by and check out the bugs. You've learned so much about bugs...How could we share with parents all that we know? Do you have any ideas for this?

S: We could write the names of all the bugs and what we know.

T: Do you have an idea of what we could start with?

S: We could start with a praying mantis

S: (Sydney)At the top we could say that this team knows a lot about praying mantises

S: the praying mantis' head fell off.

T: Well, we need to decide what kind of writing we will do. There are different ways we could do this...like a letter to parents, a journal page about praying mantises or a sign.

S: I like Sydney's idea... but if we start like that, then the whole thing would only be about praying mantises, not other bugs.

T: Oh, so you want to be sure we include other bugs too?

S: Yes.

Students and teacher made a list of all the insects to include

T: Should we write a story, make a list, or do you have other ideas?

S: A sign

S: Did we include grasshoppers?

T: Yes. We could even leave a big blank space in case we become experts on other bugs.

S: Yea.

T: So should it start, This class knows a lot about bugs... and then make a list?

S: Yes.

T: Then maybe when we get to the praying mantis on the list we could write more about it and add pictures about what we learned.

S: How about the spider? We could make a web and write on it.

T: Do you think we should include spiders?

S: Yes.

T: OK. You have a lot of good ideas about how to share what we know with parents. I think we have enough planning to get started. Tomorrow we will start making our sign.

Interactive Writing with Mrs. Roth's First Grade
Prairie View Elementary. Goshen Community Schools

T: Teacher S: Student

T: We've been talking about our field trip to Merry Lea and one thing that happened there that we never want to forget.

S: The heron!

T: Hmm...what could help us remember what happened?

S: We could write it down in a story.

T: Yes, we could. Let's do that. As we plan this story, let's think about what we know about stories.

S: They have a beginning, middle and end.

T: Yes, so we will want to be sure ours has those parts. Which part do you think will be longer?

S: The middle, the most exciting part, when we saw it. We could describe that.

T: How should we start our story?

S: We could say "We rode on a bumpy hayride."

S: I like that word, maybe bumpy should go on our "wow word list."

T: OK Adam, you can go add that to our list.

T: If we start like that do you think it would be helpful to tell the reader where we were?

S: Yes. T: So how could we do that?

S: How about "We rode on a bumpy hayride at Merry Lea."

S: No, I think it should say straw ride.

T: OK, we could say it that way, since it was straw instead of hay.

Teacher wrote ***We rode on a***

T: Hannah, will you come write the next word ***bumpy*** for us?

The teacher and other students added ***straw ride at Merry Lea.***

Student reread.

T: So, there is our first part. What happened next?

S: All of a sudden Mrs. Roth saw a great blue heron.

S: And Hannah!

S: Wait! You have to write said, not saw.

T: Well, what do the rest of you think? What happened first?

Hannah: We saw it first and then we said it.

S: You YELLED stop!

T: OK, "All of a sudden Mrs. Roth and Hannah saw a great blue heron and yelled stop."

Students agreed.

Students and teacher constructed it together and reread what they had written.

T: Since we said this part (stop) I am going to put quotation marks around it.

S: You should add "to Tom" (the tractor driver) because that's who you were yelling it to.

T: OK, I will. Now what should we add to the end of this sentence?

S: a period

T: we could...or an exclamation mark, what do the rest of you think?

S: a period. T: OK
 Students reread what they had written.
 T: So, we have the beginning. What happened next?
 Discussion followed and it was agreed to add, *The people in the first wagon thought someone fell out.*
 Teacher scribed ***The people in the first***
 T: Say **wagon** slowly with me, what do you hear?
 S: I hear *wag* and *on*.
 T: I do too and it looks like that too. Teacher writes **wagon**.
 Teacher wrote ***thought someone fell***
 T: Jeremy would you come write **out**? He did, using the word wall as a resource.
 Students reread what they had written.
 Discussion followed and it was decided that they should write—*Then they said stop too.*
 T: Let's think about how those words start. Listen for that sound. (TH) Students made the sound with her. T: What two letters make that sound?
 Students dictated letters while teacher scribed...***Then they***
 T: said...Seth could you help us with "said"? ...oh he knows where to look for that word...that's our new word wall word. Seth copies, checking carefully for the direction of the d.
 T: he's checking his d, those can be tricky.
 Teacher added ***stop too***. Students reread all that they had written.
 S: Finally, Tom stopped.
 T: Well what's next?
 S: We had to pull up to see it better.
 S: ***He pulled up a little further.***
 S: Yea
 T: Teacher scribed until she got to the TH in further. Say that word...further, hear the middle sound? There it is again. What makes that sound?
 S: th!
 S: We were so quiet.
 Negotiation, and word choice discussion followed. Agreement was reached:
Suddenly the great blue heron soared right in front of us.
 S: Oh, that's the most important part of our story.
 T: Yes, it is. Is this where we usually find the most important part of a story?
 S: Yes, in the middle.
 S: Our middle is getting long.
 T: It is. Is that what we talked about in writing workshop? (Stretching out the most important part of our story)
 S: Yes
 T: Did we do that?
 S: Now what happened?
 T: How should we end it?
 S: excited!
 T: We could say we were so excited.
 S: Then we went back to the farm.

T: We could say that, but is going back to the farm important to this story?

S: No

S: I wish we had taken a picture!

S: Well, maybe we could say that—***We were so excited we forgot to take a picture!***

T: Yes, we could. Let's do. Teacher scribed.

T: Now let's check our story. (Students reread piece.) Where is our beginning, middle and end? Did we stretch out the most important part, the middle?

S: Yes!

T: Now we will never forget the great blue heron.