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## Connect Oral and Written Expression *by Nancy Frey*

The ability to read and write to convey information, provoke thought, and inspire others has long been considered a hallmark of an educated person (Manguel, 1996). More importantly, reading and writing are tools for empowerment, providing a voice and a forum for those who would otherwise be silent (Freire, 2000). For English language learners (ELLs), the ability to be heard, both verbally and in writing, is especially vital. Children who are learning to write while learning another language are challenged to acquire both the skills and the academic vocabulary and language necessary for effective writing. Recent research emphasizes that writing is a social act, not just a strictly cognitive one, and that the social act of writing is fueled by the conversations that occur among writers (Au, 1997; Dyson, 1989).

*National Geographic Reach* capitalizes on this interaction of oral language development and writing development. Students regularly engage in research-based instructional routines that invite them to compose orally in the company of their peers (Lapp, Flood, & Tinajero, 1994). In addition, teachers deliver writing lessons designed to scaffold student learning using a gradual release of responsibility model of instruction (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Students using *Reach* write daily to build writing fluency and skills. The intensification of learning that comes from daily writing is key to consistent growth in students' writing skills.

### 1 Talk is Essential to Writing

*Using a scaffolded approach to writing instruction, children learn not only what and how to write, but why we write.*

Writing researcher James Britton stated, "writing floats on a sea of talk" (Britton, 1983). Indeed, the art of written composition invariably arises from the conversations we have with others. These acts of oral composition are an essential, yet often overlooked, element of writing. In their study of the writing practices of elementary ELLs, Bicais and Correia (2008) noted that "[c]hildren used peer talk to share their experiences, abilities, skills, and knowledge in interactions that contributed to their learning" and further observed that some students who were quiet during whole class instruction became engaged when discussing their writing with peers.

The challenge in any classroom is to establish an environment where spoken language is fostered in ways that contribute to learning. This is accomplished first psychologically, in a classroom

that honors the homes and cultures of the children (Turner, 2007). Toward this end, the literature featured in *National Geographic Reach* highlights the experiences of people from all over the world. In addition to creating a sense of psychological safety, these readings provide students with a bridge to write about their own experiences as well as those of others. In addition, *Reach* provides a framework that encourages students to speak, listen, read, and write in the company of others. While some of this is accomplished in a large group format, much student talk and its associated writing occurs with partners and in small groups. These frequent small group interactions promote language development and provide young writers with the opportunity to compose orally before doing so on paper (Fisher, Frey, & Rothenberg, 2008).

Language Frames	
<b>Tell Your Ideas</b> I think _____ would be interesting. A story about _____ would be _____. _____ would make a great _____ for my story.	<b>Respond to Ideas</b> I like that idea because _____. The main character should be someone who _____. A better _____ might be _____.

◀ Language frames support peer conferences.

## 2 Scaffolded Instruction Builds Writing Skills

Scaffolded instruction is a principle of teaching dating back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Vygotsky's (1938/1978) observations of the interactions of children who were learning together gave him insight into the possibilities of what could occur when a competent other (teacher or peer) was present to offer support. Over time, Vygotsky's insights about a learner's zone of proximal development were reinterpreted as the teacher practice of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Scaffolding in turn has been further explained in reading as a gradual release of responsibility model of instruction (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). More recently, this model has been expanded for reading and writing instruction to include a collaborative learning phase where students engage in productive group work in the company of peers (Fisher & Frey, 2007, 2008). Students benefit from time to write together through guided instruction as well as from skill-building exercises such as writing specific types of sentences, power writing, and close examination and replication of writing models (Fisher & Frey, 2007).

Writing instruction in *National Geographic Reach* is scaffolded through writing routines that are used consistently throughout the lesson cycle. These routines include:

- **Modeled Writing** In Modeled Writing the teacher uses a think aloud approach to model and explain the decision making process used by a writer (Davey, 1983). Students are able to observe what the teacher writes as she explains how she decides what to include and how to express it. For many students, witnessing and participating in the modeling process is essential for understanding the act of writing.

Say	Write
The girl and her father planted the sprouting potatoes in soil.	I think the girl learned that you can plant sprouting potatoes in soil.
The potato plants produced many new potatoes.	She also learned that potato plants produce many new potatoes.

- ▲ In Modeled Writing, the teacher first thinks aloud, showing students how she decides what to write. She then models how to turn her thinking into written text.

- **Interactive Writing** In Interactive Writing the teacher and students work together to discuss what they will write, and then students take turns adding to the written product on the board or chart paper. This discussion may proceed one word at a time, with frequent rereading of what has already been written, so that students have extended opportunities to think about and take part in the construction of a piece of writing.
- **Independent Writing** Students using *National Geographic Reach* also have many opportunities to write independently. They write in response to literature or to class discussions of

Big Questions, and in many other contexts. However, they are not asked to write independently without support. The lessons in *National Geographic Reach* consistently provide teacher models, language frames, sentence starters, or other supports so students can write successfully on their own.

- **Power Writing** Writing fluency is critical to the development of young writers. Students including ELLs may find it difficult to begin and continue a writing task. As with reading instruction, where it is understood that a steady daily diet of texts nourishes young readers and contributes to fluency, so it is with writing. *Reach* uses an approach called Power Writing (Fearn & Farnan, 2001; Fisher & Frey, 2007) to build the writing stamina of young writers. These brief, timed writing events encourage children to put their ideas down on paper in order to build writing fluency. Over time, as they track the amount they write, students can see their own developing fluency and writing skill. Other approaches, such as specific sentences, invite students to use newly acquired vocabulary to create grammatically and semantically correct sentences (Fisher & Frey, 2007). Importantly, these original sentences are further extended into longer pieces so that students move quickly from word, to sentence, to paragraph.

- ◀ The Power Writing Routine encourages students to put their ideas down on paper to build writing fluency.

- **Writing on Demand** *National Geographic Reach* lessons also include opportunities for students to write on demand. These activities resemble the kinds of writing students frequently encounter on tests. *National Geographic Reach* lessons provide models of how to analyze and interpret writing prompts and how to write effectively in response.
- **Developing Vocabulary for Writing** Schleppegrell and Go (2007) examined the writing of fourth and fifth grade English learners who had generated lists of possible academic language and vocabulary prior to writing and found that the young writers utilized these lists to strengthen the structure and content of their writing. Vocabulary instruction in *National Geographic Reach* includes multiple opportunities for students to explore, list, and write about new academic and content vocabulary, and they are consistently encouraged to use these new words in discussion and in their writing.

- **Writing Projects** In addition to daily writing activities, *National Geographic Reach* includes more extended writing projects, in which students study the writing process to create and publish a more developed piece of written work. Students study a model, plan, draft, revise, and edit their work, and then publish it for their peers. The writing projects include many opportunities for students to learn from each as they collaborate, share, and review each others' work. Writing projects include a wide variety of writing forms, including narratives, articles, persuasive essays, descriptive writing, and others.
- **Unit Wrap-Up Projects** Engaging, creative projects connect many modes of communication—oral, visual, kinesthetic—and connect learning back to the central idea via the Big Question.

## Conclusion

While writing is often viewed as an independent activity, the research on the importance of collaboration before and after writing is compelling. Writing is ultimately about audience, so conversation

and response are integral to the process. As noted earlier, writers typically begin to compose orally before they put pencil to paper. Therefore, it is essential for young writers to convey their own ideas, listen to the ideas of others, and dialogue about both. Children also need opportunities to discuss what they have written with fellow writers in order to obtain peer responses. Students meet the authors of many of the readings in *National Geographic Reach* and learn how these professionals approach their craft. These author conversations are intended to model the kind of thinking that writers of all ages engage in. And finally, the act of writing is far too important to leave to chance. We know that merely “causing” writing through writing prompts is not enough. Young writers must be taught about the structures and conventions of the language, as well as the craft. Purposeful attention to building the fluency, content knowledge, and art of writing are woven together into a compelling program. Using a scaffolded approach to writing instruction, children learn not only what and how to write, but most importantly, why we write. In discovering the art of writing, they also discover themselves.

**Writing Project**

### Write Like a Scientist

**Write an Article**

Write an article that explains what you think is so amazing about plants. Add your article to a class science magazine to share with others in your school.

**Study a Model**

An article includes facts and details about a topic. Read this article that Mariah wrote about plants.

**Plants Are Everywhere**

by Mariah Ruiz

Plants are amazing because they can grow in so many different places. We know that plants grow in soil, but they pop up in other places, too. Did you know that seeds can sprout in tiny cracks on sidewalks? Some daisies, for example, grow big enough to break the pavement!

Other plants, like seaweed, live completely underwater. There are even plants, like mistletoe, that grow on other plants!

So, the next time you're outside, take a look around. You might see a plant or two growing in the most unusual place!

**The topic sentence** tells the main idea.

Each fact or detail supports the main idea. The writing is focused.

**The concluding sentence** connects all the ideas. It makes the writing complete.

**Prewrite**

**1. Choose a Topic** What topic will you write about in your article? Talk with a partner to choose the best one.

Language Frames

<p><b>Tell Your Ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plants can _____. That might be a good topic.</li> <li>• I know a lot about _____, so I'll write about that.</li> <li>• My favorite plant is _____. I would like to tell more about it.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Respond to Ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think/do not think that is a good topic because _____.</li> <li>• _____ sounds interesting. Tell me more.</li> <li>• I like that plant, too. I would like to read about _____.</li> </ul>
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**2. Gather Information** Find all the facts and details you'll need for your article. Do they all tell about the same topic?

**3. Get Organized** Use a main idea and details diagram to help you organize what you'll say.

Main Idea and Details Diagram

**Main Idea:**  
Plants grow everywhere.

**Supporting Detail:**  
in cracks on sidewalks

**Supporting Detail:**  
underwater

The main idea goes here.

Add details that support the main idea.

**Draft**

Use your main idea and details diagram to write your draft.

- Turn your main idea into a topic sentence.
- Turn your details into sentences that tell more about the main idea.