

Exemplar 4

Using experience charts as a basis for children's early contact with reading

A language experience chart enables the child's oral expression to be given the permanence of public print.

This approach to learning to read has a number of features to commend it:

- it enables the child to tell and later to read personal experiences
- it provides the teacher with an opportunity to model writing and reading for the children
- it caters for individual differences among children
- it integrates listening, speaking, reading and writing and can be used with individuals, groups or the whole class.

Unplanned opportunities for language development will arise frequently through chance happenings, for example a butterfly, a bee or a wasp in the classroom. These happenings can provide the basis for the authentic recording of the child's language. However, occasions can also be planned and used as a stimulus for language work. 'Our news' is frequently used to encourage children to recall and recount events, but this should not be the only source of talk. Other examples could include a nature walk, a visit to a park or playground, a visitor to the classroom (postperson, doctor, nurse) or a video. These can all be used to stimulate narrative, description, discussion and dialogue.

Following questions, answers, discussion and comment about a particular event or incident the teacher can ask individual children what they would like him/her to write about the event or incident. The teacher then records what the children have to say on a large sheet of chart paper naming the letters as he/she writes. These sentences should match as closely as possible what the children say. The teacher should avoid the temptation to embellish the children's sentences.

Initially, the teacher and the children read together what has been written, focusing on initial letters, 'special' words, and print features such as top-to-bottom and left-to-right orientation. Later, when the children have acquired some concepts of reading, groups and individual children should be asked to help the teacher to read the chart. After reading there should be plenty of discussion, giving the children opportunities to ask and answer questions. The chart should be kept and reread frequently at intervals. A number of related charts can be put together to make a book and this can be kept in the library corner or class library.

Unplanned opportunities for language development will arise frequently through chance happenings.