Planning to write

Once writers know that they are going to write they need to make (or have made for them) certain decisions so they clearly understand what their writing will involve. They need to have answers to the following questions:

- Why am I writing? What am I trying to do with this piece of writing? (This provides the purpose of writing.)
- To whom am I writing? (This indicates the audience for the writing.)

Writers may also seek answers to these questions:

- What form will best suit my purpose? What structure will the form take?
- What do I know about the content of the writing? What should I include in the writing? (This suggests the content of the writing and is dependent on the purpose, audience, form and the source of the experience.)

FORM HINT

(i) Narrative writing (stories) rarely requires much planning of content because ideas emerge through the writing; however, even here there are marked individual differences.
(ii) Expository writing (essays, reports, reviews), which is largely informational, requires some planning of content so that it is logically presented.

Pre-writing strategies

Writers use a variety of strategies to help organize their thoughts about their intended writing. The strategy or strategies they use depends on the purpose, audience and form, and their personality and approach to writing.

Pre-writing may take a few minutes before writing commences (eg responding to an invitation) or it may occupy several weeks for a large piece of writing (eg researching for a project).

Thinking

It is important that you provide writers with ‘thinking time’ so they can gather their thoughts together. Many thoughts occur at odd moments when they are least expected. If writers know in advance about their future writing they have time to ponder and collect ideas. When you allow free choice of topics you provide writers with an advantage because they can be constantly thinking about a possible topic.
Some useful pre-writing strategies that enhance thinking and are worth encouraging include:

**Talking**
Talking helps clarify ideas and thoughts. Children can share their ideas and sort out any misunderstandings. The most effective talk situations are small groups, although pairs and class sessions may be useful for particular activities.

Language experience activities are suited to class sessions. However, while talk is useful for sorting out ideas, too much of it as a pre-writing strategy may discourage children from wanting to write.

**Reading/literature**
Reading is always a valuable experience and should be an integral part of the writing programme because it acts as a source of input to increase children's experiences. Regular reading by the children, and by you to them, continually adds to their knowledge of the world and of how language works. This knowledge is drawn on and used in writing. More specifically, reading provides:
- a source of information for content writing (note-making may accompany this reading),
- other views of life and the world we live in,
- a model for literary forms and styles,
- a stimulus to reflect on our own experience.

**Note-making**
It's often helpful to jot down any thoughts or information that may be used for the intended writing. This note-making often merges into the writing stage. Jottings may include:
- notes for expository (factual) writing from reference books,
- flashes of inspiration.

**Brainstorming**
Brainstorming involves writing down, without deliberation or discussion, words or thoughts associated with a particular topic. After the thoughts have been written down they can be discussed in more detail and organized for inclusion in the writing. Brainstorming may be done at an individual, group or class level.

**Drawing**
Many children find it easier to express their ideas pictorially before they write them. In this way they clarify their ideas through drawing and writing then becomes easier. They can continually refer to their drawing for the substance of their writing.
Enacting
Children may use dance, drama, mime, music or role-play to help express their ideas. When children become absorbed in their acting, they explore and discover ideas and feelings which can form a basis for their writing.

Modelling
Activities involving papier mache, play-dough, clay, straws, egg cartons, boxes and needlework are all ways of shaping ideas for writing.

What is your role?

- RESPOND positively to children’s ideas and offer of encouragement.
- ENCOURAGE children to share their ideas, and provide time for this to happen.
- MAKE suggestions and offer ideas where they are needed.
- ASK open-ended questions to stimulate thought if children are experiencing difficulty (eg What about…? How did it feel? Why do you think…? What would you do?)
- SHOW writers examples of pre-writing strategies (eg your own planning of assignments, the Principal’s notes for a newsletter, other teachers’ notes).