



# There's a Writer in Our House!

Strategies for  
Supporting and  
Encouraging  
Young Writers and  
Readers at Home



Ann P Kaganoff

A **Prufrock Press** Book

“For many reasons, schools don’t spend enough time on writing development for all children, even though it’s an imperative, lifelong skill. Dr. Ann Kaganoff’s *There’s a Writer in Our House!* is an essential tool for any parent, guardian, or teacher who is committed to helping a child develop writing and reading skills. With Dr. Kaganoff’s instruction and explanations, a parent or a teacher can become an ‘Informed Guide,’ learning not just what to do, but how and why each recommended activity is important. The book’s At-Home Model supports literacy development using personalized prompts that will engage your child in the process. Writing and reading don’t just happen. These skills need to be taught, practiced, nurtured, and celebrated!”

**Lori K. Dyer, MA, BCET, President of the  
Association of Educational Therapists**

“Would you like to help your child build comfort and confidence in their writing and reading skills? Dr. Ann Kaganoff, an acclaimed educational therapist, provides well-thought-out and easy-to-use strategies that parents can use to encourage their children in the development of writing and reading skills. These easy, yet effective ways to customize and personalize writing instruction are based upon your child’s strengths and interests. These strategies are fundamental to all effective instructional practices. Parents and educators need this inspirational book!”

**Daniel Franklin, PhD, BCET, author of *Helping Your  
Child with Language-Base Learning Disabilities***

“Readers will benefit from Dr. Kaganoff’s extensive knowledge as a classroom teacher, teacher educator, staff developer, and educational therapist. With six decades of experience, she is a member of a rare class of educational professionals who have much to share, and we are lucky enough to have access to her wealth of knowledge in this book.”

**Dr. Diana Arya, Associate Professor in Education and  
Faculty Director, McEnroe Reading and Language Arts  
Clinic, University of California, Santa Barbara**

“*There’s a Writer in Our House!* is a gift not only to parents, but to teachers and clinicians as well. Dr. Ann Kaganoff, a master teacher and clinician, has written a comprehensive, clear, well organized, and easy to follow guide to helping children find joy in developing the writer within them. It is a valuable resource that belongs on the bookshelf of every parent and teacher of an elementary school child.”

**Nan Freund, MEd, BCET, FAET, Board  
Certified Educational Therapist, Past President  
of the Association of Educational Therapists**



**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# **There's a Writer in Our House! Strategies for Supporting and Encouraging Young Writers and Readers at Home**

*There's a Writer in Our House!* is an invitation to parents of children in first grade through fifth grade interested in actively participating in their children's early literacy learning from the very first steps.

Founded upon well-researched literacy instructional methods that have been informed by the author's clinical perspective as well as her years of experience with many kinds of learners, this book provides a valuable understanding of how both writing and reading contribute to child development in multiple areas. Chapters provide background concepts regarding grammar and specific critical thinking skills in both writing and reading as well as customizable, child-centered activities used to practice and build writing and reading comprehension skills.

You will learn how to advance and encourage your child's learning and communication skills by highlighting important literacy areas such as vocabulary development, background knowledge, and critical thinking. You will also learn to recognize and track the significant developmental achievements of your child as you proceed from the early to the more complex *At-Home* activities, as well as receive strategies for how to respond and give feedback in specific situations, such as when a child writes something that makes sense to the child but not to the parent, how to offer feedback that identifies and labels a child's strengths, and how to collaborate effectively with a child who is just developing new interests or a new willingness to try something that previously seemed "hard."

Practical, accessible, and most importantly, fun, this book is a must-read for all parents, regardless of background, seeking to support their children's ongoing literacy development confidently and effectively.

**Ann P. Kaganoff**, PhD and Board Certified Educational Therapist, has been active in the field of education for over six decades, at every level from pre-school to graduate school. She is a Past President of the Association of Educational Therapists (AET). She has been a frequent presenter at conferences on topics related to literacy and the practice of educational therapy. She also serves as a mentor and trainer for new and veteran educational therapists. She is the author of *Best Practices in Educational Therapy* (Routledge 2019), a book dedicated to furthering the practice of educational therapy.

# **There's a Writer in Our House! Strategies for Supporting and Encouraging Young Writers and Readers at Home**

Ann P. Kaganoff, PhD

Designed cover image: © Getty Images

First published 2024  
by Routledge  
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

and by Routledge  
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2024 Ann P. Kaganoff

The right of Ann P. Kaganoff to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

All rights reserved. The purchase of this copyright material confers the right on the purchasing institution to photocopy or download pages which bear a copyright line at the bottom of the page. No other parts of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

ISBN: 978-1-032-58823-0 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-45268-3 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003452683

Typeset in Palatino  
by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

Access the Support Material: [www.routledge.com/9781032588230](http://www.routledge.com/9781032588230)

### *To My Teachers and To All Teachers*

*My mother was my first teacher. She taught me the love of books and reading.*

*I can still hear her voice reading to me and my little sister Alice. In a way, Alice was my second teacher. She was blind from birth, and as I grew up with her, I learned first-hand what it means to have a “handicapping condition.” She too loved books, and she read constantly from the time she learned braille. She used to joke that her room could be an annex to the Library of Congress, from whence came the shipping cartons with her next shipment of braille volumes. I learned from my second little sister Elizabeth, who became a teacher of deaf children and taught the little ones how to use the language of signs. I learned from my two daughters Rachel and Tessa about the readers who learned to read as easily as they learned to breathe, and who, once started, have never stopped. I learned from wise mentors in graduate school, from colleagues who practice educational therapy, and from teachers and therapists I have trained. And most of all, I have learned from my students.*

*I have learned from their examples of courage, curiosity, persistence, and determination. I have learned from their resilience in the face of difficulties and struggles. Equally important, my students have taught me much even when they are challenging and resistant, because I have had to work harder than I knew I could to overcome their reluctance with my own ingenuity, my own resilience, and my hopes for them. Needless to say, they have taught me the ever-present value, to themselves and myself, of a sense of humor. As you will see in this book, they have taught me the joy that can come from teaching others. And so, To All Teachers, the ones near to us in time and space and the ones far from us. Let us celebrate the joy they bring.*





**Taylor & Francis**

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# Contents

<i>Foreword</i> . . . . .	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i> . . . . .	xv
<b>Introduction: The Invitation</b> . . . . .	1
<b>PART I</b>	
<b>The Emerging Writer</b> . . . . .	17
<b>1 Setting the Stage for Success: Understanding     the WHY and the HOW</b> . . . . .	19
<b>2 The At-Home Model for Young Writers and Readers:     Questions and Answers</b> . . . . .	40
<b>3 At-Home Writing Activities: Getting Started and     Keeping Going</b> . . . . .	61
<b>4 The Young Writer’s Assets: Background Knowledge,     Vocabulary, and Thinking Skills</b> . . . . .	89
<b>5 The Writer’s Toolbox: Words, Sentences, and     Paragraphs</b> . . . . .	113
<b>6 Connecting Writing to Book Reading</b> . . . . .	139
<b>7 Getting Creative</b> . . . . .	155

**PART 2**

**The Emerging Reader 181**

**8 The At-Home Model for New Readers:  
The *Language Experience Approach (LEA)* . . . . . 183**

**9 Expanding Reading Development with the  
*Language Experience Approach* . . . . . 209**

**10 Building Critical Thinking Skills At-Home . . . . . 223**

**PART 3**

**Meeting Today's Challenges for Parents 253**

**11 Parents in a Supporting Role . . . . . 255**

**About the Author . . . . . 286**

# Foreword

All parents want their children to succeed in life, and one of the keys to success is having a strong foundation of reading and writing abilities. As a former classroom teacher and reading specialist, I have observed the difference it makes when children have had ample opportunities to practice authentic, purposeful engagement in reading and writing. Such experiences can be found in schools, but other curricular goals can get in the way of providing more practice time and flexibility for children to grow into the literate beings that they are ever becoming. For parents advocating for educational support on behalf of their children, such opportunities can be even more elusive. And there are ways to garner support for children who demonstrate a particular disability that prevents them from expressing their true potential in school. However, the set criteria for eligibility are so stringent that most children who are tested for special education support do not qualify for such services – only 15% qualified for such services in 2022.<sup>1</sup> So, what happens to the rest of the student population in need of additional educational support? Schools have been overwhelmed by the number of students in need of support beyond what classroom teachers can provide. National authorities have reported negative impacts from the recent pandemic on the intellectual<sup>2</sup> and socioemotional<sup>3</sup> development of the vast majority (more than 75%) of our young developing readers and writers. The needs are real, and traditional school-based resources are unavailable to most families.

We collectively face the challenge of raising future generations of critical consumers, voters, professionals, leaders, and caretakers within a world that is changing at an increasingly rapid pace. But what many parents may not know is that there are resources available, which is why I am so pleased and honored to introduce Dr. Ann Kaganoff, a long-time literacy educator and educational therapist who is a leading member of the largely hidden national

network called the Association of Educational Therapists. Most parents are unaware of the growing number of professionals in this network and what they can offer schools and families in need of research-based instructional and assessment support. I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Kaganoff in my role as Faculty Director of the McEnroe Reading and Language Arts Clinic housed within the University of California, Santa Barbara. This clinic, or rather the original version of it, served as one of the training spaces for Dr. Kaganoff decades before my leadership appointment in the fall of 2015.

It was clear from our first meeting that not only do we share concerns about the state of needed support for our young students, we also share a philosophy about the ways to provide such support. Children who experience academic and socioemotional hardship in school contexts are immersed in language and instruction from those who emphasize skill building and test performance over research-based practices that foster authentic engagement in learning and literacy development. Words like *deficient*, *poor*, *lacking*, and *at-risk* surround them during teacher-parent meetings and related consultations with school leaders and evaluators. To date, traditional school-based remedial instruction reflects practices developed in the early 1960s; repetitive call-and-response flashcard drills and timed read-aloud tasks from prescribed reading programs have shown no to even negative effects on reading development.<sup>4</sup> Not all parents who read this book are seeking support for children who are showing learning loss or resistance to school instructional practices. Many families may be looking for ideas to support and encourage the continued development of their children's critical literacy skills. Such parents understand the lifelong value of competence in writing, reading, and critical thinking, and will value an approach that goes beyond the prescriptive programs ill-designed to engage the interests of the child.

This book offers something completely different for parents who are ready to make a difference and become informed guides for their children. Dr. Kaganoff's book provides all readers with the foundational background needed for understanding

children's language and cognitive development. Her book also offers creative ideas and strategies for maximizing home-centered opportunities for learning and practice that are tailored to the strengths and interests of each individual child. These activities are not simply recipes or prescriptions. Parents will learn the underlying purposes for various literacy activities and how to engage their children in such activities through stimulating prompts. Parents are likely to especially appreciate how well the activities are tailored to fit into family life, which never stops. They will also appreciate the many ways that activities contribute to the development of a child's background knowledge and vocabulary. The extended family is a central topic of this home-based program, guiding children to become archeologists of stories and events that have been written and told. The high value placed upon what the child thinks about and observes, as recorded in what they write and what they tell, extends beyond not just the fondness of the doting parent. These activities serve to record stages of growth and development over time that are of value to the family and also of value for their child's further education.

Readers will benefit from Dr. Kaganoff's extensive knowledge as a classroom teacher, teacher educator, staff developer, and educational therapist. With six decades of experience, she is a member of a rare class of educational professionals who have much to share, and we are lucky enough to have access to her wealth of knowledge in this book. The reader should be aware that this is neither a program nor a workbook, but a thorough account of the theories and practices that guide caregivers or other family members in the phases of fostering the knowledge and skills of young emerging writers and readers. And not to worry, Dr. Kaganoff will be there with the reader the whole way through, providing notes to clarify and support each step of the process.

*Diana J. Arya, PhD,  
Associate Professor in Education Faculty Director, McEnroe Reading  
and Language Arts Clinic, Gevirtz Graduate School of Education,  
University of California, Santa Barbara, CA, USA*

## Notes

- 1 National Center for Education Statistics (2023). Students with disabilities. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg>.
- 2 Lake, R., & Pillow, T. (2022). The alarming state of the American student in 2022. Brookings Institute. Retrieved from <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/4140372/the-alarming-state-of-the-american-student-in-2022/4948916/>.
- 3 National Center for Education Statistics (2023). Press release. Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press\\_releases/07\\_06\\_2022.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/07_06_2022.asp).
- 4 Butrymowicz, S., & Mader, J. (2018). The US education system is failing special needs students. *The Education Digest*, 83(8), 26–35.

# Acknowledgments

People who make contributions to our lives often do so with intention and purpose, so they are not necessarily surprised when we thank them and tell them why their actions meant so much to us. In my life, on the other hand, there have been parents of students who I cannot name here, and who, if I were to thank them in person, would be very surprised to learn that I think of them with so much appreciation for what they taught me. I am glad for the opportunity to thank some of them now.

Most parents of my students brought their children to me because they were highly involved in their child's progress. Their involvement was most often shown in our regular debriefing sessions or parent conferences by the kinds of questions they asked and by the concerns they cited. There were times, however, when parent involvement reached a higher level, as it once did with a mom who I had invited to sit in on a session. I needed her to observe her son's frequently rude and uncooperative (and unexpected) behavior that was interfering with our work in spite of my gentle reminders. None of this fit with what I knew of the family.

Mom came and sat silently throughout the lesson, but "Teddy" seemed to forget she was there and was his usual uncooperative self the entire time. She and I exchanged glances at the end of the lesson, but I was unclear about what action she might take. Something happened after that session because when Teddy showed up the next time, he was a transformed person, polite, attentive, and hardworking. No words needed to be exchanged between the two of us about the cause of his transformation. However, when he and I ran into each other at the local grocery some years later after we had finished our work together, he greeted me with this: "Remember that time when my mom came to my lesson and I was so rude to you like she wasn't even sitting there!" We both had a good laugh about that, both of us knowing that Mom had had a role in his transformation. He shared with



me that he was now an award-winning sports newscaster (his dream job)! And I silently thanked his mom one more time.

Sometimes parent involvement showed a touching humility. This was the case with a mom who confessed to me that she had never understood the rules of grammar and could not help her eighth grader with his grammar lessons. She asked permission to sit in on a few sessions so that she could listen and observe the instruction. She became so completely engaged in the project that the “few sessions” turned into three months of regular attendance until she felt confident in her own mastery of the grammar material, at which point she and her son could manage the lessons on their own! I thanked this mom repeatedly (to myself) for the exceptional model she was providing. She was showing her son that even grown-ups have to deal with uncertainty and the humiliation of not knowing. She modeled a willingness to learn even when the work was very hard indeed. She was learning at the same pace as her child and kept showing up until the work was done.

And then there was the mom of a very impacted autistic seventh grader, who had been so obviously a trial to her parents because of her uncontrolled behaviors. I could tell when Mom turned her over to me at the door at the start of our lesson, just by the way she looked at her watch, that she was glad to no longer be the one in charge, even for just that hour. Her daughter was an ongoing challenge to me, even with her marginally modified behavior during our sessions. At one point, however, I did have to make it clear to “Lisa” in the tone of voice I used (that I had never used before and that I did not know I even possessed) that if she EVER AGAIN tried to climb over the upstairs banister on the second floor to see if she could jump down and land on the stairs, she would see consequences that even she had never seen before. With the support of her dedicated parents, Lisa went on to a special high school for autistic children, and in her senior year at that school, her mom called to tell me that her daughter was now working as a peer counselor to *younger autistic girls*. Mom and I were both proud, and I thanked Mom for being such a good model for me.

My educational therapist colleagues, who are parents themselves, are also professionals who understand very well the

family dynamics that provide the context for the learners we work with. They get it about the challenges that confront not just the children who struggle, but all children who are growing up and participating in learning, each in their own individual way. I have been indebted to many of them over time, and to three in particular whom I would like to thank here (and not in order of importance).

Risa Graff of Chicago is a Past President of the Association of Educational Therapists (AET) and my friend of many years, who has been my Zoom companion through much of my writing and reviewing process for the chapters here. She has read drafts of chapters and has been a resource for insights both practical and theoretical. She has counseled me regarding the accessibility of my language and my message, thanks to her own professional writing skills and her background with learners.

Nan Freund, also a Past President of AET and my friend of many years, has shared her great wisdom about procedures and cases in our practices over the years and has always enriched my understanding of family dynamics and all kinds of learning issues that students encounter. Nan has contributed much to my professional growth not only on a personal basis but also through her dedication to the present and future training of educational therapists.

Marion Marshall, author of two timely books on assessment and intervention for learning disabilities, gave me valuable feedback early on when I decided to undertake this book for parents by making suggestions that have strengthened my writing throughout, thanks to her observations and powerful intellect.

I have acknowledged the work of Maryanne Wolf elsewhere (in my book on *Best Practices in Educational Therapy*) because she continues to inspire my thinking and my writing. I always mention her work on reading and the brain to my students, to inspire them to take reading seriously. Her latest book, *Reader Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World*, makes an enormous contribution to our understanding of the impact on the children of today's digital world, and I here recommend it to all parents who are responsible for these very children.

My commitment to the *Language Experience Approach* began early on in my training in the Reading Clinic Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara in the 1970s. There I learned about it from one of its strongest advocates, Carol Dixon, who taught me, mentored me, and inspired me. I hope this book will show her how deeply and continuously such programs and mentorships continue to live on with positive impacts on learners old and young.

While the Reading Clinic Program at UCSB has grown and changed in the years since I benefited from the program, the Clinic continues to make a significant contribution to the entire Gevirtz Graduate School of Education and the graduate students who train there. It is a key conduit through which UCSB students gain the knowledge and expertise that will prepare them for certification programs in general education and special education. The Clinic, under the direction of Dr. Arya, serves the children of the surrounding community who are fortunate to participate in the Summer Reading Camp and other year-round programs, all hands-on, interest-based programs that go well beyond learning to become better readers. I readily acknowledge that such research-based and forward-looking programs are not available to families in every community in the land but if your community is served by such a program, you may find it worth your time to investigate it as a resource for your own family, or at the very least, worthy of your support in the community.

The team at Routledge and Prufrock Press deserve special mention. I thank Daniel Schwartz, Education Editor at Routledge, who enabled my contact at Prufrock Press with my new Commissioning Editor in Education, Rebecca Collazo. Rebecca has been available through the miracle of Zoom conferencing, to confer, answer my questions, and give insightful guidance in all matters relating to the preparation of chapters for submission and making the final manuscript as ready as it needed to be. She has been very supportive and understanding of my goals for the book and its ultimate outreach to potential readers, the parents that we both care about. And special thanks to Shelley Strelluf and the production team at Prufrock Press for their care in ensuring a professional and appealing final product.



# Introduction

## The Invitation

### **EASY ACCESS NOTES FOR THE INTRODUCTION: WHAT YOU WILL LEARN**

- ◆ The Early Literacy Skills: An Invitation to Parents to Become Informed Guides for Their Children.
- ◆ Addressing Children's Individual Differences in a Time of Challenges: A Clinician's Point of View.
- ◆ The Important Role of Writing in a Child's Overall Development.
- ◆ Introducing the *At-Home Model*: The Special Contribution Parents Can Make with Both Writing and Reading in the Home Environment.
- ◆ How to Get the Most Benefit from Reading This Book.
- ◆ The Wider Audience for this Book: Classroom and Special Education Teachers, Educational Therapists and Learning Specialists, Home-Schooling Families, and Teachers in Adult Literacy Programs.
- ◆ A Tribute to Those I Have Learned From.

*There's a Writer in Our House!* is an invitation to parents of children in first grade through fifth grade interested in actively participating in their children's early literacy learning from the very first steps. Parents can be a powerful influence in promoting positive beginnings to help their children become comfortable and confident as writers and readers, even as they must navigate

the changing demands of today's schooling to support their children. In light of these challenges, this invitation begins with a message of encouragement. You are a unique source of support and guidance as your children build the basics of writing and reading and as they come to understand the value of these skills in their lives. You can best support your children when you gain the confidence of being an *Informed Guide* to help your children start off on a solid footing as they learn to write and read.

This invitation comes from an author who is a parent, a grandparent, a life-long educator, and an educational therapist with many years of experience helping all kinds of learners to become writers and readers, at all levels. We will use these perspectives of both the educator and the clinician to help you develop a firm basis for guiding your child and to help you explore the learning processes involved when children are first introduced to writing and reading. In addition, our emphasis will include learning strategies combined with *enrichment opportunities* that help children expand their individual talents, interests, and strengths. You will find suggestions for how to make each learning activity meaningful to your child as an individual. This personalized approach helps ensure that the learning is relevant and more likely to last until tomorrow, next week, and even next year.

Given the high value of literacy skills, many parents of young learners are already committed to participating with their children as they are introduced to the joys of how to read and write. You might have already checked out the resources for how to engage in this important task, to have the necessary information about best practices to use when encouraging your children. You might have found the various types of programs, methods, and materials that are available for parents. Many of these approaches are founded on research and classroom applications, and many are indeed effective. However, in *There's a Writer in Our House!* the author adds a new way of looking at this process, with a clinical perspective. This perspective enables you to *tailor learning activities to the interests and strengths of each individual child* because it shows you how the learning activities can take advantage of the familiar environment of your home.

## Addressing Individual Differences in a Time of Challenge

As a parent, you know that children respond in many different ways to what and how we teach them because children come with their own distinctive personalities, talents, and interests. We know that when they are truly engaged, they can be successful at learning even the skills that at first seem complicated. The goal of this book is to give you well-designed activities that present writing and reading skills in ways that you will be able to customize and personalize to build your child's confidence and competence. Here you will learn strategies that help your child write and read within the familiar context of your home, with activities that take advantage of learning opportunities that already exist at home. More importantly, we will go beyond the WHAT of the learning activities, to establish the HOW and the WHY so you will clearly understand how these writing and reading experiences contribute to child development in the areas of language, cognition, vocabulary, background knowledge, and critical thinking, and why they are important. And let's not forget promoting a love of learning and the growth of curiosity and inquiry!

The strategies and activities in this book have been developed in the firm belief that parents will willingly engage in the very best practices for helping their children with the process of acquiring the literacy skills. My work as a clinician has always shown me that parents can respond well to learning alongside their children. They can become confident *partners in learning* when they feel prepared, equipped, and confident themselves, particularly in areas where they may feel a bit "rusty" from a lack of recent exposure to certain skills and concepts. Parents can be especially motivated to engage with literacy skill learning because as adults, we recognize how important these skills are for success in all of education and life.

Parenting has always been serious work, no matter what decade or culture we find ourselves in. The years 2020–2023 have brought new and unexpected challenges for families as they have had to adjust to restrictions and restructuring for all family

activities because of the COVID pandemic, especially in the area of schooling. This global pandemic has transformed many of the basic relationships between parents and children and their educational environments. Parents are being called upon to engage with their children's schooling in ways that no one expected and that no one could have prepared us for.

Researchers, educators, and sociologists are not yet able to determine the full impact of these changes on children's learning. But we can already see differences in the ways we deliver school instruction, and certainly in the ways children experience that instruction. This has placed unprecedented demands on the roles of parenting, as families have had to reallocate their resources of time and attention to refocus on the educational needs of their children. Parents have had to take responsibility for helping multiple children, at different age levels and in different subject areas. They have often had to discern, to the best of their abilities, what skills and objectives are most important, while having to make decisions with limited time and resources.

## Helping Parents Meet the Challenges

*There's a Writer in Our House!* is well-timed to meet the needs of parents in a decade of unparalleled social and educational demands. If you are holding this book, chances are that you are searching for guidance and support as you navigate rapidly changing situations in which school resources may be limited for periods of time, causing interruptions to your children's education. This book seeks to answer your immediate questions about how best to help your children after the pandemic crisis of 2020 has forever altered our models of schooling and parenting. The ideas contained here for writing and reading are both current and timeless, and they draw upon one constant idea that endures. *Parents can provide a unique and special contribution to their children's literacy acquisition when called upon and when shown what to do and how to do it.*

The power of parents has been made clear to me in my many years of experience with young learners and their parents, giving

me a deep respect for the role parents can take in this important enterprise. As an educator, in the broadest sense of the word, I have worked with learners at every level from pre-school to graduate school, and have been privileged to teach other teachers, colleagues, educational therapists, and of course, parents. I had always had a special interest in the children who struggled to learn to read, because of the impact on learning. Difficulties with reading are nearly always accompanied by lags in writing, but for many reasons, reading improvement has tended to receive greater instructional priority than writing. This may be because remedial reading programs appear more easily packaged than remedial writing programs. Over time, we have seen a wide array of programs developed for reading skills, with structured kits, learning centers, computer-based packages, and online applications. For the consumer of these programs, reading achievement has seemed to be easier to assess, with testing that is thought to measure progress.

As a clinician, I have had abundant opportunities to observe and teach a wide range of students who are just learning or are already struggling to read and write. This work has involved parents who have been especially attentive to their children's progress in learning to read and who want to help their children in this process. Parents have often shared with me the memories of their own early experiences with reading, ranging from the magic of getting lost in a favorite book to the terror of having to read aloud in front of the class. Whether they regard themselves as avid readers or not, parents generally identify themselves as "readers," and eagerly seek out suggestions for how to support their child with reading.

## **Why Is Writing So Important?**

As you can see from its title, this book highlights the significant role that writing occupies in learning and thinking. Writing is far more than just a subject that is taught as part of the school's Language Arts curriculum. However, when we examine the resources that are available *to parents*, it seems clear that



supporting early writing is different from supporting reading. There may be online programs for writing and summer camps for writing, but compared with the resources available to support reading, there are fewer to choose from. As a result, parents may begin to feel that the teaching of writing belongs only to teachers in the school setting. That's where we find the procedures and the curriculum for teaching writing: the books, the lessons, and the practice exercises. This is true even for home-schooling families, where parents are provided with the home-schooling curriculum for both reading and writing.

## **The *At-Home Model* for Early Writing**

Activity books for early writing are most often presented in a workbook format, with “recipes” for what to do. My work as an educational therapist, however, has taught me how important it is for learning activities to be *individualized and customized* for each child. This tailored approach, which I have called the *At-Home Model*, has the benefits of being “child-centered” as opposed to being program-centered or method-centered. The *At-Home Model* for the writing and reading activities presented here capitalizes on the learning opportunities that can be found in the familiar environment of the home. This model recognizes that the available resources of the parent, in terms of time and money, are rarely unlimited, because it is important that the recommended activities should not be a burden for an already busy parent.

In Chapters 1 and 2, we discuss aspects of child language development as background for our work with the learning activities. We will note the differing demands that are placed on the young learner's language skills by both reading and writing. When a child “reads,” he or she is responding to language that has been written by someone else. The reader's main task is to process the writer's message and incorporate that message in the form of *reading comprehension*. Reading is in the realm of “receptive” language. The task demands of writing are of a different order. Writing belongs in the “expressive” realm of language.

Here the writer must command the many different elements of creating and expressing the message. The writer must then orchestrate these elements so that the written output can be processed successfully (or not) by the intended reader. These two sides of language, receptive and expressive, account for the substantial differences between the types of materials that are available for instruction, at all levels of learning.

## How This Book Began

I first realized the need for *There's a Writer in Our House!* a number of years ago. It began with a specific family I was working with as an educational therapist. The parents had been told by the school that their eight-year-old would need a great deal of *extra support at home* for writing. They seemed willing to step in, but really had no idea where to begin. I had searched for books that might contain the ideas that I already had in mind but found none. So, I set about to write out some simple directions for what I then called *Home Writing Activities*. I drew upon my teaching experiences over the years, both in the classroom and in teacher training. I used what I remembered doing with my own children. I drew from observing other teachers teach from my years of supervising student teachers in the schools. I drew upon my work as a clinician, where I developed a customized treatment plan for each child based on that child's interests, strengths, and needs. I drew upon a firm belief in the important role of writing as children begin their journey to literacy. And I thought about the powerful impact that writing has had on my own development as a teacher, clinician, and author.

My challenge was to make the *At-Home Writing Activities* seem doable and attractive, and hopefully even fun. I knew there might be parents whose only memory of school writing was of having their papers handed back, sprinkled with red marks to show where they had "failed" at writing. I expected there might be parents who feel uncertain about their own writing skills and so do not feel prepared to help a child "become" a writer. At the time I did not expect the level of urgency that parents might feel

about teaching their children in the pandemic years that began in 2020, but I knew that if parents felt confident and committed, their children would know they were in good hands. While many of the chapters here focus on guiding the young writer, I am hopeful that you too will find joy in the experiences of writing together, At-Home

## **Applying the At-Home Model to Both Writing and Reading**

The At-Home Model has clear benefits for early writing, which had been the original focus of the book. As you read on, you will see that the idea of a personalized and customized approach applies equally well to early reading. As the instructor for Reading Methods courses in teacher training programs, I made sure that my lectures on Beginning Reading had always presented an approach called the *Language Experience Approach (LEA)* because of its importance in early reading instruction. It is now included here for your children because it fits the At-Home Model so well, and because reading and writing belong together.

As you will learn in Chapters 8 and 9, in the *Language Experience Approach*, children dictate a “story” or an account of their activities and experiences. The dictations are often preceded by an activity or experience that gets the language flowing, or they may feature an experience that has been planned for just that purpose. The dictations take whatever shape or form seems important to the child at the time. They are recorded by the parent or a teacher, exactly as dictated. Because of their high value to the child, these stories can be transformed into instructional materials that can be used to support the reading skills. Dictated stories have been important in the instruction of many of my own clients. The approach has been relevant to parents as well as teachers, as I have found in parent workshops on *LEA*. And as this book will demonstrate, *LEA* is a perfect fit with the At-Home Model.

In the At-Home reading and the At-Home writing activities, I have emphasized how to engage the interests, the strengths, the curiosity, and certainly the humor of children. While many

of their educational experiences are rightly *curriculum-centered*, at home you can make the learning *child-centered*. This kind of learning is personalized and validating for your children. When parents and children collaborate with each other, the journey may begin at home and then you may find yourselves taken to amazing and unexpected places. The reading/writing journey can be like that.

In addition to the activities in each chapter, you will find strategies such as

- ◆ How to respond and give positive feedback about a child's written efforts, even when the writing may not make sense to the parent.
- ◆ How to help children develop confidence as writers, even when they may not take to writing naturally.
- ◆ How to shape children's expectations and keep progress and projects going.
- ◆ How to help children self-evaluate their own progress and move from external praise to self-evaluation and intrinsic motivation.

For added inspiration and clarity, *There's a Writer in Our House!* includes real-life children's writing samples and dictated story samples. These are a good way to show parents what can happen with At-Home writing and reading.

## How to Get the Most Benefit from This Book

**Easy Access Notes.** Easy Access Notes are found at the beginning of each chapter. Their purpose is to allow a preview of the chapter so that you can think ahead to what you already know and what specific questions you may have about the topics. You will be given a good idea of what to expect while reading and you will see how each chapter fits into the other parts of the book. You will be able to easily revisit any parts of the chapter or the book to check on ideas or activities that you want to reread.

**Activity Levels.** Activity Levels are provided wherever activities are introduced and described so that you can judge how well the activity might match the age and interests of your child. These levels are broad and are based on the kinds of instructional activities that are typically conducted in school instruction in the literacy skills. We take into account the wide variation that occurs across school programs, as well as the variation we see in the interests and achievement levels of individual children in all families who might use this book. If there is any doubt about whether the activity is appropriate for your child, you can make the decision based on their interests and prior experiences, while not underestimating the power of the new and the unexpected. Children who are engaged can maximize the benefits of any learning situation they experience. It is our job as parents to provide a rich and nutritious diet for them to choose from.

**Downloads.** Following selected activities that involve both writing and reading, you will find some charts on which you can record achievements over multiple periods of time. They are intended for repeated use to track markers of progress in specific areas, but also as a way to guide your own observations for what to watch for. The Downloads are marked as online resources that can be downloaded, printed, used to copy/paste text, and manipulated to suit your individualized use.

## **Who Else Can Use This Book? A Wider Audience for *There's a Writer in Our House!***

**Classroom Teachers.** Credentialed teachers are trained to teach the full range of literacy skills. They understand the relationships between reading, writing, study skills, and critical thinking. Classroom instruction, as we resume in-person learning, is generally conducted with children in groups, and teachers may have limited time for the individualized interactions that are possible for parents and children, at home. That said, there are always times when the classroom teacher finds opportunities to

address children's individual needs. There will be pairs of students who can engage in the *Written Conversation*, or the *Paired/Shared* writing activity (Chapter 3). There may be times when a classroom aide or a visiting parent can work with a second or third grader on writing activities. There are suggestions for ways to transfer from school to home in the use of these activities. A teacher might try different versions of journal writing activities that shift the focus from academic applications such as tracking the progress of the science project to the At-Home setting where students track the progress of learning to make jam or cookies or training the puppy.

Parents who read this book will find multiple references to ways in which the activities suggested for use at home can promote and develop skills that transfer easily to the school setting. Specific links to school writing and reading are detailed throughout when the discussion references *Planned Writing*.

**Special Education Teachers.** By training, special education teachers address the needs of children at a more individualized level. These special needs often cover a wide range of learning issues, including language processing difficulties, memory and cognition difficulties, executive function and attention disorders, and dyslexia and other reading disorders, along with the emotional by-products of learning disorders, such as anxiety and feelings of helplessness. Special education teachers are trained to take a diagnostic approach and tailor the instruction based on the individual needs that are identified through focused assessments. Their use of individualized interventions is highly compatible with the emphasis of the At-Home Model, on personalized and customized activities based on the strengths, interests, and needs of the child.

**Educational Therapists, Learning Specialists, and Reading Tutors.** Many of the insights discussed in this book are the result of my observations of the impact of writing achievement on struggling learners. In fact, struggling learners often benefit especially from being able to write with confidence. Practice in targeted writing activities can result in more effective organization of the student's thoughts and ideas. Practice in writing highlights the

importance of background knowledge and vocabulary and may motivate a student to systematically try to expand both. Planned Writing is referenced wherever it applies to reinforce links to the school setting.

As will be further discussed in the *Questions and Answers* section of Chapter 2, writing has profound benefits to the individual child in all areas of language and cognition. The ability to write provides benefits to the young writer's self-confidence and self-worth. Writing promotes a special kind of personal identity and pride of ownership, often described as the *writer's voice*. Additionally, writing can leave a valuable footprint in the form of dated writing samples that document growth.

We can see a predictable impact when students can use the computer for writing. There is greater ease in editing when the young writer is not hampered by the laborious application of pencil to paper. Assistive technology applications may include voice-to-text software. We are able to witness the pride when a painfully constructed paragraph, produced from a printer, is legible and can be read with ease by both the writer and the teacher. When struggling learners make a strong connection between their own writing and the type of communication with another person that writing enables, children can be empowered and transformed by the act of writing.

Many learning specialists and educational therapists include the *Language Experience Approach* in their repertoire of strategies for struggling readers. Those who have yet to try *LEA* may want to consult the works of Sylvia Ashton Warner, who wrote of her work with the Māori children in New Zealand in *Spinster* (1958) and *Teacher* (1963). Also, see "When Parents are Co-Teachers: The Language Experience Approach (LEA) for Young Readers" (Kaganoff, 2013) for step-by-step directions for *LEA* with both parents and educational therapists in mind. The bibliography of that article (also contained here in Chapter 9) provides other references and sources for the use of *LEA* in teaching young readers. Chapter 9 in this book focuses on the use of *LEA* to expand reading development.

**Home-Schooling Families.** At-Home Writing and At-Home Reading are both particularly relevant to home-schooling