

Language and Writing Skills Acquisition for Multilingual Learners



Kevin P. Colleary, EdD

Adjunct Professor Graduate School of Education
Fordham University, New York

Researchers in a variety of disciplines agree that the capacity for excellent oral and written communication is one of the most important skills students need and that it is a key component for success in today's world (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2002; Bates, 2006; Morreale & Pearson, 2008). In a recent corporate survey of 1,000 business leaders from all over the globe, "leadership and communication were the top two skills seen as most critical for business success." (Hult / EF, 2021, p. 4). As the digital age grows and develops, writing has become increasingly more important. As Vacca et al. state, "Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history.

They will need advanced levels of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens and conduct their personal lives" (2021, p. 89). As teachers, we know how important excellent oral and written communication skills are for success in school. Writing is also critical to students' ability to express their understanding of content and concepts and to help teachers assess students' understanding of what they have learned. However, teaching writing continues to be a challenge for many teachers, especially for teachers of students who are multilingual learners (Moses & Mohamad, 2019).

Vista's English language and literacy development programs **Connect to Language, Literacy, and Content (Connect)** and **Bridges to Literature and Content (Bridges)** integrate research-based writing practices for multiple purposes, including writing to build writing stamina; writing to respond to text; writing to build writing skills; writing to inform, persuade, or narrate; and writing to learn the writing process.

Research has shown three concepts to be consistently helpful in successful writing instruction: 1) scaffolding instruction; 2) motivating student writing through content; and 3) using collaboration to create a community of writers.

"Teachers should keep in mind the powerful ways that scaffolding writing instruction, using strong content as motivators and supports for emerging student writers, and building a community of writers in their classroom can make a positive difference in every student's life and educational experience."

1) Scaffolding writing instruction

The benefits of helping students increase their writing skill capacity and fluidity with scaffolded support have been supported by research for many years (Cunningham & Allington, 2003; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Faraj, 2015; Spycher, 2017). Scaffolding helps students succeed by making the component whole a bit smaller and easier to digest. It can also allow students the time they need to figure out new and sometimes challenging ideas. In teaching writing, scaffolding is especially important, as the writing process is a complex and sometimes confusing one for many students—especially for those who are new to and still learning the basics of the English language.

Connect and **Bridges** are built around unit themes that each include a Big Idea and Essential Questions. In each unit, students build writing skills and learn strategies through purposeful scaffolding. For example, in “Connect to Writing,” students work through the writing process after developing rich content knowledge, building graphic organizers, and focusing on writing skills. Student models provide students with examples of what excellent writing might look like.

These models also give students examples to help them learn how to write in a variety of writing styles. Built-in process writing steps guide students to complete and present their writing assignments in a systematic, step-by-step way that helps break down and de-mystify the writing process.

Unit 1 Back to School

Some stories show events that happen in real life. Look at the picture. Can you tell a story about the picture?

- Who do you see?
- Where are they?
- What are they doing?
- What are they going to do next?

CONNECT TO THE THEME

CONNECT TO Writing

Realistic Fiction Write a Real-Life Story

Remember, realistic fiction has:

- characters that are like real people
- events that can happen in real life
- settings that are real
- dialogue that sounds like a real conversation

Write a story about a new student. Make your characters, the events, and the setting realistic. Use dialogue for what the characters say.

WRITING STRATEGY Organize a Story

Think of the beginning, middle, and end of your story. What happens at the beginning? What happens in the middle? What happens at the end?

Plan

- Use a graphic organizer to plan your realistic fiction story.

Draft

- Use your ideas to write a draft. Include:
 - characters that seem real
 - events that could happen in real life
 - a setting that seems real
 - dialogue that seems real

Revise

- Use the revision checklist to review your draft.
- Exchange drafts with a classmate. Give each other suggestions for making your drafts better.
- Revise your draft.

Edit

- Use the editing checklist.

Student Model

First Day of School by Rosa Montez

Elena is a new student at school. The teacher is Ms. Lee. The teacher says, "Hi, Elena. Welcome to my classroom." The girl next to Elena smiles. The girl says, "Hi, Elena. I'm your buddy. It's nice to see you here. Let's go to the playground."

Elena is excited. They play on the swings. They bring food and drink. Elena can't find her backpack. She looks for it. She finds it under a tree. At the end of the day, it's time to go home. Elena sees her mom on the playground. Elena says, "It was a great first day of school. Mom," her mom replies. They walk home.

Revision Checklist

- I use a main character and supporting characters.
- My story includes a beginning, middle, and end.
- My story includes dialogue.

Editing Checklist

- I use parentheses of location correctly.
- I use correct spelling, especially for any homophones.
- I use pronouns correctly.
- I use punctuation for dialogue correctly.

Connect 3, Unit 1

Unit 1 Discovering Your ROOTS

BRIDGES TO WRITING

Personal Narrative (WRITING THAT REFLECTS YOU)

Good writing always begins with an idea. A personal narrative begins with an idea about you.

CHOOSE A PROMPT

- Write about an event that changed you.
- Write about a person who made a difference in your life.

BE SURE TO

- engage the reader with a hook
- focus on your central idea
- include evidence to support your central idea
- write your personal narrative in the simple past tense
- revise and edit your work

WRITING STRATEGY

Write a Hook. A personal narrative tells a story that only the writer can tell. The first sentence you write gets the reader interested. This is called the hook.

Student Model

Cafeteria Lessons by Amanda Estrada

Can a cafeteria teach you a lesson about your ancestry? My cafeteria did! At lunchtime, on the first day of school, I walked into the cafeteria. I heard the noise of forks and knives. I tried to pull up a chair next to someone I recognized. The chair didn't move. The legs were attached to the floor. They held my legs. When I stood I felt I stood on top of a pile of girls eating sandwiches.

I didn't speak to my homeroom teacher. They talked to me. They got food sandwiches. I... did different work by herself. Suddenly, a new girl, Ana, sat into the seat next to me. She started speaking Spanish right away. She sounded like a model! She pointed to her straps and placed it... next to my straws. She asked...

...then we talked about our grandmothers and food. We talked about Spanish music we both liked. I mentioned my little brother does not speak Spanish. I told her, "I have to translate in my own house!" She laughed about it.

"I have to translate at the doctor's office!" she said. I know what she meant. But I was glad... to be able to speak two languages. I smiled my grandmother had passed down something... special language through a new friend.

PLAN

Use a supporting evidence organizer to plan your personal narrative.

DRAFT

Use the ideas in your supporting evidence organizer to write a draft of your personal narrative. Make sure your draft includes:

- hook
- central idea with supporting ideas
- the past tense

REVISE

Use the revision checklist to review your draft.

- Use the revision checklist to review your draft.
- Exchange drafts with a classmate.
- Give each other suggestions for making your drafts better.

EDIT

Use the editing checklist to edit your draft.

Revision Checklist

- I draw the reader in with a hook.
- All of my ideas support the central idea.
- I use the simple past tense.
- I use regular and irregular past tense verbs.

Editing Checklist

- I use a capital letter to start each sentence.
- I use correct punctuation. (,)
- I check my spelling in a print or online dictionary.

Bridges B, Unit 1

2) Using engaging content to support writing instruction

In recent years, reading scholars and researchers have argued that solid content instruction in the elementary grades should not be ignored. Some suggest that it can actually help increase reading proficiency (Pondiscio, 2014; Shanahan, 2020; Hwang et al., 2022). Research has shown that students who are exposed to thoughtful, progressive, grade-level-appropriate content instruction show greater gains in vocabulary, comprehension, and writing. (Snow, 2005).

Some have argued that student achievement gains have also been seen on standardized tests when, for example, more social studies content is taught. (Tyner & Kabourek, 2020). English learners can be especially positively impacted (August & Shanahan, 2006; Fisher et al., 2008; Proctor, et al, 2011; Baker, et al., 2014). Weaving content and writing instruction together has also been argued as a method for improving student capacity in both understanding content and in writing. (Hochman & Wexler, 2017).

In Vista's **Connect** and **Bridges** programs, a consistent pattern of units built on engaging and motivating content helps students build knowledge. These engaging science and social studies topics present students with a wide variety of interesting, student-focused content about which to practice their academic writing. Students learn speaking and writing strategies through meaningful content and apply the content to their ELA practice, thus marrying the goals of ELA success, writing, and content learning. Authentic texts and content-driven lessons are offered through print and digital resources to build capacity and address the proficiency needs of each student.

Connect 3, Unit 1

Bridges B, Unit 1

3) Motivating student writing through content

No one should go it alone. Students learning to write need support and challenge from peers and teachers. They also need to understand writing as a public act—writing meant not only for themselves, but also for their readers. Much research on writing in a variety of settings, both domestic and international, has shown the practical benefits of collaboration on student achievement and fluency in writing (Foley & Thompson, 2003; Lowry et al., 2004; Yong, 2011, Talib & Cheung, 2017; Storch, 2019). Group writing and project-based writing can have a positive effect on students’ writing capacity across the grades. As recommended in “Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers” (Graham, et al., 2018), teachers should “create an engaged community of writers” by using these steps:

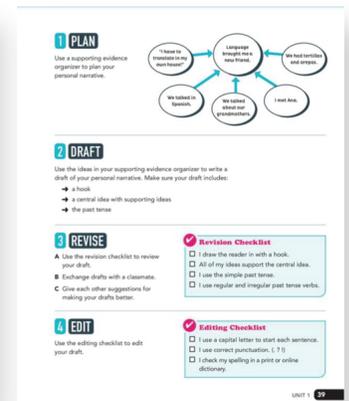
1. Be a model to students and participate in the community by writing and sharing their own writing.
2. Give students writing choices.
3. Encourage students to collaborate as writers.
4. Provide students with opportunities to give and receive feedback throughout the writing process.
5. Publish students’ writing and extend the community beyond the classroom. (p. 34)

Vista begins this writing practice with encoding and writing at a granular level in their K–12 newcomer program, **Get Ready!** This progresses to forming more complex sentences and building longer pieces in K–6 **Connect** and then practice at higher levels in 6–8 **Bridges**.

In all Vista ELD programs, students and teachers have access to a variety of tools to help build a community of learners and a community of writers, which is especially important as students learn the writing process. Scaffolds both within and throughout the programs include both teacher and student modeling, while explicit writing instruction gives students opportunities to practice their oral and writing skills through communication. For example, students can record their answers, listen to playback, and then connect them to writing. This type of practice ensures that students who are taking extra steps to translate have the scaffold they need to transfer thoughts into writing.



Get Ready 6-8, Unit 1



Connect 3, Unidad 1.

Students develop both Tier II and academic vocabulary as they move through a thematic unit and then use these new terms to develop writing skills. An example of modeling and thought/writing development in **Bridges** is a new feature called “Book Club.” Book Club encourages students to build a community around a shared reading and then express their own ideas about the text, using both oral language and their writing skills. Students use these opportunities to learn and apply new tools and then to practice their writing skills. Interactive tutorials and video virtual chats found on the program’s digital media site are another way that students see how a community of peers can support their writing capacities and make them more comfortable about writing in school and beyond.

Building strong, confident writers is a goal we share for all our students—especially those learning English. While the work can be challenging, every teacher needs supports like those found in Vista’s high-quality materials. Teachers should keep in mind the powerful ways that scaffolding writing instruction, using strong content as motivators and supports for emerging student writers, and building a community of writers in their classroom can make a positive difference in every student’s life and educational experience.

Dr. Kevin Colleary is an adjunct professor at Fordham University’s Graduate School of Education in New York. His research and publications focus on social studies education, knowledge curricula, content area reading, critical thinking, digital literacy, second-language learners, diversity issues, best practices in teaching and learning, and helping teachers understand how to develop content-driven literacy instruction at all grades. Dr. Colleary’s most recent publication is *Ensuring a Better Future: Why Social Studies Matters*, published by Gibbs-Smith Education. He has authored numerous chapters in a wide variety of educational texts and has been published in a variety of professional journals. Dr. Colleary received his BA in history from Siena College, Albany NY. He also earned both his master’s and doctorate in education from Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

BOOK CLUB
Honoring Our Ancestors

These stories share a central idea, which is...

You can find supporting evidence in each text. For example, in the memoir...

18 UNIT 1

Book Club Discussion

A Discuss the questions. Use the word box or your own ideas.

1. What did the artists learn from their ancestors?
2. How do they show this in their paintings?
3. How do they show this in their memoirs?
4. What do the artists have in common?

Words to Use

reading	Helén Zughaib
education	Nancy Horn
pioneers	Stephen Van Mason
strength	Maya Christina Gonzalez
connection to nature	George Crespo
support and love	Enrique Chagoya

B Answer.

1. Describe the collection *Honoring Our Ancestors*.
2. Choose a memoir to recommend. Describe the memoir and tell why you recommend it.

C Making connections

1. Which artist's story did you like the most, and why?
2. Which artist is most similar to you, and why?
3. Which painting did you like the best, and why?

D Choose one of your ancestors. Write about how you are similar to this person. Use two pieces of evidence to support your answer.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

RECOMMEND (verb)
DEFINITION to say that something is good!
EXAMPLE I recommend the documentary film series *Blue Planet*. It's amazing!
WORD FORMS recommended, recommending, recommendation

DISCUSSION STARTERS

This book is called *Honoring Our Ancestors*. It is a collection of ...
In this collection, I recommend reading ... because ...

19 UNIT 1

VISTATM EDUCATION

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