# A Scaffolded Approach to Learning to Write

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Ten K–5 teachers in an urban district with students of a variety of linguistic background organized a collaborative study of inquiry-based practices during one academic year. The teachers, a college professor, and a graduate student met weekly for two months in the fall with the goal of learning more about the language and writing of students learning English. Through discussions of students' work in the context of second language acquisition theory, the teachers gained knowledge and awareness of language and literacy development of bilingual learners.[1] The school is very multilingual, but the instruction is all in English. Having no specialized staff to work with bilingual learners, the teachers, supported by the principal and in partnership with a university, set out to better prepare themselves to work with bilingual learners. Analysis of students' work was followed by six weeks of discussion about practices that would help these students' writing development. Several approaches were discussed and chosen for implementation. One of them, the rhetorical approach, is addressed in detail in this chapter. This approach walks students through the process of planning and executing writing, developing good habits, and improving their products.

The decision to use the rhetorical approach emerged from teachers noticing that the students' writing exhibited similar characteristics. Across the grades, students tended to write *bed-to-bed* stories in which they strung together a list of phrases or simple sentences joined by *then* or *and*. One Vietnamese first grader wrote,

> One morning I woke up and went to brush my tetth and I went outside and, I went in the car my mom stared to Drive.

The story from a fourth-grade Nepali student showed a similar pattern:

> The first day I lots of work. I ate lunch. ran to play socer outside Then I was tired enugh. Again I went to study. I studied Social Studies, Maths, Nepali, grammer, English and helth ed It was time to have snacks. I ate my snacks. Then I went to class. It was free time. I did my home work.

The students' writing was mostly lists of undeveloped events composed primarily as simple statements. Topic development, which had been among the concerns teachers brought to their meetings, was minimal. Teachers began examining bilingual learners' writing samples assisted by a rubric that included writing traits as well as language features. Consequently, teachers' conversations turned to how issues of language were impacting writing traits, including not only topic development but also voice.

## Oral-Like to Written-Like Language

One common pattern across the grades was students writing short paragraphs that mimicked their oral language. As elementary educators, the teachers were very aware that emergent writers typically write as they speak. However, by looking across grades, teachers realized that few K–5 students were moving away from more oral-like forms and into more written-like forms (Gibbons, 2002). Admittedly, at any K–5 grade there could be bilingual learners who ranged in their English language development from preproduction to early fluency, due to their varying lengths of time learning English. However, even bilingual learners with more developed oral language appeared to produce writing with more oral-like characteristics. Sentences tended to be short, ideas or words were repeated, and sentences were chained together by key words. One Spanish fourth grader strung sentences together with *so*, which echoed his speech patterns:

So we play evey day on the bus. I bering toy's so we can play we have the best time! So I bering 3 action figer's. We mack a lot of nose (underlined for emphasis).

Another common oral pattern was repetition, such as in the writing of one third-grade Chinese student:

then we was home taking a bath for bed but until bed we play a little bit while when the sun came down I went to bed at 9:00 p.m. with all my family went to bed until morning we went back to school (underlined for emphasis)

Even at the fifth-grade level, teachers noticed bilingual learners relying on oral language in their writing. These students tended to incorporate into their writing: a relatively small range of vocabulary; a more typical subject-verb-object pattern; and relatively fewer dependent clauses and embedded phrases. Evidence of oral language was not the only feature that teachers noticed across grades.

### Rosa's Writing and Language: From First Days to Grandma's House

In addition to oral-language patterns, teachers considered language involving text structure, sentence grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. The writing sample of one Guatemalan girl, Rosa, from Liz's fourth-grade class offers examples of both writing and language issues.[2]

### Rosa's Writing Sample #1

My first day in 1st grade was really scary especially if I did not know any English. When I first got in my class I felt scared and strange because I only knew some English words and I did not have any friends. My teacher was Mrs. C…she was very nice. When we staterd to do work I tried to understand but I just understanded a little bit. By that time my mom was gone and I felt really sad but I remembered the words that my mother said to me and those words were "don't be afraid you could do it" and that

was what I did. When we went to lunch I already knew a girl that talk Spanish and English so she helped me. That was the only girl I knew and to be honest she was kind of a troublemaker so I had to stay away from her because I did not wanted to get in trouble. By the end of the day I was not that scare. I wanted to tell my whole family of the experience I have just past which was scary and kind of fun.

Aspects of writing in Rosa's sample that teachers discussed included conventions, such as capitalization and punctuation, as well as writing traits, such as voice. Teachers agreed that Rosa's voice did not uniquely surface in this writing sample. In fact, the passage reminded them of similar recounts by other students. Rosa's unique voice was not evident in descriptive phrases that helped readers experience sadness at her mother's leaving. Rosa's sentences were all statements, including her inclusion of her mother's dialogue. As one participant in the teacher group realized, voice was influenced by Rosa's limited knowledge of descriptive vocabulary, including adjectives, adverbs, and descriptive phrases that would have allowed her to make her sadness of her mother leaving more evident.

Teachers also analyzed other aspects of language that surfaced in writing, seeing them as evidence of bilingual learners' attempting new text structures, sentence grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. For example, in terms of text structure, Rosa wrote one extended paragraph in which she narrated her experience but without developing aspects of her day into paragraphs. As many bilingual learners, she struggled with the past tense marker ed when she wrote "understanded," "did not wanted," "was not that scare" (scared), and "got past" (passed). The cohesion of her writing was impacted by her understanding of connecting words, such as when she wrote "especially if" instead of "especially because." Her verb choices showed transfer from Spanish, her native language, as when she wrote "talk Spanish" instead of "speak Spanish." Teachers also highlighted what language Rosa could manipulate. For example, she attempted complex sentences, usually beginning with when. Through eight weeks of collaborative inquiry, teachers analyzed the language ability and challenges of students representing such native languages as Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Russian, Haitian Creole, Khmer, Albanian, Nepali, and French.

### From Inquiry to Practice: The Rhetorical Approach

This analysis and discussion of language samples led to implementation of instructional approaches that could support these students. Liz chose to implement the rhetorical approach (Brisk & Harrington, 2000; de Alvarado, 1984). This approach helps students plan for writing focusing on the context and content of the text. Before engaging in actual writing, students decide on the audience and purpose for writing. They explore the selected topic from whole to parts. Given the purpose, audience, and content, they choose the most suitable type of text, be it a letter, book, or story. With this information in mind, students draft, revise, edit, and publish their texts.

*Improvement through the Rhetorical Approach*

Several months later, Rosa wrote the following description of her favorite place.

*Rosa's Writing Sample #2*

I have a lot of favorite places. But one gets most of my attention. That place is my grandma's house. This is my favorite place because when I go there I feel cozy and safe also I get a lot of attention and last but not least I get love. This is my favorite place.

One reason I chose my grandma's house as my favorite place was because I feel cozy and safe there. I like feeling cozy and safe because when you feel that, you feel more comfortable and you also feel relaxed every single moment. This is one thing I really like about my grandma's house. This is why I chose my grandma's house as my favorite place.

Another reason I chose my grandma's house as my favorite place is because I get a lot of attention there. I like that because I feel very important and I like that. Also, I feel special and that makes me feel happy. This is one thing I loves about my grandma's house.

Last but not least the last reason I chose my grandma's house as my favorite place is because I get love there. That's one thing I love about my grandma's house. I like it because I love to be n a place were people love me and care about me. This I think is the most important reason of why I chose my grandmother's house as my favorite place.

For all this reasons is why I chose my grandma's house as my favorite place. My grandma's house rules, it makes my life fullfil every time I go there. This house is the best. This is my favorite place.

Rosa developed ideas into paragraphs with topic sentences. She chose more descriptive words, such as *cozy, safe, comfortable, relaxed, attention,* and *fullfil.* She increased her range of connectors: *but, because, one reason, another reason, also, last but not least,* and *for all this reasons.* Her voice surfaced in sentences such as, "My grandma's house rules, it makes my life fullfil every time I go there." Not only did her voice begin to surface, but topic development also expanded. She still had some grammatical morpheme problems as when she wrote "fulfil" instead of "fulfilled." These are very difficult aspects of language to acquire (Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004). What happened between Rosa's first writing sample and this one?

## Implementation of the Rhetorical Approach

The rhetorical approach is one instructional strategy that supports the writing process (Brisk & Harrington, 2000; de Alvarado, 1984). There are eight general steps in the rhetorical approach: (1) explore a general topic; (2) define the purpose and audience; (3) select subtopics; (4) select the genre and appropriate organizational structure; (5) select information; (6) order examples and details, then write a draft; (7) revise and edit; and (8) prepare a final copy. Liz incorporated the rhetorical approach into a social studies unit on immigration. Although she implemented the eight steps, she occasionally interjected additional sidesteps to respond to students' needs. These sidesteps reinforced the effectiveness of the rhetorical approach, as Liz continually allowed students' needs to influence her instruction (Figure 2.1).

## Liz and Rosa's Fourth-Grade Classroom

As part of a large urban school district, many of Liz's students were immigrants from such countries as Vietnam, Ghana, Puerto Rico, Colombia, China, and Guatemala. They brought with them different personal and conceptual understandings of immigration, different educational experiences, and different literacy development in their varying heritage languages and in English. They also brought different knowledge of language and literacy. To maximize these bilingual learners' range of language development, Liz increased opportunities to develop their English not only during reading instruction but also during content-area instruction. By integrating writing into her social studies unit, Liz aimed to develop students' content knowledge as well as academic language (Cummins, 2003).

Liz achieved these goals through infusing her social studies unit on immigration with opportunities for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For example, to help students
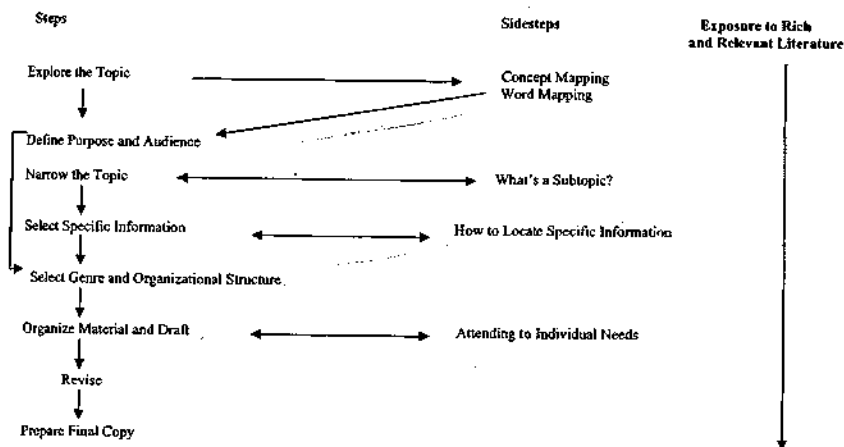
Steps                                          Sidesteps                    Exposure to Rich
                                                                            and Relevant Literature

Explore the Topic ──────────────────────────►  Concept Mapping
                                               Word Mapping
      │                              ◄─────
      ▼                         
Define Purpose and Audience

Narrow the Topic ◄──────────────────────────►  What's a Subtopic?
      │
      ▼
Select Specific Information   ◄──────────────► How to Locate Specific Information
      │
      ▼
Select Genre and Organizational Structure

Organize Material and Draft ◄───────────────► Attending to Individual Needs
      │
      ▼
Revise
      │
      ▼
Prepare Final Copy

**Figure 2.1** Implementation of the rhetorical approach in a fourth-grade classroom

understand immigration historically, Liz enriched the unit with a read aloud of books such as *Letters from Rifka*, a chapter book about a young Eastern European girl immigrating to America at the turn of the 20th century. Read alouds of more challenging texts also exposed students to vocabulary and dialogue that they might not have encountered in their independent reading. Liz incorporated writing into her unit to help students synthesize and convey their overall understanding of immigration. By structuring this writing through the rhetorical approach, she hoped to develop writing and target language needs.

*Step 1: Explore a General Topic*
The rhetorical approach begins with students' freewriting about a general topic, as a way of activating background knowledge. Sometimes, students are given complete autonomy in topic selection. Other times, the teacher may purposefully direct students to achieve content area goals. Sometimes, this process occurs as a whole class through shared writing. Other times, students freewrite individually.

Liz intentionally focused students on the general topic of immigration to support social studies content. She began the process with a whole-class discussion to reinforce the oral language of students learning English. Then, her fourth graders freewrote individually in their writing journals. This could also have been done in reverse order, with students freewriting first and then discussing orally either in groups or whole class.

During this freewriting, Liz's students were midway through their unit, which covered immigration from the turn of the 20th century to present. Because students had been hearing, reading, and using the term *immigration*, they had developed partial understandings of this concept (Allen, 1999). However, based on their freewriting, Liz noticed significant conceptual gaps for many students. Consequently, she adapted her instruction before proceeding to the next step of the rhetorical approach.

Sidestep 1: Concept and Word Mapping
In response to student needs, Liz led the class through developing a concept map in which they discussed not only what the concept of immigration is but also what it is not. These maps could have been individually created by students; however, Liz realized that her students' ideas would be challenged and expanded through a whole-class discussion. This also provided another opportunity to scaffold language for bilingual learners through

building oral language. Liz began with an open-ended question, "What do you think the word *immigration* means?" She then facilitated the discussion through asking students' opinions and by summarizing students' ideas. In the following excerpt from this discussion, students' reveal their developing understandings, as they respond to ideas expressed by their peers.

Terrence: I think it means people that are basically just travelers. People that travel.

Giselle: People that move to a new country or new place that are immigrating it.

Deji: I think it means brought into other countries like terrorists. Never been in country before.

Anna: People want to go to a place. ... If somebody had to go do something new and try something new, like a different kind of group or religion.

Giselle: I think it means leaving your homeland to have a better life in another country.

Terrence: ... What I'm mostly noticing is people going places. People going from one place to another place.

Jennifer: ... It's not when you move from place to place. It's not always immigration because Laura [a classmate] is going to move in three weeks, and she's not going to immigrate.

Liz: What do you think? She says immigration is moving place to place, but others say just because you're moving does not mean you're immigrating.

Giselle: I think if you're moving to another country, then it's immigration, but not if you're going from state to state.

Liz: So moving from country to country is immigration but not state to state?

Jalissa: I think immigrating is like moving from one country to another, but you can also immigrate your own way, like I'm immigrating to Florida...I'm moving to a place not far from here. And I'm going to live somewhere else.

Liz: So what do you guys think? Is Jalissa going to be an immigrant? Is she immigrating to a new place?

Terrence: Depends where you're moving to. Say you're moving where you never been before, and say it's warm not cold. That's kind of like immigrating.

Anna: Not necessarily. Depends on how far you go and how many new things you have to do.

Jalissa: Well, I have been there before. I have been to where I'm gonna live. And I have done lots of things there in the summer, so I would not say I would be an immigrant.

Although Giselle managed to define *immigration*, a number of other students offered different ideas. A common theme in this discussion involved movement. The specific types of movement expressed by individual students reflected personal experiences, either theirs or those of friends. This discussion revealed that students' conceptual understanding was interpreted through their personal experiences. This discussion did not close with a unanimous definition of immigration. However, Liz challenged students in future discussions to continue exploring this concept—what immigration is as well as what it is not. She also encouraged students in making connections between their own lives and those of immigrants they studied in books.

In the following class, students developed a word family map, as shown in Figure 2.2. The purpose of this word family map was to uncover and reinforce root words and morphemes that would help students linguistically unlock the meaning of future words
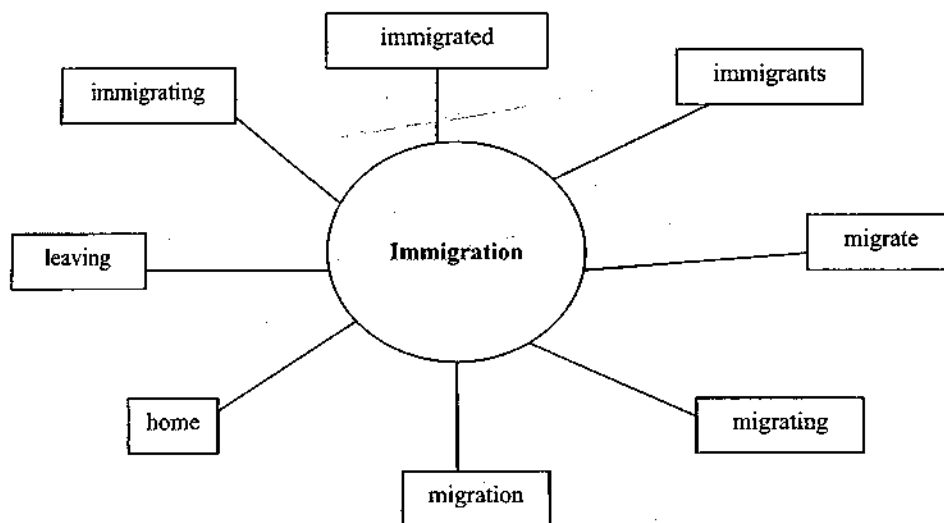
Figure 2.2 Word family map

they encountered. As students shared ideas, other word forms arose, such as *immigrant, immigrating, migrate,* and *immigrated.* One student shared her awareness of language with others when she commented,

> I have two things to say. One is you're using suffixes. When I think of suffixes, seeing up there -ing or -ed. I'm seeing those suffixes because mostly that's what we can come up with and that's the main word...I was also going to say, what does migrate have to do with immigrate? I'm not saying it's wrong, but what's it have to do with it?

This led students to discussing bird migration, which included developing word associations, such as,

> Migrate is a piece of the family because it's a same word but a different personality sort of ... different ways of doing it. Like animals instead of people. But immigrate is with people.

While Liz facilitated these student discussions, she also interjected new information, such as describing migrant workers, whose lives would be represented in a future read aloud exercise of *Amelia's Road* (1995). The word map created an opportunity to clarify how these words are used within the context of sentences.

After making and discussing the word family map, students opened their writer's notebooks to write their own sentences containing these words. Volunteers shared some of their sentences:

- We are studying immigration in social studies.
- Rosa immigrated to the United States of America from Colombia.
- Today, you will be immigrating to America.
- I have seen a bird who migrates everywhere.
- I immigrated to America by boat.

Occasionally, Liz drew students' attention to morphemes by asking such open-ended questions as, "What did that *-ed* do to that word?" To which a student explained, "Turned it into the past tense." These word analyses were important for all students, but especially

for bilingual learners who were developing not only concepts but also the word knowledge needed to manipulate language.

Following the concept mapping and word family mapping, Liz returned students to step 2 in the rhetorical approach, which addresses purpose and audience.

### Step 2: Define Purpose and Audience

Writers usually consider why they write to a certain audience, as this shapes their written message. Bilingual learners experience an additional challenge. Different cultures have different reasons for writing and different styles depending on audience. Bilingual learners need to be made aware of these differences.

In step two of the rhetorical approach, students discuss both purpose and audience. Instead of assigning an audience or assuming the students were writing primarily to the teacher, Liz allowed her fourth graders to discuss possible people who might want to read what they would write about immigration. After jointly compiling possibilities, the students voted. An overwhelming majority of the class chose Mr. Sullivan, a former student teacher who had been in the class when they began the immigration unit. They wanted "to show him how much we've learned since he left" and "to show him how much progress we made since he teached us since September." Choosing a real audience helped students personalize their purpose for writing. Liz found that many of the students, especially bilingual learners, struggled with finding the words to express their thoughts. With a specific audience, she could push them to clarify their thoughts through prompts, such as "What would Mr. Sullivan want to know you've learned about immigration?"

The class had previously learned that whom they write to impacts how they write. For example, they had discussed letter writing to friends, when they would often assume that the other person would know what they are saying and they can use an informal language register to share their thoughts and feelings. Because the students' purpose was to show Mr. Sullivan what they had learned about an academic topic, Liz pushed them to use more formal, academic language. Instead of narrating or persuading, their primary purpose was informing Mr. Sullivan about certain concepts, events, and history. Having purpose and audience in mind helped later on when they chose the format of the book they wanted to produce. They wanted something nice and impressive.

What specifically would they write about? What was the most appropriate way to present information, given their goal was to demonstrate what they had learned? These questions were addressed in the next two steps of the rhetorical approach in which the students first narrow the topic vertically and then horizontally.

### Step 3: Narrow the Topic

After determining the purpose and audience, students narrow the topic by exploring possible subtopics. Brisk and Harrington (2000) refers to this as *narrowing the topic vertically*, or determining the level of generalization. When talking to her class, Liz referred to this as identifying subtopics. Before guiding students in developing subtopics about immigration, she modeled developing subtopics for two familiar topics. First, she offered an example related to science content they had finished studying. Liz explained, "Birds is a topic. Under birds there can be many subtopics. I know this from reading we've done about birds and writing I've done about birds, so one subtopic about birds might be *feathers*. Another subtopic of birds might be *flying*." Students offered two more subtopics: beaks and habitats. While reiterating the general topic of birds and potential subtopics, the teacher looked for

evidence of student understanding and realized another example was needed. For the second example, she chose the Super Bowl, a recent event that had been of great interest to the majority of the class. Students suggested such subtopics as football field, interceptions, singing the national anthem, and teams. These suggestions made Liz aware that the concept of a subtopic was still not clear to most students.

### Sidestep 2: What's a Subtopic?

Liz devoted an additional lesson to developing the concept of subtopics through a variety of nonfiction literature as models. First, she showed students a book about bugs that included explicit topics and subtopics, building the connection between reading and writing. At the same time, she asked questions, such as "Based on this title, what do you think the following writing will be about?" During this mini-lesson, she modeled how to create a web with *bugs* written in the middle as the topic and subtopics added as she identified them. In the following excerpt of her mini-lesson, she builds on what the students do know to push them forward in their ability to identify subtopics.

Liz: I wanted to figure out what were the subtopics of this book. So what do you think I had to do to figure it out?

Wee: Read the back.

Jalissa: Read the table of contents.

Liz: The back of book didn't help me in this case. I did look at the table of contents, but guess what? There isn't any in this nonfiction book. So I went ahead and read the book and realized it probably could have had a table of contents. And the first chapter would have been titled introduction because the first page tells me about all types of bugs and what makes a bug a bug or an insect an insect. And as I read on, I realized the second chapter could have been titled ants. Because under this topic of bugs, there was a subtopic of ants. Then I read on more, and I realized that this subtopic was all about dragonflies. So now I'm noticing that I have some kind of chapters here, and they're subtopics of the big topic bugs. Sometimes authors organize them into chapters and put in a table of contents to tell you. But sometimes they don't. But if you're a good reader, you can figure it out even if there is no table of contents.

Following this example, Liz grouped students in pairs, according to common reading levels, and gave them preassigned nonfiction books. As partners, students read the books and then created either a web or bulleted list of the main topic and subtopics. Some of the nonfiction books had titles and subtitles for students needing that explicit guidance. Other students had books that required them to identify the subtopics without having subtitles as clues. Pre-selecting the books took into account different student needs for support during the process. At the end of this partner work, the students reported back to class so that everyone could benefit from a variety of examples.

One pair had read a book on whales and identified subtopics of *how whales breathe* and *singing whales*. Two other students read a book on reptiles with *crocodilians* and *snakes* as subtopics. Another pair read a book on extreme sports with subtopics such as *freestyle motorcross* and *base jumping*. When the class came back together to share the work that they had done in pairs, students appeared to have a better understanding of subtopics.

| Leaving the Homeland | The Journey | Settling in a New Place |
|---|---|---|
| -Diseases<br><br>-Reasons for leaving<br>　• Poverty<br>　• War<br>　• Family<br>　• Discrimination<br>　• Natural disasters<br>　• Famine | -Diseases<br><br>-Ellis Island<br>　• stairway of separation<br>　• examination<br>　• baggage room<br><br>-Steerage<br><br>-How long did it take?<br><br>-Inside the boat<br><br>-Traveling on the ocean<br><br>-Meeting people on the boat<br><br>-Buying tickets<br>　• different classes | -Meeting people<br><br>-Finding jobs<br><br>-Where did immigrants go?<br><br>-Getting a disease in the new place<br><br>-Homes<br><br>-Schools |

Figure 2.3 Immigration subtopics

*Back to Step 3 in the Rhetorical Approach*

When students returned to step 3 of the rhetorical approach, they were ready to explore subtopics about immigration. Although they exhibited a better understanding of subtopics, Liz scaffolded this process by reminding the class that she had sequenced their immigration unit by presenting the reasons people left their homeland, the journey, and life in America. Next, through a whole-class discussion students developed three major subtopics: leaving the homeland, the journey, and settling in a new place. Liz drew three columns on the board with these headings. The students reexamined their original brainstorming of subtopics, adding any new ideas. As students wrote, Liz circulated the room, scaffolding for some students who seemed stuck by prompting them with questions about the books on immigration that they had read. When the students came back together to share as a group Liz encouraged them to think about what category their subtopic might fall under. For example, steerage would be categorized under the major subtopic of the journey. As students shared their subtopics, Liz would write each one down on a note card and then ask the students to place it in the appropriate column. While categorizing subtopics, students realized that some fell under more than one category. For example, they realized that diseases could be a subtopic of both leaving the homeland and the journey. At the conclusion of the share, the students had categorized all of the subtopics they had currently brainstormed (Figure 2.3).

　　This activity of categorizing the subtopics was important in organizing the sequence of the class book. It was also a constructive way for students to understand the concept of categorizing. While engaged in the exercise, Liz would write the categorized term on the

board while repeatedly defining the word in multiple ways. For example, she would say, "We are categorizing these subtopics," "We are putting these subtopics where they belong," and "We are placing the subtopics in a category with other subtopics that have something in common." Similar to the word family map that the class created with the word immigration, Liz introduced different forms of the word *categorizing* while teaching, such as *category, categorize, categorized,* and *categories.* She always wrote the word on the board, an essential support for second-language learners whose letter-sound discrimination may not yet be proficient and who benefit from the dual input of receiving information in both oral and written forms. It is also important for second-language learners to see the word to reinforce their visually noticing morphemes that are added to or taken from words.

### Step 4: Select Information

During the fourth step of the rhetorical approach, students chose the specific information to be covered within each subtopic. Liz had students working on different subtopics of their choosing. Some students worked independently, others in partners, others in triads. Liz encouraged heterogeneous groups in which a second-language learner was paired with a native speaker of English. This provided an authentic context for dialoging and writing about academic topics by using more academic language. This also provided a supportive environment in which emerging speakers of English could take linguistic risks.

Next, Liz provided students with a collection of books and news articles that she had compiled on this topic. She asked students to use their knowledge of tables of contents and glossaries to find out which books would be beneficial in researching their particular topics. During this process, Liz reinforced text structures that reflect expository text, such as tables of contents, glossaries, subtitles, charts, and captions. Liz realized during the process that many of the students were having difficulty locating and synthesizing specific information. As a result, she decided to spend some additional time instructing students on how to conduct research.

### Sidestep 3: How to Locate Specific Information

The class had been posing questions about immigration and then reading information to find answers to their questions. This format mirrored that of a nonfiction book, *If Your Name Were Changed at Ellis Island* (1994), which they had been reading together as a class. Chapters of this book posed a question, such as "Why did people leave their homeland?" The following text addressed that question. In a similar format, students turned their subtopics into questions. For bilingual learners, learning to create questions was an essential part of developing sentence grammar in English. Some students needed support formulating a question, but the majority of the class were able to easily transpose their topics into questions. Once the class had their questions written, Liz suggested they try locating information to answer their questions. She modeled this process through asking, "Why did Na leave her homeland?" in reference to a special edition of a local newspaper on immigration. As a think aloud, Liz found answers in the article while taking bulleted notes on chart paper. Students then began this process with their chosen subtopics.

### Step 5: Select Genre and Organizational Structure

The next step was to select the genre and appropriate organizational structure, given the students' defined purposes, topic, and audience. The students' purpose was to inform, so they chose an expository text form. Influenced by a science book they had been reading

on turtles, they decided to write one class book that included writing by all the students on various subtopics. They could present this book to Mr. Sullivan during their publishing party to show him what they had learned. This text structure required elements of expository text, such as titles, subtitles, glossaries, and a table of contents.

### Step 6: Organize Material and Draft

Next, the class discussed how the subtopics should be sequenced. Liz challenged them by asking these questions: "Does this belong here?" and "Would this make more sense later on?" Through this process, students decided which subtopics fit into which categories as well as the order within categories. For example, they decided that in the journey section of the book the topic of buying tickets should come before Ellis Island.

Because they had been working on paragraphing, when they set out to write, they were reminded to include such things as topic and closing sentence. They each wrote at least one paragraph. During this time, Liz conferenced with individual students. She assisted them in filling in any additional information they had overlooked in their initial research and first draft. She also helped students move their notes to paragraphs.

Some students, who were working in groups, further subdivided their topics into smaller categories of information, with each student responsible for writing a different aspect of the overall section. Other students, working together, chose to coauthor their entire section, sitting side by side as they talked through all the content and word choices. Other students worked alone, producing drafts, such as the following.

"Examination"

Examinations was the first stage people went through to Ellis Island. Some where allowed to enter the United Stats right away. And because they did not have diseaes. If they did have diseaes they would be detained that means that they hat to stay until they were healthy. Some people did not stay at Ellis Ilond because of the diseaes they had. And they had to go back to were they came from. But if you didn't have a diseaes you would go to America.

### Sidestep 4: Attending to Bilingual Learners' Individual Needs

While conferencing with two more recent arrivals, Liz discovered that they were having difficulty producing writing based on research. Knowing that they both had direct experiences with immigration, Liz suggested that they change their subtopic to *personal stories of immigration*. Their research became interviews with immigrants. Although both students were immigrants, they opted to write about a family member's experience with immigration rather than to share their own. One of the students, Aldo, chose to interview his father, who had emigrated from Africa. The other student, Cecilia, decided to interview her brother, who had left his homeland in South America with his family just a few years earlier. Prior to conducting their interviews, Aldo and Cecilia prepared questions encompassing the class' subtopics: leaving the homeland, the journey, and settling in a new place. Aldo and Cecilia worked together drafting and revising their work. Their final product, titled "Recent Immigrants," was inserted at the end of the class book. This modified assignment not only relieved these students' challenge of finding information for their subtopic, but it also validated their experiences as immigrants. Cecilia contributed the following passage to the class book:

Immigrants come to the United States, but in many different ways. One story of an immigrant happened in my family. The whole story began when my brother came to the United States. HE came to the United States because his parents made him. He did not want to come because he would ruin his career as a doctor. But, it was too dangerous to stay in his homeland. He came in an airplane and landed in an airport. He did not arrive at Ellis Island like most immigrants from the past did. Also, it only took him ten hours to get to the United States. It did not take months or weeks or even days. He even got food on the plane. Now all of these reasons are how you can tell if a person is an immigrant today.

*Step 7: Revise*

The writing process continued as students individually crafted their drafts through revisions. Because students were at different places of drafting, revising, and editing, the teacher was conferencing with individual students and small groups at different times. During the conference time, the teacher's primary focus was to have students writing well-developed paragraphs. Therefore, she helped students add any additional information or delete or eliminate unnecessary information. During revision, Liz dialogued with students, asking text-level questions, such as "How could this be reorganized or further developed?"

She also guided students in examining language use within sentences. Many bilingual learners demonstrated challenges with sentence structure, such as missing or overused articles, depending on their first language. Other bilingual learners needed support in mastering the use of certain verbs. For example, Spanish speakers struggled with the appropriate use of *do* and *make* because one Spanish verb, *hacer,* carries both meanings in their original language. In terms of grammar, students struggled with writing about events in the past tense and in expressing degrees of meaning through modal auxiliaries: *could, should, might, may, must.* Only after their ideas were developed did students focus on punctuation and spelling.

*Step 8: Prepare a Final Copy*

Finally, students created a published book, not necessarily a flawless piece of writing but rather one which demonstrated significant though developmentally appropriate editing. Some students, who had finished their section of the publication earlier than others, assisted Liz in typing the book. During a publishing party, they presented the book to Mr. Sullivan. As the following passage illustrates, the students had moved away from the bed-to-bed stories to write about topics of their choice in an interesting and detailed way.

"Reasons People Left Their Homeland"

There were different reasons why people left their homelands at the turn of the 20th century. Some people left their homelands because of poverty and famine. They didn't have enough money or food where they lived. Others left because of natural disasters or catastrophes which included volcanic eruptions. Another reason people left their homeland was because of discrimination in their country. Many people were not allowed to practice their religion as they choose, so they left their country. These are some of the reasons why people left their homeland.

## Scaffolding Learning and Teaching

The rhetorical approach walks learners through the writing process, attending to each step in more detail than other process approaches. This process not only helps the students but also orients teachers to the aspects of writing that students have internalized and those that are still a challenge. Bilingual learners' experiences and knowledge about writing vary a great deal. A large number of students tend to be unfamiliar with the expectations of how to carry out writing assignments in American school systems. Presently, the approaches to writing demand a lot from the learner, including creativity; however, most approaches give very little specific direction. For bilingual learners, this may signify a major cultural adjustment, since many school systems around the world use a more prescriptive approach to teaching writing. Even if they experienced a flexible approach in the educational systems in their homelands, these second-language learners need more task and language scaffolding. Such scaffolding frees students to focus more attention on expressing their ideas.

## Scaffolding Learning

The rhetorical approach allows teachers to support students explicitly through a series of steps that help develop writing habits. At the same time, this method provides students with opportunities to be creative. Often in the quest to foster creativity, teachers come up short in providing help for students for whom either writing or English or both may be new experiences. Before students can be told with confidence to write independently, they need help in building the necessary elements for second-language literacy: knowledge of content, literacy, and language (Bernhardt, 1991).

In writing, content refers to the topic of any given piece. For young children, this content usually begins with their immediate lives. Consider the examples of two kindergarteners: Enver, an Albanian student, who wrote, "I am driving my car"; and Jing, a Chinese student, who wrote "I love chkn [chicken]." Both sentences were accompanied by detailed drawings. Because these young children perceive the world in relation to themselves, they tend to write simple, one-frame, personal narratives. These expand developmentally over time to involve multiframe drawings accompanied by sentences and eventually to written narratives that are not dependent on drawings and that address issues from perspectives other than their own.

Content in writing also refers to bilingual learners' perceptions of the natural and social world. The content knowledge for science and social studies begins in the cultural funds of knowledge, which are first developed within families and communities (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994). This content knowledge expands beginning in the early grades to develop students' conceptual understandings at subsequent grades. In Liz's example, students were developing their knowledge of immigration. This built on students' personal immigration experiences as well as on concepts of family, community, country, and world, all of which had developed progressively through the elementary grades. Depending on their previous schooling, bilingual learners brought varying understandings of this social world into their writings about immigration. Liz built on these funds of knowledge and understandings when she allowed Rosa and Aldo to write personal narratives describing their immigrant experiences.

Through the initial steps of the rhetorical approach, Liz activated and developed bilingual learners' understandings of content. Through brainstorming, students explored what they knew about the topic. They further explored and enriched their understandings of chosen subtopics through further writing, discussion, and research. This content knowledge

development is essential when teaching culturally diverse students because their different personal and educational experiences have built different background knowledge.

In addition to content knowledge, students learning to write in a second language need knowledge of literacy. This literacy knowledge includes understanding that writing is a process of conveying meaning through written symbols. Early knowledge of writing builds on oral storytelling, drawings, and letter-like approximations. As students learn more about writing, they understand that through this process a product needs to be constructed following certain norms of the written language. Many immigrant children need to learn that writing is the product of each author's thinking through this process. This may be in conflict with previous experience learning to write in which they copied sample texts, or perhaps these students are accustomed to teachers and parents editing their drafts for conventions of spelling and punctuation while requiring little, if any, revision. This literacy knowledge of parents and children should be respected; however, teachers can use the rhetorical approach to develop habits that help students understand that writing requires a real purpose, a real audience, something to say with a certain degree of complexity and depth and that is organized in a way congruent with the chosen genre and the cultural expectations of the setting (Johns, 1997).

The rhetorical approach explicitly addresses these elements of writing that occur before students begin drafting. This approach can be flexible enough to allow student choice of purpose, audience, genre, organization, and topic, or, as was the case in this particular project, to have a choice on developing a topic that the school curriculum required covering. Yet by explicitly addressing each step, the students made these writing choices. Some choices were easier, such as deciding on audience, purpose, and what the final product would look like. Others were more difficult, such as defining subtopics and carrying out research about them. Even easy choices were not developed habits of students when this project began.

With enough practice, the students should eventually work independently, having applied the learned habits to the writing process. We saw this in Rosa's second writing sample, which she created long after the project, described in this paper, occurred. Rosa had developed the notion that a topic needs subtopics and that each subtopic needs development; that is, she had internalized some of these processes. She had developed more voice and language, richer in vocabulary and sentence structure.

A final, essential knowledge is needed for bilingual learners to write: knowledge of language. Writing in a second language requires knowing how that particular language organizes written discourse; how to choose words that carry the intended meaning and to combine them appropriately in sentences; how to apply grammatical rules to indicate tense and quantity; and how spelling patterns carry meaning in English. For example, some students come from cultures in which arguments are structured by providing evidence that leads *to* a final topic statement. These students need to be aware that some organizational text patterns in English involve clear topic statements at the outset of an argument that are followed by supporting evidence of that statement (Connor, 2002; Hinkel, 2002; McCabe & Bliss, 2003). Other bilingual learners come from languages with more consistent sound–symbol correspondence, such as Spanish. These students benefit from learning how spelling patterns carry meaning in English even when sound–symbol correspondence changes. For example the second letter *c* in *electric, electricity,* and *electrician* represents three different sounds while retaining the same root meaning (Birch, 2002).

Bilingual learners also need to learn how writing is different from speaking. Because bilingual learners have knowledge of their first language, writing development in a second

language is not completely dependent on oral language development in that second language. In other words, some bilingual learners might write in English before they choose to speak in English. However, even for students who seem to write more than they speak, this distinction between spoken and written language is critical. In addition to increased use of academic vocabulary, bilingual learners need to master the writing of more conceptually dense sentences. Instead of stringing together brief statements, as in oral dialogues, students must learn to elaborate their ideas within increasingly complex sentence structures. This occurs through embedding ideas within phrases (Kucer, 2001). For example, José, a fifth grader, wrote, "My class went to computer." Written language needs to be more explicit. Jose could have expanded with "where we made PowerPoint shows on the animal habitats we researched." This awareness of and ability to manipulate language is especially critical for developing academic writing. Through all the stages of the rhetorical approach, teachers can increase bilingual learners' awareness of these language differences.

## Scaffolding Teaching

Using the rhetorical approach to teach writing enabled Liz to discover the strengths and weaknesses of her students. Liz took advantage of her new awareness of the students' dif--ficulties to scaffold the learning building necessary skills for her students. Students quickly defined their purpose and audience, which guided their selection of genre and organizational structure. Many of the earlier steps needed a sidestep to build students' knowledge and skills. Concept and word mapping as well as understanding subtopic assisted students in exploring the topic in depth. Research shows that bilingual learners greatly benefit in their second-language acquisition from exploring concepts in depth (Lightbowm & Spada, 2003). This allows them to acquire knowledge and vocabulary, to develop their ability to think, and to build their oral-academic language (Solomon & Rhodes, 1995). In addition, gaining experience with looking for subtopics allows them to practice and internalize the notion that when writing about something, they need to express and clarify ideas through adding details. In the initial writings of the students, a paragraph frequently had five or six ideas or events with little or no expansion.

Once the students defined the depth of the topic, they needed research skills to find information and to give breadth to each subtopic. In scaffolding research strategies, Liz also scaffolded academic language by developing their ability to ask and to answer questions. These turned out to be too difficult for students who were relative newcomers to the country; Liz found an alternate task for them by allowing them to do research within their personal experience. Beginning second-language learners do better with personal narratives or writing that is related to their personal experience. Only when they have gained confidence with the language can they write about topics in a more abstract way (McLane, 1986).

Even when students are at the stage of writing personal narratives, the quality of the narratives can change. For example, another first-grade teacher at this school, Mary, used the rhetorical approach with her first-grade students who were locked in writing very short bed-to-bed stories. A few months later, they produced more elaborate personal stories about interesting events in their family life. They used elaborate language with complex sentences and rich vocabulary that reflected development of knowledge, literacy, and language. (For a full account see Brisk & Harrington, forthcoming).

## Conclusion

As an instructional practice, the rhetorical approach can benefit both first- and second-language learners. For students learning English, this process provides essential support for developing knowledge of language, literacy, and content. The purpose of the rhetorical approach is to develop good habits: good writing habits for students and good teaching habits for teachers scaffolding writing. This approach, which supports the writing process, is broad and flexible enough that teachers can use their own preferred strategies to address the different steps. The development of students' English writing is supported through strategically increasing awareness of the writing process, including topic exploration, establishing purpose and audience, and choosing an appropriate organizational structure. By weaving relevant reading and referring to books through the process, Liz helped students see books as sources and models for their own writing.

The rhetorical approach helped Mary's first-grade students in their initial stages of writing personal narratives, and it helped Liz's fourth graders with more demanding expository pieces. This approach is not a fixed recipe to be followed in the same way as Mary or Liz, but it is a guide to scaffold the essential elements of the writing process. The particular teaching strategies teachers choose to implement in the various steps of the writing process are professional choices based on students' needs. These choices support all students, but especially students learning to write in a second language.

## Notes

1. Bilingual and second-language learners for the purpose of this paper are defined as students with a language heritage other than English and who speak English to varying degrees of proficiency.
2. All students' names are culturally appropriate pseudonyms. Liz, the classroom teacher, is one of the coauthors of this chapter.

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