Reading and writing are social practices: reading and writing involve the construction of meaning to serve relevant life purposes, so to facilitate and enrich our lives.

Reading and writing are not ends in themselves. Classroom reading and writing should be seen by children, to be relevant to their lives.

Writing can be viewed from both the surface and deep structures. Too much focus on the surface features, impedes a writer’s control of the deep level of writing.

The Conditions of Learning (Brian Cambourne, 1988)
- Immersion
- Demonstration
- Engagement
- Responsibility
- Use
- Expectations
- Approximation
- Response

This theory of learning underpins the MPW language program. Babble is a young child’s first attempt at oral language. What is a young child’s first attempt at written language?

Activity: Samples of young children’s writing
Read the next two samples of writing.
Talk: What does the writer know about writing?
What might the teacher teach?

Note how the children’s approximations reveal both what the child knows, and what the teacher might teach.
I bumped my chin
on the edge (of the pool)
When I asked the
teacher to look at (my chin)
but he didn’t look
at (it). I showed it to my
Mummy. She said
“Get out of the
pool. You don’t want
it dripping in the pool.”
Amy, 5 yrs

What does this child know about writing?
What might the teacher teach?
A Cat by Grace

It was a sunny morning. I saw a cat. It was a coloured cat. It was a cute cat.

The Writing Process (Donald Graves)
The writing process may involve
- selecting a topic
- drafting
- conferencing (trying the piece out on sympathetic audience),
- researching
- re-drafting
- proof-reading and editing
- publishing

The same process is not observed for each piece of writing. Remember also, not all writers write in the same way.
Spelling
Spelling serves writing. To be a good speller and to never write is to waste energy. (Chris Bouffler)
Children should not be so worried about spelling that they are afraid to write. We must see their approximations, so we know what to teach. Attention paid to spelling, is related to the purpose and intended audience for the piece.

Spelling strategies
- Internal
  - Grapho-phonic (sound it out, syllabification)
- External
  - ask someone
  - Visual (does it look right?)
  - look on list, book
  - Morphemic (words which mean the same are spelt the same)
  - dictionary
  - spell check

Mnemonics

Two Parallel Writing Strands: Personal and Required
In personal writing sessions, the children choose their topics and their text forms or genres.
In required writing sessions, the teacher determines the text type or genre, and often the topic.
Required writing sessions teach different genres: narratives, recounts, information report, procedures, argument, description, explanation, plus, other text types, such as non-rhyming poetry, letter writing and so on.
What the children choose to write in personal writing sessions informs the teacher about those text types and genres with which they are comfortable. It helps direct her choice of required writing types.

Non-fiction genre
To understand genre is to understand how text purpose shapes a text. The text purpose determines
- the schematic or organisational features
- the linguistic items
The structure of an argument differs to that of a narrative, or to that of an information report, because the text purposes differ.
The different genres are learned as they are used for their intended purposes, in the classroom. Learning language (spoken and written) is integrated across the curriculum.
There is no one right order for the introduction of the different genre. Children will learn to control those genre with which they are familiar.
Writing: Four Knowledge Types

Writers draw upon four different types of knowledge:

- **Contextual** – topic, purpose, audience
- **Linguistic** – print concepts, spelling, punctuation, handwriting, the schema and linguistic items (grammar), of different genre
- **Procedural** – which process does this text purpose need
- **Critical/analytical**

**Contextual knowledge** *(what, why, who for?)*

- In personal writing sessions, children self select their writing topics. Help your child identify possible writing topics for school.
- Help identify various sources of information on the topic; local expert, newspaper, books, old photos, internet.
- With older students, discuss purpose and audience for the writing

**Linguistic knowledge**

- Discuss the form of the writing - fiction/non-fiction; story (science fiction, fairy story, fantasy etc,) recount, report, argument, procedure (how to make or do), explanation, letter, list, poem.
- Spelling:
  - Sing the alphabet song
  - Talk about letter names: in child’s name, in street sign
  - Play ‘I Spy’ in the car
  - Praise what is right in a spelling eg ‘speshal’.
  - If a child asks how to spell a word, say, ‘You try first and then I will help.’ Then if necessary, write the correct form of the word, in full.
- As the children get older you might talk about different spelling strategies
  - **Sound it out** (first concentrating on individual sounds; later identifying syllables, and trying to include the vowel sound heard in each syllable)
  - **Visual image**
    - **Morphemic** (words which mean the same are spelt similarly)
      - eg twin twice twelve twenty……two
      - signal signature………sign
      - hear, heard ………ear
      - catch…………..caught
  - **Mnemonic** : a memory aid eg. accommodation – two cars at two motels
    - friend- a **friend** to the **end**
Encourage children to proof read their finished writing and to find some errors, which they try to self correct, before they check in a dictionary, in a book , with an adult, …. 

- Editing: attention to sequence, unnecessary words, unnecessary information, ‘best words’ etc
- Handwriting: note your child’s pencil grip. Pencil is held between thumb and knuckle of tall finger. Pointer finger rests on top and helps balance the pencil.
- Perhaps a gift of a lettering book and lettering pens for older children.

**Critical Analytical Knowledge**

- Do you really think that is fair?
- You solved the problem in your story with violence? Are there other ways the problem could have been solved?
- How have you described grandmothers in your story? Are all grandmothers like this?
- Who is powerful in this story? How has the author/illustrator shown that?
- In your artwork of the class excursion, all the children have white skin. Do all the children in your class have white skin?
- You said you disagree with this article. Could you write an alternate perspective?
- Whose opinion have you ignored? Whose voice is silent?

**Procedural Knowledge**

- Which draft is this?
- How many drafts did you do for this wonderful story?
- For this factual book on mediaeval armour where did you do your research?
- Where might we be able to find more information on this topic?
- You say you are writing this story for 5-6 year old children. Have you tried it on any 5-6 year old children?
- I see you wrote two different endings for this story. Why did you do that?
- You say you are stuck with this piece of writing. Perhaps leave it for a day or two and then re-read it. Come back to it with fresh eyes.
- What do you intend to do with this piece of writing? (eg write poem in birthday card; turn piece about Grandpa into book, for gift)
- Time spent editing and proof reading relates to intended audience.
Helping at home

- Let your children see you writing- reminder notes, diary, shopping lists, letters, emails, minutes for meetings, poems, emails
- When reading to a child, talk about the writer and the writing
- Have pencils and paper available for your child
- Allow access to computer
- Have dictionary/ies in your home
- Above all, be interested in what your child writes. Praise what they know. Give feedback relevant to their stage of development.
- Pounce on possible writing topics
- Encourage your children to write about ‘Grandpa’, or someone special in the family, or in your street. Give as birthday gift
- When giving feedback, respond first to the meaning. Attention to spelling punctuation etc, follows.
- Help with spelling: have the child underline errors, and then have another go. Praise what is correct eg ‘skool’ ‘Well done. Four letters are right. Only one letter is wrong. Can you touch the letter which is not right? Write the word one more time.’

If the child does not get it right, you write the correct form.

I write the world.
I write about
me
my freckles
Dad’s bad back.
I write about
Grandma dying.

I write to find out
what makes freckles
where the sun goes at night
why birds fly without falling.
I write to find out
where Grandma is now.

I write to make change
to stop bullying
to keep cats inside
to clean up the rivers
to ask why –
there was no hospital bed for Grandma.

I right the world.

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References
Wilson, L. 1994, Write me a Poem: Reading, Writing and Performing Poetry, Melbourne, Eleanor Curtain Publishing.

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