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Research Article

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Three-dimensional intervention: Practical Strategies for Promoting Emergent Writing Competencies in Senior Kindergarten Children during Activity Centers

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Abstract

Center time is an important pathway through which senior kindergarten children develop emergent writing competencies. Consequently, the practical implementation of strategies to facilitate emergent writing development within these activity settings is of considerable pedagogical significance. Researchers have observed that children generally show a lack of interest in emergent writing, have improper postures, and express themselves unclearly. Based on this, researchers conducted three rounds of action research, continuously optimizing strategies in a "plan-act & observe-reflect-adjust" cycle. After the research, the researchers concluded that action plans designed around the three dimensions of "writing attitude, motor skills, and written expression" can effectively enhance the emergent writing competencies of senior kindergarten children; and proposed the following educational suggestions: teachers should pay attention to the value and role of emergent writing in activity centers; provide leveled materials suitable for activity centers; offer scientific support for emergent writing during activities; and emphasize emergent writing evaluation after activities.

Keywords: *Emergent writing competencies; activity centers; senior kindergarten children.*

1. Problem Statement

Both the Kindergarten Education Guideline (KEG) and the Early Learning and Development Guidelines (ELDG) mention emergent writing and emphasize the importance of fostering children's interest in emergent writing and the cultivation of initial skills. The Guiding Opinions on Vigorously Promoting the Scientific Connection between Kindergartens and Primary Schools also states that emergent writing is a part of the transition from kindergarten to primary school, highlighting the core experience of emergent writing stimulating children's interest in writing and enhancing their emergent writing competencies. Vygotsky once said: Any learning is based on its germination and developmental period, which is the preparatory period for learning [1]. Therefore, enhancing emergent writing competencies not only facilitates the development of children's written language abilities but also progressively cultivates positive learning dispositions, thereby enabling children to better adapt to primary school learning and smoothly navigate the kindergarten-to-primary school transition.

The researcher believes that activity centers are suitable for enhancing the emergent writing competencies of senior kindergarten children. Activity centers have their own unique contextuality, openness, and autonomy, creating conditions for meaningful learning to occur for children [2]. Integrating emergent writing into activity centers not only allows children to feel the charm of written symbols but also improves their hands-on abilities and enriches their emergent writing experiences [3].

Observations have found that currently, in the area activities, there are phenomena such as children's general interest in emergent writing activities, improper writing posture, and unclear written expression.

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At the same time, teachers have not paid enough attention to these children's performances, leading to issues such as neglecting the cultivation of children's interest in emergent writing, overlooking children's writing and pencil grip posture, inappropriate support timing, and lack of emergent writing evaluation. In response to the above issues, this study proposes the three dimensions of "writing attitude, motor skills, and written expression" to enhance senior kindergarten children's emergent writing competence through activity centers.

2. Three-Dimensional Intervention Strategies

This study, drawing primarily on the ELDG, Language Education and Activity Guidance for Young Children, Integrated Development of Children's Literacy Abilities, Early Childhood Literacy Development: Helping Children Read and Write, and practical classroom observations, conceptualizes emergent writing competence in senior kindergarten children along three dimensions: writing attitude, motor skills, and written expression. The dimension of writing disposition focuses primarily on children's interest in emergent writing. The dimension of graphomotor skills comprises two specific indicators: (a) pencil grip and writing posture, and (b) pen control and trajectory regulation. The dimension of written expression centers on three specific indicators: (a) clarity of writing intention, (b) symbol-meaning correspondence, and (c) clarity of meaning expression in writing. Each indicator is further delineated by specific behavioral manifestations aligned with the developmental trajectory of emergent writing in senior kindergarteners. This framework not only facilitates the analysis of children's emergent writing development but also assists teachers in identifying each child's zone of proximal development with respect to emergent writing, thereby enabling the provision of targeted and appropriate instructional support.

Based on the characteristics of activity centers and children's emergent writing performances therein, this study selected the Science Discovery Zone and the Reading Zone as research sites, as these two zones generate a greater variety and higher frequency of emergent writing behaviors compared to other activity areas. Such a selection also facilitates the extraction of generalizable guidance. The researcher, in collaboration with

the classroom teachers, conducted three cycles of action research following the iterative model of "planning - action and observation - reflection - revision," with a focus on the three aforementioned dimensions.

2.1. First Round of Action Research

In the first cycle of action research, interventions focused on improving the conditions for emergent writing in zone-based activities, guiding children's writing postures, providing emergent writing support, and incorporating a work-sharing session.

Improving the conditions for emergent writing in zone-based activities focused primarily on the environmental arrangement and material provision, with the aim of enabling children to understand the functionality and diversity of emergent writing through hands-on experiences within the zones, thereby generating interest in emergent writing during zone-based activities. In the science discovery zone, we provided recording materials of various types and levels of difficulty, aligned with the activities in the zone. Following the renewal of materials, the teachers also explored with the children how to use them. In the reading zone, we offered a diverse range of emergent writing materials based primarily on the children's ideas, including story rating sheets, story continuation paper, and letter-writing paper, while also displaying creative examples of children's emergent writing work.

Children need to develop an accurate understanding of proper emergent writing postures. Teachers employed modeling and contrast strategies to help children recognize correct writing postures. Through comparative activities, children discovered autonomously, through their own attempts, the comfort of maintaining proper postures. Teachers supplemented this with picture-based observation, while peer assistance was utilized to precisely correct details such as sitting posture, wrist positioning, and pencil grip. In this way, children came to internalize behavioral norms including proper leg placement, straight backs, and appropriate head elevation. Throughout the activities, teachers also began to attend more closely to children's behavioral conventions related to emergent writing, offering timely reminders for children to maintain correct writing postures. Meanwhile, children engaged in both self-monitoring and peer monitoring of their postures.

When children encounter problems during the process, their self-confidence is easily undermined and their interest in emergent writing diminished. In response to such difficulties, some children are inclined to give up or switch to another emergent writing task, while others leave their seats to seek help from the teacher. Teachers need to pay attention to the emergent writing process of children during activity centers and provide timely support as needed. Teachers may offer appropriate verbal guidance or provide accurate answers to help children overcome writing obstacles, thereby enabling them to complete their work and enhancing their self-confidence and sense of accomplishment.

The sharing segment after the original activity centers is relatively simple for the children. Additional segments have now been incorporated, including display and presentation of children's emergent writing works, along with teacher evaluation. Teachers analyze children's works, providing both positive feedback and constructive suggestions for revision, while also engaging other children in discussion and evaluation. This is intended to help children learn how to better express themselves through emergent writing and to enhance their sense of achievement.

In this phase of action, children have made progress in their interest in emergent writing, the quantity of their works, and have begun to pay attention to writing posture and the correspondence between symbols and meanings. However, some issues have also been exposed: children's interest in emergent writing is somewhat casual and lacks spontaneity; their motor skills are not yet proficient, and their pencil control and grip posture still need improvement; teacher support is too straightforward and does not leave enough space for reflection; the evaluation method during the sharing segment is singular, focusing more on results than on the process. In response to these issues, the next cycle of action research will focus on extending children's interest in emergent writing and strengthening its instrumental connection with activity centers; helping children develop good writing habits and improve pencil control through game-based exercises; improving teacher support strategies by using heuristic language, think-aloud methods, and other ways to guide children to solve problems independently; while also promoting diversified evaluation, focusing on process performance and longitudinal development, introducing peer evaluation among children and guiding deep sharing from appreciation to questioning, in order to promote the continuous enhancement of children's emergent writing competencies.

2.2. Second Round of Action Research

The second round of action research focuses on the issues that arose in the first round. We create game-based scenarios, using sand trays and natural materials to help children practice pencil control, optimizing teacher guidance and peer evaluation.

In order to transform children's incidental and external emergent writing interest into a more stable and intrinsic motivation for expression, teachers adopt a strategy of creating scenarios based on children's active performance in role-play areas. Teachers do not predetermine a unified scenario for all children. Instead, when children lack writing motivation or frequently switch materials, teachers stimulate writing creativity by assigning roles and creating task scenarios, enabling children to understand the uses of emergent writing within these contexts. This generates interest in emergent writing and encourages children to engage more actively and attentively in emergent writing expression during zone-based activities, gradually fostering intrinsic motivation for emergent writing.

Good emergent writing posture needs to be reinforced over a long period. During activities, teachers use simple and understandable language to quietly remind children to adjust their sitting posture and pencil grip. At the same time, teachers encourage mutual supervision among children to help them develop self-adjustment awareness. For children who have difficulty with the tripod grip, we recognize that this is mainly limited by the development level of small hand muscles and hand-eye coordination. Therefore, we do not insist on mechanical repetitive practice but instead introduce game-based activities such as sand trays and natural material assembly. Children can freely move their fingers in the sand, feeling the direction and strength of the lines; they can use natural materials like leaves and stones to assemble simple characters or strokes, perceiving the structure of Chinese characters. Teachers demonstrate simple guidance nearby, such as showing how to

relax the wrist and how the arm moves the palm, allowing children to gradually improve the stability and coordination of pencil control through play.

Morrow mentions in his work that early literacy practices can help children organize, generate, monitor their own thoughts, and revise their ideas after solving problems. In the first round of action, the support from teachers was too direct, quickly resolving immediate issues but limiting children's independent thinking, which is not conducive to enhancing children's emergent writing expression abilities. Teachers need to help children transition between concrete images and abstract symbols. When children encounter difficulties with unclear writing intent during emergent writing, teachers provide tools such as thinking maps and step flowcharts, guiding their use through demonstrative language, helping children establish an internal logic that matches symbols with meanings during independent exploration; when children experience writing stagnation, teachers use open-ended questions instead of directly providing answers or corrections, allowing children to actively assign meaning to symbols and understand the logic of emergent writing expression.

The optimization of evaluation methods encompasses two dimensions: teacher evaluation and child evaluation. In teacher evaluation, a clear framework is followed: teachers first offer affirming remarks to sustain children's sense of achievement and willingness to share; they then identify both the highlights and the difficulties children encountered during the emergent writing process, demonstrating attention to the process itself; next, they analyze the work itself to help children understand "how to express themselves more clearly"; finally, they make longitudinal comparisons with the child's previous emergent writing works to affirm specific progress. For works that demonstrate unique creativity, teachers provide additional affirmations in a timely manner. In child evaluation, teachers provide sentence frames such as "I like... because..." to guide children from vague comments like "it looks nice" to more evidence-based appreciation. Teachers guide children to attend to their peers' use of lines, symbols, colors, and meaning expression, and facilitate this through questions such as "Can you tell what he/she wrote?" and "Is there anything you don't understand that you would like to ask him/her?" These questions help children learn to listen, interpret, and attempt to understand others' emergent writing works. When children raise questions, the original author is encouraged to respond, which not only helps the author clarify his/her own writing process but also provides a model for all children on how to explain and refine emergent writing. This enables evaluation to truly become an important avenue through which children learn from one another, reflect on their work, and enhance their emergent writing expression.

In this cycle of action research, most children showed increased interest, spontaneously shared their work, and assumed role identities. Pencil grip generally improved to the tripod grasp, and both line control and pressure application showed noticeable progress. In terms of expression, children acquired new symbols, demonstrated clearer writing intentions, and used association or homophones to substitute for unfamiliar words, with basic correspondence between text and illustration. However, several issues persisted: a small number of children continued to exhibit avoidance behaviors toward emergent writing; teachers' guidance timing was not always optimal, with some instances of prematurely interrupting children's thinking and others of missing the window of opportunity when interest waned; and the increased volume of completed works made it difficult for teachers to provide timely individual feedback during the sharing session. In the next cycle, we will provide differentiated emotional support for the few children who display avoidance, understanding their specific concerns before attempting to rekindle their interest. Teachers will also strive to better calibrate the timing of their instructional interventions. Additionally, timely feedback will be given to children upon completion of their work, combining recognition of their achievements with suggestions for improvement, so as to effectively stimulate intrinsic motivation.

2.3. Third Round of Action Research

In the third cycle of action research, we refined three specific aspects of overall teacher support: providing differentiated emotional support for the few children who remained resistant to writing, calibrating the timing of teacher instructional intervention, and offering timely feedback.

After the first two cycles of action research, a small number of children still could not independently engage in emergent writing. In this cycle, differentiated emotional support was provided for these children. For children who showed resistance, teachers did not impose excessive requirements regarding writing content but instead encouraged them to make attempts through joint guidance from peers in the same zone. For children who were prone to giving up, teachers asked about the reasons, maintained extended attention to these children, offered emotional support, and helped them resolve problems.

During the process of children's emergent writing, the timing of teacher intervention is critical. It does not depend on "how long the problem has persisted," but rather on observing and analyzing whether "the child is in a state of seeking help" or whether "the problem is hindering the construction of writing motivation and meaning." Teachers need to observe children's behaviors and analyze whether they require assistance, based on their understanding of each child. In practice, identifying the appropriate timing for intervention requires repeated exploration by teachers. When children exhibit motor hesitation or manipulate materials idly, teachers tend to observe the child's facial expressions for a while before deciding whether timely intervention is needed. However, when children display implicit help-seeking behavior, show signs of discouragement in their tone, or express an intention to give up, teachers intervene immediately to provide appropriate support, thereby ensuring the smooth progression of children's emergent writing.

After children complete their emergent writing works, teachers provide timely feedback on the works at an appropriate moment. Individualized feedback is grounded in the teacher's daily understanding of each child's emergent writing level, as well as observations of the formation process of each work during the activity. Teachers may distill the highlights of the child's writing and offer one actionable suggestion. Such timely feedback enables children to review and organize their emergent writing ideas before putting away their work, thereby effectively stimulating intrinsic motivation for the next emergent writing session and enhancing their writing expression abilities.

In this cycle of action research, children were able to independently engage in emergent writing creation. When encountering problems, they took the initiative to discuss with peers or seek help from teachers, and maintained correct

postures and expressed themselves confidently with teachers' patient reminders and emotional support. At this stage, teachers paid greater attention to the timing of intervention, employing questioning strategies to guide children's independent thinking and help them understand the logic of writing. Meanwhile, timely feedback was provided to review both the visual presentation and the creative process, along with suggestions for improvement, which effectively enhanced children's emergent writing expression abilities.

3. Effect of Strategy Implementation

Following the action research, most children were able to actively engage in emergent writing during zone-based activities. Their emergent writing motor skills also showed gradual improvement. With simple reminders, young children can maintain a good sitting posture and hold a pencil with a tripod grip. Some children are more relaxed when writing with a tripod grip. Most children can write simple Chinese characters, and they can generally move the pen along the trajectory they envision, showing an overall improvement in pen control skills. Before engaging in emergent writing, children can have writing ideas. Children's awareness of symbols is gradually being established. Some children can use multiple symbols to express meaning and can actively choose appropriate representational symbols based on their ideas; some children's symbols still require verbal explanation. The relationship between text and images in children's emergent writing works generally corresponds. A few children can use some writing symbols independently to convey meaning. Children's writing works are also gradually being used in real communication scenarios, becoming a part of social interaction.

Based on observation and interview data, it has been concluded that children's emergent writing competencies have improved, specifically that the action plan designed around the three dimensions of "writing attitude, motor skills, and written expression" can effectively enhance the emergent writing competencies of senior kindergarten children.

4. Implementation Suggestions

4.1. Emphasizing the Value and Role of Emergent Writing in Activity Centers

Activity centers not only respect children's interests and individual differences but also contain many opportunities for emergent writing. In a free state, writing serves as a naturally emerging expressive tool within the process of play. This writing behavior, stemming from intrinsic motivation, allows children to appreciate the practical value and significance of writing as a tool for expression, helping them develop a positive attitude towards emergent writing.

Teachers should fully recognize the unique value of activity centers in enhancing children's emergent writing competencies and consciously discover and create writing opportunities within each area. Teachers can naturally integrate emergent writing into various aspects of the area games, providing children with both invisible and effective support. Teachers should also pay attention to the emotions and feelings expressed by children during the emergent writing process. This is precisely the intrinsic motivation for young children to gradually develop emergent writing habits and enjoy using emergent writing for expression. Teachers should attach importance to the value and role of emergent writing in activity centers, allowing children to naturally engage in emergent writing in zone-based activities imbued with a play-based spirit.

4.2. Provide preschool children with leveled materials for emergent writing in activity centers

The realization of the educational value of activity centers largely depends on the support of materials. Teachers should provide preschool children with emergent writing materials suitable for activity centers, allowing them to understand the function of writing in activity contexts and to intuitively feel the meaning of writing through specific operations. When children recognize emergent writing as a tool needed for activities, it naturally becomes a part of the play process.

Teachers should also pay attention to individual differences among children and provide leveled materials for emergent writing to help children grow within their zone of proximal development in emergent writing. For example, teachers can provide low-threshold materials such as thick pens, sand trays, and white paper for children with weak pencil control; and structured materials like grid recording sheets for children with weak layout awareness. Teachers can layer materials by difficulty and allow children to choose based on their abilities, gaining improvement in emergent writing competencies through appropriate challenges.

On this basis, teachers also need to dynamically adjust emergent writing materials. Teachers can adjust emergent writing materials in accordance with children's emergent writing interests. Children's interests are changing, the themes of the areas are also changing, and emergent writing materials must be updated accordingly to continue to play a supportive role. Teachers can also regularly rotate materials based on thematic activities or seasonal changes. This update of materials closely connected to children's life experiences and current interests can continuously stimulate children's emergent writing motivation, guiding them to generate new ideas and enrich the content and forms of emergent writing activities.

4.3. Providing scientific emergent writing teacher support for children during activities

Teacher support is a key driving force for enhancing children's emergent writing competencies. Scientific and effective support is not simply about "teaching how to write," but about accurately grasping the timing of intervention and allowing children to engage in emergent writing in an appropriate manner.

The correct timing of intervention directly determines the effectiveness of teacher support. This requires teachers to understand children's daily behaviors, developmental levels, and individual characteristics, and to capture the help signals emitted by children during activities to judge the best timing for intervention. Teachers need to try to provide support at the right moment, aiming to achieve: when children are thinking, teachers can give them space to try; when children seek help, teachers can provide just the right support at critical points, promoting children's emergent writing abilities to steadily improve within the zone of proximal development.

Teacher support should reflect differentiation, choosing different support methods based on children's personalities and emergent writing levels. For example, for children who are emotionally resistant to writing, teachers can create situations to spontaneously gain emergent writing interest from activities; for children who encounter difficulties in skills, teachers can simplify materials; for children who lack emergent writing expression, teachers can guide them appropriately, providing books, pictures, etc., to help expand their thinking.

At the same time, teachers should also pay sufficient attention to writing posture, naturally integrating good habits into daily guidance. Teachers can help children review key points before writing and gently remind them to maintain good writing posture during the writing process. Teachers need to understand the repetitions and discomfort children experience in habit formation, focusing on encouragement. In addition, teachers can create a positive atmosphere through their own demonstrations and peer examples, helping children gradually establish good writing habits.

4.4. Emphasizing emergent writing evaluation after activities

The emergent writing evaluation segment after area activities can not only help children gain confidence through praise but also assist them in reflecting on and achieving development in emergent writing abilities. Teachers can interpret the thoughts and emotions behind children's writing works through details such as lines, symbols, and compositions; they can supplement evaluations based on children's authentic performances during the emergent writing process; and they can also compare the developmental changes in children's writing works over time, affirming their progress with a developmental perspective.

Children's evaluations also contribute to their learning of emergent writing expression. Peer evaluations among children include appreciation, questioning, and understanding. Teachers can use appropriate guiding language to make children's evaluations completer and more specific, such as guiding questions like "What made it clear to you?" or "What could be added to make it easier for others to understand?" This makes the peer evaluation process a process of mutual learning in expression skills and co-constructing symbolic meanings.

In addition, evaluation is not the endpoint of the activity; it should form a closed loop with subsequent support. After evaluation, teachers can analyze children's current developmental levels and real needs based on the evaluation results, timely adjust material deployment and guidance strategies, and plan the next direction of support, ensuring that children's emergent writing needs are promptly addressed, allowing them to grow steadily through continuous observation, feedback, and support.

5. Limitations

This study focuses on three dimensions of senior kindergarten children's emergent writing competencies, namely emergent writing attitude, writing motor skills, and written expression. This choice is based on the following considerations: writing motor skills are the physiological foundation of emergent writing, written expression is the core meaning of emergent writing, and writing attitude is the intrinsic motivation for the continuous development of emergent writing. Together, they can comprehensively reflect he development of children's emergent writing abilities. However, due to research conditions, the dimension of literacy awareness has not been included in the consideration. In addition, children's emergent writing competencies are also influenced by various factors, such as sudden emotions and family factors. Subsequent follow-up research can be conducted to examine whether children who have received training in enhancing emergent writing skills through activity centers during the kindergarten stage show significant differences in writing ability compared to those who have not received such training after entering primary school.

Author Contributions:

Yu Chunying: (Corresponding Author), she supervised the entire research process, including conceptualization, study design, and implementation. She also critically reviewed and edited the manuscript drafts.

Feiya Gu conducted the experiments and collected data at the kindergarten, analyzed the data, wrote the original draft of the manuscript, and finalized the paper based on feedback. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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