Nell Noddings, American educationalist and philosopher, recently wrote about creativity in the curriculum. She offers this important advice:

... creativity can be encouraged by making time for it, inviting playful responses, engaging in open exploration. Finally Americans should remember that if they want to promote creativity in their students, they should encourage it in their teachers. (2013, p. 215)

The following books are resources for encouraging teachers to bring creativity into the classroom through the vehicle of writing. These books invite open-ended exploration, inquiry, and inspiration.

Playful Writing: 150 Open-Ended Explorations in Emergent Literacy

Writing is an extension of play for young children as they explore their world and try out new ideas. Children develop concepts of the world around them through observation and interaction. They learn through manipulating objects and materials such as blocks and play dough; they observe the environment through all their senses; they listen to a train rumbling on the tracks, watch clouds drift across the sky, and feel the breeze blowing across their skin. These experiences must also be brought into writing instruction. Using dots, circles, and lines, emergent writers represent their experiences. Given plenty of opportunities for exploration and materials for representation, children will use writing as a means for creative expression. For example, raindrops are one of the explorations included in Playful Writing. Authors Olien and Woodside recommend spreading paper and crayons next to a window when it is raining outside. Children are invited to use these materials to express what they see outside the window. This is one of many ways children can be encouraged to use their creative capacity to write.

The introduction to Playful Writing provides a theoretical understanding of how young children learn through playful exploration. The authors explain how learning to write is a cyclical process—children often return to earlier forms when they are tackling more difficult concepts. Olien and Woodside structured the book with writing explorations grouped according to this developmental, cyclical process of writing growth. Playful Writing is intended for use in care centers, at home, and in school.

As children move from making dots and squiggles, they begin to include letters, words, and invented spellings. Later, children begin to use their drawings as illustrations to support more extended text. These children are termed “ready writers.” Although they are beginning to write more conventionally, they should also be given opportunities for creative exploration.
Chapter one of *Playful Writing* focuses on encouraging early writers to make marks on paper. Starting with chapter two, the activities include both early writers and ready writers. Chapters cover familiar early childhood topics such as communities, transportation, and animals. Chapter two is titled Creative Drama Playful Dozen and includes constructing a pizza parlor. Teachers and children talk about what happens in a pizza parlor and what is needed to make pizza. Then children use cardboard circles, memo pads, play money, and other materials as they talk about making and selling pizza and dramatize literacy practices in the pizza parlor setting. Other chapters are titled On the Go!, Make Way for Superheroes, Friendly Fairy Tales, Tricks and Magic, Special Places, Sensational Senses, Growing Time, Wild Weather, Animal Antics, Nature’s Pen, That’s Amazing, and Celebrations. The writing activities in each chapter help children make sense of their world. For example, in the chapter Natures Pen, the activity Tiny Treasures and Tiny Me encourages children to look closely at natural objects they collect, such as seashells and rocks. After observing and discussing the objects, children imagine they shrink down to the size that would allow them to make a tiny object their home. Then children create stories of what happens to them in their tiny world.

Olien and Woodside explain how providing playful exploration before writing focuses children on a topic and gives them a bank of related words that emerge from their oral language. The explorations described in *Playful Writing* fuel inspiration and imagination. Included are questions for teachers to scaffold children’s thinking and writing, based upon Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (1978). There are 150 activities in this book, and each one includes a list of materials and directions to initiate play and facilitate writing. The appendix includes connections to the Common Core State Standards for writing, speaking, and listening (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). (LKS)

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*Science Notebooks Second Edition: Writing about Inquiry*


Writing is used as a tool for thinking in scientific inquiry. It is a means for developing understanding and gaining new insights. Abstract concepts encountered in science class cannot merely be transmitted from a textbook to the student. Students must engage with the concepts in order to really understand. This is the power of writing in the content areas. Through writing, students try out new ideas, record their emerging questions, and internalize ways of talking and writing about science concepts. One way to provide essential time for writing is through implementing science notebooks in the classroom.

In order to use science notebooks effectively, teachers must understand the process children will go through as science writers. Just as children are learning science concepts, they are also developing as writers and thinkers. In this second edition, authors Lori Fulton and Brian Campbell provide elementary teachers with ways to scaffold students as they learn to record their observations and thinking. The first chapter is an explicit description of how to implement science notebooks in the classroom. Here, as well as throughout the book, classroom vignettes are told from a teacher’s point of view. This chapter also has a weekly plan to help teachers get started.

Chapter two includes the elements that will ultimately be explored in science notebooks as children develop skill as science writers. Each element is discussed in detail, including questioning, planning, recording observations, drawing, organizing, and recording thinking. Questioning is especially important and can be developed through science work. “As students
work through materials they are constantly asking questions, although they may not realize it” (p. 49). Fulton and Campbell describe how to encourage students to verbalize their questions.

Chapter three explores the developmental progression of writing in science notebooks. For example, students may not be able to distinguish between observations and questions in the beginning. With scaffolding, students will eventually be able to recognize valuable questions. Over time, children will begin to organize their writing so that the questions are grouped according to aspects of the scientific investigation.

Chapters four through six discuss the application of science notebooks. An interesting addition to this second edition is found in chapter four. Several scientists and an engineer were interviewed to find out how they use notebooks in their work. These professionals also give their recommendations for using science notebooks in school. Chapter five connects science notebooks with science education standards, and chapter six connects science notebooks to speaking, listening, and writing. Science Notebooks: Writing about Inquiry is a resource for teachers interested in developing children’s questioning, thinking, and writing abilities as they develop scientific concepts.

There is an increased emphasis on helping students explore, read, and understand complex texts. In concert, students are also expected to be able to produce clear and coherent understanding of these complex texts through writing in a variety of formats. The reading and writing expectations for students are more demanding as a result of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), and teachers are looking for instructional resources to help their students meet those demands. Rozlyn Linder’s book Chart Sense: Common Sense Charts to Teach 3–8 Informational Text and Literature is sure to be a popular professional text choice for teachers as they navigate the new reading and writing territory of the CCSS.

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In her introduction, Linder contends that charts are beneficial to all students because they help readers and writers make sense of complex texts. Linder makes it clear that teachers are creating these charts with their students collaboratively so that “students will have a shared sense of ownership over the content” (p. 13), which further promotes increased interest and engagement for students. It is clear that Linder’s charts are just one way teachers can differentiate learning in their classrooms.

Linder also acknowledges there are many types of charts; however, she has classified her charts into four key areas: ritual, toolbox, classification, and interactive. She then goes on to explain that ritual charts offer basic rules for student to follow that can include such things as class expectations, procedures, and routines. Because these charts are static, Linder does not include these in her book.
Toolbox charts include the collection of strategies that help students make sense of text and are used regularly to support readers and writers. Classification charts can be used to help readers and writers understand characteristics of different charts, such as genre charts, or to develop their abilities in comparing and contrasting. Interactive charts are Linder’s favorites because she believes students learn the most from them. It is clear, however, that there is a great deal of overlap in these four types of charts, which Linder readily acknowledges. Naming the different types of charts is really not that useful to teachers; what is important is helping students see the value in the many ways writers can create charts out of their reading, learning, and knowing. Linder also includes a section on creating and displaying charts in the introduction, which offers some creative ways for teachers to think about charts in their classrooms.

Linder has organized her book into nine chapters, each devoted to a CCSS Anchor Standard for reading. Each chapter begins with the Standard as it is worded in the CCSS. Then below the Anchor Standard is a chart that lists the literature and informational text and standards broken down by grade level. Next, Linder offers a brief explanation of her interpretation of the demands of the Standard. She then details how she would go about teaching and using anchor charts with her students. There are a variety of sections in the chapters with subheads that include such topics as introducing the chart, extension activities, teaching tips, grade-level considerations, scaffolding ideas, selecting a text, writing connections, variations, cross-curricular connections, and troubleshooting tips. Although not all these subheadings appear in each chapter, Linder offers a number of them in each one to support teachers. In addition, each chapter includes a wealth of chart possibilities (anywhere from 5 to 11) for each Reading Standard. There are also more than 65 photographs of charts throughout the book. Reading and navigating the book will be easy for teachers, so they can be selective about how they use the book based on their needs.

Using visual representations in the classroom is an inclusive practice; all learners can make sense of visuals, oftentimes more readily than print text. This book provides teachers with a new lens for looking at reading, writing, and thinking that will resonate with all students. (VAO)

References

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