



# Writing

Program Research Base



Wright Group



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# Writing in LEAD21

## Executive Summary

This white paper addresses one of the most complex strands of the elementary school curriculum—the teaching of writing. It does this to provide information about and background for content, methods, and assessment in the area of Writing in **LEAD21**. Writing is instructionally complex for many reasons, and perhaps because of its complexity, while it is one of the *most commonly used tools for teaching and assessing learning*, it is *typically taught and assessed least out of all the content areas*. This problem has persisted in the United States educational system throughout the past century.

Writing is a tool for authentic communication within the classroom’s everyday life. Students write in many settings and for many purposes in school. As a taken-for-granted part of classroom culture, writing is invisible, its processes and genres almost impervious to instruction. However, its technical aspects, what we often call mechanics—spelling, punctuation, penmanship, and grammar—are taught, practiced, and assessed as if, taken together, they amount to written communication and therefore constitute a content area in their own right.

Today, however, writing is neither “content free,” nor merely reduced to its “mechanics.” Moreover, teachers find that they can no longer teach the “content areas” free of instructional support for the writing that ordinarily accompanies them. More importantly, parts of the language arts curriculum which until now have been

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separated into reading, writing, speaking, and listening are integrated: The individual language arts strands are both researched and taught as people use them—as sociocognitive processes for making sense and interpreting the sense of others. Writing has come of age within the school, and some would say that its maturity is long overdue. Others say that its arrival as a central part of literacy

education is just in time. Globalization has increased immigration, inter-language contact among people in schools and the world of work, and the profusion of alternative media by which we communicate across distance and context, mostly by use of written language. Writing is taking on increasing significance. In an era of rapid connectivity, we must all be flexible, knowledgeable, and confident writers.

The first section of this paper locates writing in the child’s early development and describes the oral precursors of writing. Section two deals with the role of the teacher and school in teaching writing, and considers what youngsters need to learn that requires standards, formal instruction, and curriculum. Section three describes the threads that weave reading and writing together: oral language, culture, and thinking.

In this weaving, conversation plays an important role. Therefore, section four discusses what can be learned by means of “talk about text.” Such talk moves reading, writing, and oral language into the social ecology of human life (Barton 1994).

The ecological view of literacy asserts that reading, writing, and oral language cannot be separated in their learning and in their use to learn subject matter. They are inter-related because they are all part of communication and are meaningful within social groups, contexts, knowledge, and activities. Section five discusses genre, not as the label that is attached to a text for the purpose of marketing or shelving it in the library or book store, but as a way to teach, use, and assess the combination of features of a text in social context. Genre in this contemporary sense is the form, purpose, topic, and author/audience of written text, all working together (Bakhtin 1986). Section six looks at several twenty-first century needs for writing instruction: teaching writing to English Language learners (ELL); differentiating instruction to address students’ special needs; and rapidly changing tools for writing as new technologies develop and alter purposes and situations for communication. All of this is part of the teaching and learning of writing in school and is therefore incorporated into **LEAD21**.

# Early Language Development: Oral Precursors to Writing

Human beings are social, and all human societies engage in talk. Most activities in society involve the uniquely human capacities of teaching, learning, and using language to communicate (Cole 1996). Talk has been well-studied by linguists, anthropologists, sociologists, and educational researchers for more than a century (Erickson 2004). We know a great deal about the acquisition, for example, of a first language and also of language-in-use, especially in educational settings. We also know a great deal about learning a second language either by immersion or by some form of systematic

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language instruction (Wittrock 1986). But it is difficult to put all of these instances of oral language development together, much less to see how they lay the foundation for learning to write.

How is early speech a precursor of writing—both its informal acquisition of writing at home, and its formal instruction in school writing? How can speech serve as a powerful resource for learning to write—in everything from teaching and learning the alphabetic principle to learning and using text genres?

As a precursor to writing, humans must acquire a first language, a process which includes mastering its sound patterns, increasing in its vocabulary, forming idea units to follow grammatical rules, and expressing and understanding talk in social situations (Morrow 2008). This process is a marvel of mixing human genetics, social relations, and informal teaching (Cole 1996). The capacity to do all of this in real time, improvisationally yet as part of an “ensemble”—that is, in face-to-face contact with others—is part of the richness and complexity of humans’ learning to talk (Gumperz 1982). Youngsters’ additional awareness of context that is not physically present in the immediate interaction demonstrates that in this accomplishment they develop a sense of time, place, activity, relationship, role, strategy, and tactics for written communication (Cook-Gumperz 1982).

To the extent that educators take this development for granted, or do not capitalize on it as a resource for teaching, they deny the power of what linguist James Gee (2008) calls the child’s “primary discourse,” which is a tool for entrée into the “secondary discourses” that school introduces (reading, writing, talking about ideas). The loss of this potential is a problem for all children. But it is most pronounced among those who have learned a “primary discourse” comprised of a dialect or language other than what is commonly called formal or Standard American English (Gee 2008). It is also a problem for children from a non-dominant culture that has different occasions for reading and writing from those used in the common classroom, or that has culturally diverse traditions for when and how to tell a story. We can find examples of these

differences and the problems they can cause for teachers and youngsters alike in a myriad of research—most prominently in the pioneering ethnographic study of children’s language and schooling in three speech communities in *Ways with Words*, by Shirley Brice Heath (1976).

No matter how emergent literacy presents itself at the classroom door, good teachers with strong writing programs capitalize on the foundational learning of language and literacy that young children bring with them to school. If prior to school, the child’s opportunity to activate emergent literacy is minimal (that is, if it differs from the

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ordinary expectations of monolingual, middleclass teachers), Gee asserts that teachers must nonetheless take up literacy development within the classroom because it is as essential to learning literacy as is school-based instruction. He argues that catching up children’s emergent literacy is a moral obligation, since so much of their life opportunities depend on them becoming literate.

Children need opportunities for language acquisition to support subsequent school-based instruction. Gee differentiates “acquisition” (that knowledge which we develop by doing something) from “learning” (that knowledge which we develop by being taught about it). Thus, children’s learning about writing, their gradual acquisition of page orientation, or left to right placement of print (or proto-writing which we might call “scribble,”) is qualitatively different from their learning of conventions (for example, direct teaching of print; teaching of forms—parts of a business letter or an invitation; the sounds of English, in which different sounds can be associated with the shifting positions of symbols—*b*, as it shifts to *b,p,q,d*).

The distinction between acquisition and learning can be further clarified by considering both the *what* of their learning (informal versus formal rules) and the *how* of their learning (acquisition through everyday literacy events in the family and community, compared to learning in a formal school context, which includes assessment). Both are necessary, and children who arrive at school lacking rich opportunities for acquisition often are plunged into instruction prematurely. That is why a strong literacy program recognizes varied prior knowledge and background and offers a rich blend of opportunities to learn to write in English both in the doing and by means of instruction in the early years, and for newcomers to English, at any elementary grade.



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In the examples above we can see that acquisition and learning by instruction are not rigidly divided. Many children have acquired such principles in English, such as the topdown, left-to-right orientation of print, in an adults' lap while listening to and looking at the words and pictures in a bedtime story. But what the direct teaching of concepts of print affords is the capacity to make that knowledge explicit and to be able to anticipate it in reading, apply it in writing, and articulate the principle in revision. We move then from acquisition, to instruction, to independent, self-regulated use of print. From acquisition, or learning by doing, comes fluency and tacit knowledge. Knowledge gained by direct instruction is more meta-cognitive in nature. Though its users may be less fluent, they may be still able to assert underlying rules and principles. Thus we learn to speak grammatically before we study grammar—both are important for our development as fluent communicators.

Needless to say, students need them both—particularly to master an array of communication and also to create ways of expressing themselves in a world increasingly characterized by generativity and connectivity. Both acquisition by working alongside others and learning by means of direct teaching are important to writing instruction: Both can be practiced in school. Comprehensive writing programs offer principled opportunities for each of these. Indeed, some aspects of written language may lend themselves to direct instruction while other aspects are indeterminate and therefore require coaching, modeling, and expansion of the sort that we see in the adult/child interactions in which early acquisition occurs.

## **Writing Goes to School**

Human beings are, in psychologist Lev Vygotsky's words, "natural symbolists" (Vygotsky 1934/1987). Our ability to teach, learn, and use language gives us access to what psychologist A. R. Luria called the "tool of tools" (Luria cited in Cole 1996). Language is our social and genetic birthright and holds enormous value for both the individual learner and the society. Mastering the language of one's culture is an individual accomplishment that depends greatly on interaction with others. In studying the development of language and thought in society, Vygotsky described this process in his "general law of cultural development" as follows:

Any function in children's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First, it appears on the social plane and then on the psychological plane. First, it appears between people as an interpsychological category and then within the individual child as an intrapsychological category....social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships (Vygotsky cited in Cole 1996).

Here Vygotsky is telling educators two things of significance:

- First, language and literacy develop in social interactions and authentic activities;
- Second, there is an intimate relationship between students' learning to think and their learning of language and literacy.

In short, we cannot deny the weave of language, community, and thought in human development. Vygotsky's law places the onus on adults to help beginners organize experience in ways that support language development.

While humans may be genetically primed to acquire language, human development depends on the interaction of social and individual history, as well as context. Cole notes that the interdependence of child development with adults' "arrangement of environments that optimize that development" leads us to another Vygotskian idea—that of a "zone of proximal development" (Cole 1996). That zone, according to Cole,

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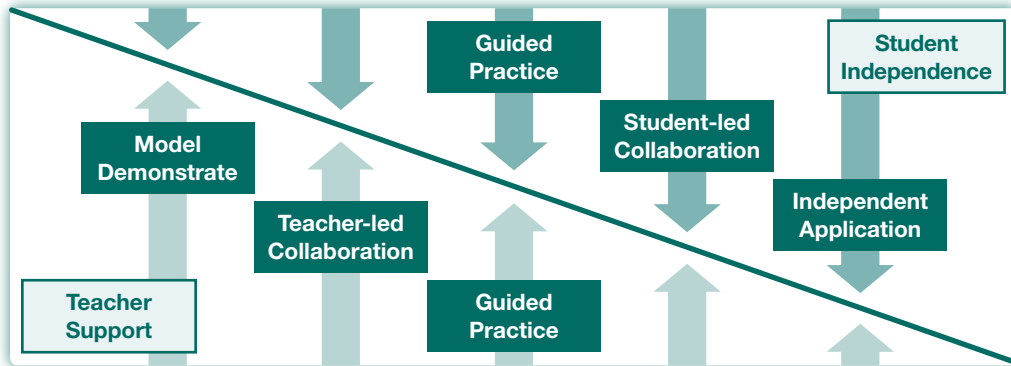
"Affords the proximal, relevant environment of experience for development. It is the foundation upon which, in an ideal world, the education of children would be organized." The adult's work with the child within this metaphorical zone, in Cole's term, "braids" individual and cultural development. Being a part of a language community is the

source of powerful learning. However, it is also the source of shared knowledge of a communication system that is normative but not deterministic—that is, the ability to communicate with others enables the student's transformation through critical examination of the student's community (Gee 2008).

Another scholar, Jerome Bruner, also concerned with culture and education, dubbed this process of learning and development through communication with more experienced members of a community, the "instructional scaffold" (Bruner 1996). Scaffolding is, like Vygotsky's zone, a metaphor to help us understand how and why the teacher and student should engage one another in activities in which the student can succeed with instructional support—the scaffold the teacher provides as the student builds complexity in knowledge and understanding.

As the student becomes more proficient, the teacher gradually releases control, offering less assistance until the student has assumed independent, self-regulated ability to complete the learning task (Au, Mason, and Scheu, 1995). This is the removal of the scaffold.

## Gradual Release of Responsibility Model



However, because development continues, the teacher continues to “up the ante,” raising the scaffold once again beyond that which the student has already mastered or can currently do with assistance. A thoughtful program that includes integrated literacy instruction attends to this dynamic with methods, materials, benchmarks, and standards that explicitly lay out where the student is headed. Although such a curriculum, embodying Dewey’s “end in view,” (1990), points all students in the same direction, it also allows for students to move along at different paces, begin from different entry points, or bring varied background knowledge to the process (Au, et al. 2009). This has been called a staircase approach to curriculum development and can be of use to all teachers (K–5) in a school. It enables continuity within and across grade levels as well as among youngsters with varied writing or reading ability at the outset.

Additionally for Bruner, this process is not as simple as “onward and upward,” rather, he theorized a “spiral curriculum” in which children are taught and re-taught concepts that are important to their learning, at increasing levels of complexity. Thus, in writing, for example, a drawing with a few letters beneath it can become a series of descriptive sentences illustrated by a drawing, and ultimately a research report with a picture, chart, or graph to represent complex information. Building complexity by teaching a concept as part of a conversation that re-visits that concept in new and more complex ways is a key way to work toward higher-order reasoning as learners develop.

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## Language, Culture, and Thought

In the case of oral language development, we can observe very young children interacting in various highly scaffolded ways right from the start, as even newborns are welcomed into the family and its activities. Observational research shows us that children receive, both spontaneously and intentionally, a range of instruction from parents—modeling, coaching, and directing them. Depending on the situation, a child's simple utterance may be expanded (and infused with intention) as the adult responds to it, as in the following interaction loosely based in many examples available in Cazden's summary of her own and her colleagues early child language research (Cazden, 1982):

**Child:** Mommy juice (holding her empty cup toward the mother)

**Mother:** Oh, Baby Katie wants some more juice in her cup (taking the cup and adding juice)

Yet when the toddler reaches toward the hot stove, Mother may not wait for the child to say a word. Instead, she might issue direct instruction:

**Mother:** No! Don't touch the stove. It's hot!

To which the child might reply, withdrawing her hand:

**Child:** No! 'tove hot!

Thus, we can observe the first examples of the dynamic tension between variation and predictability that marks all language use, both oral and written. We can observe the mother teaching by taking the child's meaning seriously and acting upon it and also by her expansion of the utterance toward a more mature, conventional expression of it. We see both parent and child express multiple kinds of meaning in even the smallest exchange (very rich context). And we also see parental support of the child's development toward a more complex way of speaking. This is all done via informal support, which more experienced members of the family offer the child—as innately as a child initiating an exchange with a two-word request (Brown 1977, cited in Cazden 1988).

We can also see how, over time, children grow in their capacity to speak within a group. Although the interactions in which they participate are novel and variable, the path of the child's language acquisition systematically increases in complexity (Block and Mangieri 2003). In the following example we see the linking of language, culture, and thought. We can see that what the more experienced speaker affords the novice is an opportunity to reflect upon the observation and transform it. In this way, the novice approximates cultural knowledge about categorizing animals from general to specific—yet also perhaps learns about them from specific to general.

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When a grandfather walks with his young grandson and a hairy, four-legged creature approaches them wagging a tail, the child may shout, “Max!” In response, grandfather is apt to say something like, “Yes, this is a dog and you have a dog, too. Your dog is named Max” (Rosaen and Florio-Ruane 2008).

Rosaen and Florio-Ruane (2008) note, in this example, that “so much has happened by way of the linguistic mediation of experience and the authentic engagement of a more and a less-experienced member of the culture. Most important perhaps is that in the intimacy of adult-child interaction, language and concept development proceed almost incidentally, and context is immensely important to the process.”

This teaching arises through informal chats with one’s grandfather, but it is made more systematic in school. Still it should not lose its essential qualities of authenticity, communication, and closeness to the learner’s emergent understanding. Families send their children to school precisely so that teachers who are certified experts in the teaching of reasoning and communication can work with their children toward systematically higher standards of language as well as “language about language and ideas” (Cole 1996). In schools, and especially for more complex literacy practices such as comprehension and composition, the informal teaching by the family is more than supplemented by systematic curriculum design, instructional planning, and assessment (Morrow 2008).

A beginner’s speaking and thinking repertoire for complex ideas is limited but expandable by adult response. With growing interaction within the physical world and among experienced members of a culture, a beginner’s thought and language becomes increasingly complex. Ultimately thought, which began on the social plane, is internalized and personalized in cognitive networks of words, ideas, and experiences. These have been learned and have meaning in the company of others (Rosaen and Florio-Ruane 2008). They are the stuff of experience out of which students write.

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Language and culture shape thought, yet by a continuous process of development and interaction, speakers/writers can use language to reflect their thought and impact readers. Writers and readers together re-make, even transform, culture. When, for example, a group of middle-school students noticed their peers were throwing away nearly full containers of the milk they were required to take with the school cafeteria lunch, they wrote a script for a video about the waste of resources called, “Got Milk?” The script was filmed and screened for all the students in the school, and the requirement of taking milk was changed. Waste was decreased. The micro-culture of the school community was changed because students wrote (Ferdig 2001).

## Talk about Text

There are no national standards limiting the kind of instructional support grandfathers give to children, but teachers need to base their instructional decisions on knowledge of best practices. Professionalism, specialized knowledge, and pedagogy differentiate their work from the language learning support provided by engaged families. Therefore it is important for literacy programs to be planned with clear attention to what we know, based on rigorous research on a variety of topics, and conducted from multi-disciplinary perspectives. The body of multi-disciplinary, applied research on literacy

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is not intended to script the teacher's work. Rather, in the complex, fast-paced and indeterminate world of teaching and learning, it is important to have principles and standards that help educators organize, convey, teach about, and assess the appropriate expectations for their grade level. When publishers produce research-based materials

consistent with the goals and standards of effective instruction, they can add greatly to teachers' ability to use best practices across the multiple subjects for which they are responsible in elementary school.

In the case of teachers' communication with youngsters about literacy, evidence from studies suggest options for instruction regarding optimal moments to use direct instruction, modeling, explanation, guided discovery, and other approaches. The historical absence of research-based guidance for teaching literacy was lamented by Block and Mangiere, and it was not until the 1990's, when they designed and conducted extensive research on a large sample of teachers working with diverse children, that we began to have a sense of what effective literacy instructors do in varied contexts. Their work resulted in an accessible set of principled, case descriptions of successful teachers, tools for situating strategies in one's own lesson planning and learning activities, as well as tools for self-assessment and skill-building (Block and Mangieri 1993). In all cases, of course, the goal is to help all children reach independence and self-regulation as readers and writers. In response to the latest research, **LEAD21** builds Modeled Writing, Shared Writing, Interactive Writing, and Independent Writing into every writing lesson. Conference with Students is also a regular part of the lesson plan so that students are constantly moving between whole-group, small-group, and individual work structures. Over the course of five days, this structure enables students to gain the necessary self-confidence and independence to produce their own writing products.

Table 1.

| <b>LEAD21 4-Day Writing Lessons Structure</b>  |   |  |   |
|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Day 1</b>   | <b>Day 2</b>  | <b>Day 3</b>   | <b>Day 4</b>  |
| <b>Activate Prior Knowledge</b>  | <b>Study the Writing Model</b><br>Talk about Text                           | <b>Study the Writing Model</b><br>Talk about Text                                | <b>Revise the Model</b>   |
| <b>Study the Writing Model</b><br>Talk about Text<br><br><b>Characteristics of Descriptive Paragraphs</b><br><br><b>Organization of Descriptive Paragraphs</b> | <b>Choose a Topic Modeled Writing</b><br><br><b>Shared Writing</b>          | <b>Write a First Draft Interactive Writing</b><br><br>Reading/Writing Connection | <b>Peer Review Author's Chair</b>   |
| <b>Descriptive Language Shared Writing</b>   | <b>Write and Confer Independent Writing</b><br><br>Conference with Students | <b>Write and Confer Independent Writing</b><br><br>Conference with Students      | <b>Write and Confer Independent Writing</b><br><br>Conference with Students |
| <b>Set Writing Goals</b>   | <b>Gather Information</b>   | <b>Reflect on Writing</b><br>Grammar   | <b>Edit the Model</b>   |
|  | <b>Sensory Language Interactive Writing</b>                                 |  | <b>Write and Confer Independent Writing</b><br><br>Conference with Students |
|  | <b>Write and Confer Independent Writing</b><br><br>Conference with Students |  | <b>Reflect on Writing</b>   |
|  | <b>Reflect on Writing</b>   |  |   |

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There are good reasons why teachers and **LEAD21** scaffold writing instruction and plan for the “gradual release of control” to the student author (Au, et al 1995).

Teachers have many children to attend to in classrooms. Classrooms are formal, public places where, by definition, teachers and students share less background knowledge of one another than in families. Schools operate within a climate of equitable treatment of students, focus on students’ achievement of pre-determined goals, assessment of growth toward those goals, and discussion of complex subject matter. Therefore, teaching writing is a matter of gradual release of control among learners who are widely diverse and in situations marked more by formality than the intimacy of family life. For these reasons, teachers need to know each student by a series of steps:

- administering pre-assessment
- identifying the needs of diverse learners
- differentiating instruction
- assessing progress
- and also maintaining a shared sense of the classroom as a place where written communication matters.

(See **LEAD21** Writing Lesson Structure for evidence of building a shared sense of a writing community within the classroom.) Teachers also need to use formats for writing instruction that utilize a rich mixture of social interactions among students, and between teachers and students, for the purpose and practice of writing. This, too, is a deliberate feature of writing instruction in **LEAD21**.

Teachers scaffold youngsters’ development in a variety of ways. They vary the configurations for activities (whole class, pairs, small group), by offering varied kinds of instructional support (mini-lessons, conferring, questioning, modeling). And they pace writing in ways sensitive not only to students’ readiness but also to a process that, for each child and for the entire group, moves from planning through completion of the writing task. In the case of writing, students in **LEAD21** experience all of these instructional arrangements depending on their needs, the teacher’s instructional goals, and other features of the instructional context. Writing instruction thus can take varied forms, some quite different from the typical recitation format of Teacher Initiation-Student Reply-Teacher Evaluation (IRE) first described in research on classroom discourse by sociologist Hugh Mehan, (1976) and replicated in many studies of classroom oral discourse.



## Genres

Written literacy is a second-order symbol system in that it uses textual signs corresponding to the sound-based signs of meaning in speech. In alphabetic writing systems such as English, this means that letters represent sounds and combine in particular ways to make words: Words are linked in sentences to represent objects or ideas. When sentences are linked, they are referred to as written “discourse,” and generally take culturally patterned forms of meaning that we call “genres.” Thus, oral and written systems of representation combine to enable verbal communication using culturally shared patterns of written marks.

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Here is an opportunity for teachers to integrate instructional strategies and concepts in reading comprehension and written composition. In both cases, the learner is working with patterned uses of print beyond the level of the sentence. This means that closed-ended grammatical or phonemic-rule systems no longer support students when they are attempting to interpret or to design text. What supports students at this operating level are culturally shared schema (for example, story grammars) for composing or interpreting text. These are tied, however, to genres—that is, to the constellation of relationships among author role, purpose, intended audience, topic, and voice. Word choice, the crafting of sentences and the fulfillment of the schema for a particular genre give each text its particular voice. The authors’ craft is as relevant a study in composition as it is in comprehension. When students are working at this level, it is not surprising that reading and writing mutually support one another and are often linked by discussion and contrastive analysis.

Table 2.

| Writing Genres   |
|--|
| <b>Expository:</b> writing class rules, social studies report, science report, news report, paragraph, history report, comparison essay, business letter |
| <b>Messages:</b> friendly letter, e-mail, invitations, thank you notes, announcements  |
| <b>Procedural:</b> directions with maps, how-to  |
| <b>Reader Response:</b> book reviews, letter to author, retellings   |
| <b>Poetry:</b> quatrains, concrete, couplets, cinquains, haiku, free verse, limerick   |
| <b>Narrative:</b> personal narrative, folktale, biography, fable, realistic fiction, science fiction, mystery, short story, journal writing              |
| <b>Descriptive:</b> descriptive posters with labels and captions, descriptive paragraph, essay   |
| <b>Persuasive:</b> Ads, letters, posters, paragraph, essay   |

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In extensive research on reading, writing, and oral language in both student and adult book clubs, Florio-Ruane and Raphael found that texts under discussion often shaped talk and writing about them, not only in theme or topic, but in genre as well (Florio-Ruane with deTar 2001; Raphael 2004). For example, discussion of an autobiography frequently called forth personal narrative in response. Students who wrote in response to text in a “Stories of Self” book club unit further demonstrated increased length, complexity, conventionalized vocabulary, and character development as they alternately read, talked about, and wrote autobiographical text.

There is much to be learned about this synergy—how it might be applied to motivate writing or accelerate students’ reading comprehension as well as their writing of extended text. **LEAD21**’s feature called Reading/Writing Connection continually works to build bridges between the students’ reading and writing experiences. However, if genre helps us differentiate particular contexts and purposes for language as well as heuristics for structuring text, then it is important that genre study be central to comprehension instruction, through talk about text, and the learning of composition strategies. In the words of Cope and Kalantzis:

Genre is a category that describes the relation of the social purpose of text to language structure. It follows that in learning literacy, students need to analyze critically the different social purposes that inform patterns of regularity in language—the whys and the hows of textual conventionality, in other words (Cope and Kalantzis 1993).

Culture is not only central to the sociolinguistic processes occurring when one reads or writes an essay (or a history report, editorial, memoir, or a poem), but it is also sustained and transformed by the process. This is what researchers call the “reflexive” relationship between language (both oral and written) and culture (Rosaen and Florio-Ruane 2008).

To learn to read and write, students must master the sound patterns of their language, the ways these sounds combine into words, and ways that words combine to make sentences and longer units of discourse. They must also master the ways an author uses written conventions to express meaning. But students also learn how to use figures of speech—metaphors, similes, and symbols. It is the combination of a text’s form and function along with the power of its rhetoric (all of which are taught and learned by means of literacy education) that makes literature the repository of a culture’s experience.

## Learning a New Literacy Future

Learning the second-order symbol system of written literacy is more complex, takes longer, and needs more systematic, instructional support than learning to speak. However, students do not come to reading and writing in school without some very powerful resources. Merely because the writing system does not require the use of speech (and the author need not be present in order for the reader to make sense of his or her text) does not mean that writing is not social. In fact, it is intrinsically social both in its development and in the ways that communities develop norms or rules for making meaning. This is especially the case when writers create text longer than a single sentence—when there is no precise way to predict how they will combine words and sentences to convey their ideas.

The social nature of writing appears early. Just as in speech, beginners do not “crawl before they can walk,” but attempt to convey meaning in a holistic, if immature, way. Situation and context matter to intelligibility more than mastery of all the complexities of written expression. This means that scribbles can function as a birthday card. While it would be untrue to say that the young child who has made the card is really writing, it would be accurate to say that the child has acquired some knowledge about writing, which includes basic principles of orthography, text arrangement, language use for social functions, authorship, and audience. Good teaching capitalizes upon and does not underestimate the powerful context and emergent knowledge about text that very young children possess and continue to develop as they grow and learn.

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It is a pleasing irony that research on what is called “pre-literacy” or “emergent” literacy has much to teach us that is far beyond how children initially approach writing (Temple, Nathan, Burris, and Temple, 1988). It teaches us about how anyone approaches a new literacy—regardless of their mother tongue, or learning style, or even of the medium in which that literacy is expressed (for example, texting, e-mail, on-line socializing). Researchers find that just as young children participate actively in their acquisition of speech, those raised in a literate society also reach toward written literacy in their social and cognitive development even before coming to school (Teale and Sulzby 1987). Pre-school children engage in handling books, pretending to read books aloud and silently, holding writing implements, as well as “writing” in strings of squiggly lines to imitate adult cursive (Clay 1975, Ferriero and Teberosky 1983).

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Just as in speech acquisition, children actively engage in give and take around text with adults during activities that gradually extend their understanding. They elicit caregivers' authentic responses, as in the naming of pictures in storybook reading, or in making "written" messages for adults (playing school or pretending to run a restaurant) (Ninio and Bruner 1976). They "read" what they have produced in the "restaurant" or "school." They follow along as adults read familiar books to them, often turning the page at appropriate points, imitating adult expression, and reciting familiar lines. Wanting very much to be participants and to master the conventions of the written code, young children imitate adults' reading and writing within both everyday situations and imaginary play. They move on to using the language in equally authentic projects and assignments as they grow able to take notes, write reports, craft mysteries, and so on. Parents welcome this, as do good teachers. **LEAD21** taps into this natural progression by linking Oral Language Development in Kindergarten with the beginnings of writing in Grade 1. The strand begins early in Kindergarten and then halfway through Grade 1, links up with the Writing strand to create a seamless blending of children's natural oral language with their urge to write. But **LEAD21** does not lose site of the mature ends of education toward which these scaffolded activities are directed. That end is the literate adult able to participate in the economy, cultural life, and democratic processes of the community.

Drawing from research on early language and literacy development, we can summarize some of the lessons learned that, taken as a whole and utilized by thoughtful teachers, seem to push writers toward conventions of written language and toward authentic and increasingly mature writing.

- Assume interest and competence on the part of the student writer.
- Develop a relationship with the writer/student, and work on literacy activities in meaningful contexts.
- Share an interest with the writer's sense-making and problem-solving in the writing task at hand.
- Follow the writers' lead as they assume the role of author.
- Teach with a spirit of inquiry by capitalizing on errors and uncertainty as opportunities to learn more about and support the learning of the writer (Florio-Ruane 1991).

In contemporary classrooms, where ELL students are reaching toward literacy in English, or where children are diverse in their starting points but are reaching for the shared goal of adult literacy, or where everyone (including the teacher) is reaching toward new literacies in an era with enormous amounts of information exchanged (via the internet or cell tower), we might all think of ourselves as emergent readers

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and writers. In a sense, we are all lifelong students of writing as we master underlying principles and are encouraged by more experienced others to risk expressing ourselves and interpreting the expressions of others in new ways. In spite of this contemporary plethora of information, it is yet possible to organize, prioritize, and write a curriculum with a strong research base, an array of instructional best practices, and wise assessments that are both valid and informative. These are the goals of the Writing strand in **LEAD21**. The following table offers key examples of this process as it links program content with research-based knowledge about the learning and development of writing, and effective instructional practices.

**Table 3.**

| <b>LEAD21 Writing and Language Arts Instructional Pedagogy</b>   |   |
|--|---|
| Research Says  | LEAD21 Delivers   |
| All human societies engage in talk. Most activities in society involve the uniquely human capacities of teaching, learning and using language (Cole 1996).   | Activate Prior Knowledge begins every writing lesson.   |
| No matter how emergent literacy presents itself at the classroom door, good teachers with strong writing programs capitalize on the foundational learning of language and literacy that young children bring with them to school (Heath 1983).   | Activate Prior Knowledge includes overt encouragement of students' sharing their past experiences and present abilities to express themselves.  |
| Cole notes that the interdependence of child development with adults' "arrangement of environments that optimize that development" leads us to another Vygotskian idea—that of a "zone of proximal development" (Cole 1996).   | Modeled Writing by the teacher leads into Shared Writing and Interactive Writing with the whole class as a regular feature of the Writing and Language Arts strand. In addition, teachers are encouraged to Conference with Students to help them internalize the whole-class discussions.  |
| As the student becomes more proficient, the teacher gradually releases control, offering less assistance until the student has assumed independent, self-regulated ability to complete the learning task (Au, et al. 1995).  | Modeled Writing, Shared Writing, and Interactive Writing all give way to Independent Writing and Peer Reviews.  |
| Ultimately thought, which began on the social plane, is internalized and personalized in cognitive networks of words, ideas, and experiences. These have been learned and have meaning in the company of others. They are the stuff of experience out of which students write (Rosaen and Florio-Ruane 2008).  | In <b>LEAD21</b> students learn how to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose a Topic through Modeled Writing by the teacher.</li> <li>• Add to the topic through brainstorming and Shared Writing.</li> <li>• Write and Confer as they independently choose their own topics to write about. (See the Day 2 lesson structure.)</li> </ul>   |
| Texts under discussion often shaped talk and writing about them, not only in theme or topic, but in genre as well. (Florio-Ruane with deTar 2001; Raphael 2004)  | Students are encouraged to Talk About Text in <b>LEAD21</b> through a series of teacher-led questions. Students discuss the author's word choice, and the author's text structure as they learn the form and function of the genre. Also Book Corner encourages further discussion of texts read in the class.  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assume interest and competence on the part of the student writer.</li> <li>• Develop a relationship with the writer/ student, and work on literacy activities in meaningful contexts.</li> <li>• Share an interest with the writer's sense-making and problem-solving in the writing task at hand.</li> <li>• Follow the writers' lead as they assume the role of author.</li> <li>• Teach with a spirit of inquiry by capitalizing on errors and uncertainty as opportunities to learn more about and support the learning of the writer (Florio-Ruane 1991).</li> </ul> | Developing the teacher-student relationship as part of a writing community is demonstrated throughout the writing lessons in <b>LEAD21</b> during which students engage in the complete process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study and discuss the writing model that is part of the learning structure in <b>LEAD21</b> throughout the writing process from first draft to the final edit of their writing.</li> <li>• Make reading/writing connections to the text they are currently reading in the unit including vocabulary and comprehension skills.</li> <li>• Write and confer throughout the writing process with the teacher as well as their peers.</li> <li>• Reflect on their own writing with the use of Evaluation Rubrics.</li> <li>• Utilize grammar skills in their writing.</li> <li>• Use Peer Evaluations as well as Revising Checklists to revise their writing.</li> <li>• Use self-evaluation to improve their writing.</li> </ul> |

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## Author Biography

**Dr. Susan Florio-Ruane** is Professor of Teacher Education and served as a Senior Researcher in the MSU Institute for Research on Teaching from 1977–87. In that role she co-coordinated the Written Literacy Forum, a collaborative research project bringing together the insights of campus-based ethnographers and educational psychologists, with those of elementary and secondary school teachers of writing. During her time in the IRT, she also received funding from the National Institute of Education for a study of “Schooling and the Acquisition of Written Literacy.”

From 1987–1993, she coordinated the Learning Community Teacher Education Program where she pursued an active program of research on Learning to Teach Writing. Her paper entitled “The Social Organization of Classes and Schools” won the 1990 Division K Research in Teacher Education Award of the American Educational Research Association (AERA).

Dr. Florio-Ruane served as President of the Council on Anthropology and Education from 1994-96. She teaches ethnographic research methods and analysis of discourse at the doctoral level as well as masters and undergraduate-level courses in literacy education and has written widely about ethnographic and sociolinguistic research, literacy education, and the preparation of teachers. She was an External Evaluator of the federally-funded National Center for Research on Writing at University of California, Berkeley and Carnegie Mellon University, serves on the advisory board of the Teachers College Press Practitioner Inquiry Series, and was the principal investigator in a study of “Autobiographies of Education and Cultural Identity: Preparing Teachers to Support Literacy Learning in Diverse Classrooms.” funded by the Spencer Foundation.

She is currently a senior researcher at the Michigan State University Literacy Achievement Research Center (LARC), where she studies and teaches about effective literacy instruction in urban schools. She has won two awards from her university for outstanding teaching of both graduate and undergraduate students and is Co-Lead Editor of the *Journal of Literacy Research* published by the National Reading Conference.

Dr. Florio-Ruane has published in many books and journals including *The American Educational Research Journal*, *the Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, *the Elementary School Journal*, *the Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *Theory into Practice*, and *Research in the Teaching of English*, *The International Journal of Teaching and Teacher Education*, and *English Education*. Her book (with Julie deTar) entitled, *Conversation and Personal Narrative: Transforming Teacher Learning about Literacy and Culture* was published by Lawrence Erlbaum (2001) and received the Edward L. Frye Award from the National Reading Conference.

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