

Writing for Publication

A Personal Reflection

by Laura Friedman

All writing is about communicating thoughts, ideas, and experience. Writing has little meaning or purpose if there is no core essence or reason to share, even if the audience with whom an author shares is herself.

Writing can help the author look at her thoughts and experiences from a one-step-removed perspective. Putting thoughts into writing, stepping back just a bit, and then reengaging through reading one's writing can help move both writer and reader toward a deeper personal understanding and toward enriching the perceptions of others.

Writing for journal publication carries a certain discipline not necessarily found in other forms of writing. It is useful for those interested in this type of publishing to have some awareness of the discipline; yet editors help refine prospective articles to meet certain style requirements. Often, but not always, research

must be brought in to substantiate any claims and to move beyond the experiences of the author alone.

All — the writer(s) and the reader(s) — come to a published piece with unique mindsets and ideas; and the writing helps to create opportunities to ponder, wonder, negotiate, and learn from similarities and differences in a safe, non-confrontational way. Sharing and consolidating multiple experiences helps the writer broaden perspectives.

When I write with publication in mind, there is a basic (but flexible) procedure that I follow. Sections of the accompanying article, "What's in a Meaning," help to illustrate this process (Friedman, 2011). This article can be found on the Exchange website under Free Resources: www.childcareexchange.com/resources/view_article.php?article_id=5020196.

Before Writing

Pondering: This is the period of time in which I simply think. Most often something has happened in a room full of children that has captured my attention. Occasionally, another published piece or conversation gets my mental juices flowing. I have little conversations and

debates in my head. Ideas flow fairly quickly and easily, but not in an organized fashion. This is perhaps the most creative piece of the process. It is certainly the most open-ended and fun! I love an engaging conversation, and for me, this period of time is like taking the first step in connecting with others. Whether or not I am able to make this connection depends on the rest of the process.

Naming my subject: Most of the topics I consider deal with observations of children in action. Isolating an area on which to focus can be difficult. Here I visualize a lasso swinging over, dropping, and then snaring one element of my thinking on a topic. It helps to ask myself: "What's itching you right now? How and when did it start? What do you want to share?" Since many ideas come and go over the course of days and weeks, I try to capture these snippets of ideas, name them, and then store them in a folder on my computer. In this way, if I don't have time or the required discipline at the moment to grow an idea, I can come back and jumpstart my thinking based on the captured possibilities.



Laura Friedman has worked as a home-care provider, a public school librarian, Title I and special education aide, and as a preschool teacher. Her experiences with her own three children, now adults, offered some of the most significant practical

learning of her career. She holds a B.A. in early literacy and a master's of education, as well as NCME Montessori Certification. In 2008, Laura founded Creativity in Learning with the goal of sharing and learning with other early childhood professionals.

As I discuss in the “Afterthoughts” of “What’s in a Meaning,” I began thinking more deeply about the word ‘play’ when I was introduced to the work of David and Frances Hawkins during a gathering at The Hawkins Centers of Learning. A discussion evolved about the value of play in adults’ lives. So while this was the initial trigger for the article, many months passed before a cohesive piece of writing began to form in my head.

During Writing

Building a framework: Planning the flow of ideas from start to finish is important. This provides me a framework from which to work that (gently) keeps me focused. The more discipline required, the more concrete the framework must be — as in a detailed outline. And yet, I am always aware that the plan may be modified.

For “What’s in a Meaning,” I took my basic flow chart (framework) and listed under each heading (Setting the Stage, Sharing Experience, and so on) what I wanted to cover. This helped keep me on topic.

Setting the stage: This explains how and why I got to the point of wanting to share my thoughts with others. It serves as an entry point or introduction that communicates my thinking.

The first four paragraphs in “What’s in a Meaning” serve to set the stage: To orient the reader and create a connection to my thinking.

Sharing experience: Focused observations in any classroom setting offer information about children, their development, and learning. I have learned over time that my own expe-

rience and thoughts about children are valid. So it is important for me to share my experiences without much editing. I watch children carefully, I take notes, and I might take photographs or video in order to help me remember and reflect on what I’ve seen and heard.

In “What’s in a Meaning,” I share some of my personal reflections about ‘play’ that are based on observations, reading, and conversations I have had with parents and other educators.

The perspectives of others: After writing down my own thoughts and experiences, I find out what others think about the topic. Settings (urban/rural, private preschool/Head Start program), and populations of children and families (language, culture, socioeconomic status) vary. Within the past 10 years in my home state of Maine, there have been increasing numbers of immigrants from Asian, African, and European countries. Efforts to step into their shoes not only helps to explain different beliefs, it also aids my understanding of my own context.

In Paragraph 7 of “What’s in a Meaning,” I look to others for information and experience; I bring their thoughts into the conversation. As a result, the discussion about ‘play’ widens and is enriched.

Drawing conclusions: This step involves looking for and articulating similarities and differences among the many points shared in the article. This is an exercise in comparing and contrasting that helps readers develop a wider lens of understanding.

Toward the end of “What’s in a Meaning,” I begin to integrate my thoughts with others’ I have included. As a result, my own ideas of play were broadened, as can be seen in the last bulleted list.

Finding ongoing questions: Almost always, as I look deeper into a topic or idea new questions emerge; these questions help me to identify new thinking and branches of inquiry to explore. Recently, I have been studying the experiences of schools for young children in Reggio Emilia and Pistoia, Italy. As a result of this inquiry, new questions have emerged about how we have arrived at our early childhood system in the United States. Whether I frame a new inquiry and follow up with new research and writing is a choice I will make down the line.

A number of questions have arisen since I wrote “What’s in a Meaning.” Combined with other experiences, I am now keenly interested in the ways we might document and support the authentic learning available in play.

Resources: All materials cited in an article (references) should be listed at the end. Publishers generally offer guidelines about how they would like these formatted.

“What’s in a Meaning” closes with a list of sources that I have used in my research and cited in the article itself. In this particular case, the list is formatted in the style of the American Psychological Association (APA), which is commonly used in academic writing in the field of education.

Revisiting and Revising

Once the writing is done, I find it valuable to step away for a day or two. In the past I have found that I am not able to clearly see what I’ve written if I try to review and revise right away. And as much as I might like to think my writing makes sense to others, the only real way to test that is to let others read and review for me. I have also found that my choice of reviewer makes a difference; if I ask someone to read who has no expe-

rience with my topic, the review may bring up questions about areas that I might take for granted. If I want to inform and not just 'preach to the choir,' my writing has to be thorough.

Letting Go

Once I have checked spelling and grammar two or three times, both with the computer program and by re-reading, I *must* move on. This is hard. Invariably once I've let it go, I find more changes I wish I had made. I have come to understand that this is part of any writing process. There will always be changes and additions, no matter how many times I review.

Submission

A last check of publishing (manuscript) guidelines helps me consolidate and organize my piece. It's always good to do a final check, since each publisher has its own requirements.

Manuscript guidelines can usually be found on publishers' websites. Looking at articles within magazines also helps the writer to get a feel for the topics and style of articles the publisher wants.

Return/Editing/Trying Again

Seldom is an article accepted as complete the first time through. An excellent editor helps to draw out the writer's thinking to create the *most* meaningful and articulate piece. And so there is likely a period of back and forth until all

the 'kinks' have been worked out. Here again I have learned that this piece is not entirely about my own opinion; publishers have specific goals in mind. If my submitted piece does not relate to these goals, it will simply be rejected. I may give in to a period of mourning at this point, hopefully short-lived, and then I regroup and begin again.

While all modes of writing serve to communicate, I find that writing with publication in mind leads to clarification of thought and often offers a new point of view. The discipline involved in this type of writing can be challenging, yet reward comes with the new perspective we gain in joining our ideas with those of others and sharing them with the world.

Reference

Friedman, L. (2011, September/October). What's in a meaning: Defining play. *Exchange*, 201, 96-98.

Resources

APA Style
www.apastyle.org/

Hawkins Centers of Learning
www.hawkinscenters.org

Reggio Emilia: An Educational Project
<http://zerosei.comune.re.it/inter/index.htm>

