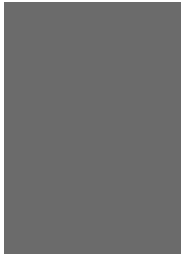




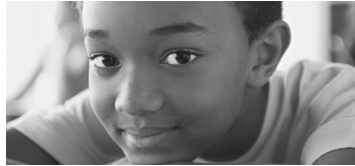
I can
think in Spanish
and write in
Spanish.
I can think in
English and
write in English.



From Ideas to Words



I used to write
just a little English.
now I know lots
and lots.



I didn't know
I had poems
inside
of me.



*Writing Strategies for
English Language Learners*



I keep this
notebook with
me all
the time.
It's got Greek
and English!



It feels like
freedom
when I write
in Korean

TASHA TROPP LAMAN

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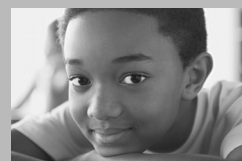
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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Seeing Possibilities for Growth in Ourselves and in Our Students

In 1993, in a twelve-year-old Nissan packed with six cardboard boxes, I steered my way 1,500 miles across the country, from Ohio to New Mexico, toward the Navajo reservation where I was going to teach. I arrived in Gallup, New Mexico, my new home, on New Year's Eve and checked into the El Rancho hotel. The lobby had wood paneling, a large stone fireplace, and a double stairwell with ponderosa pine railings. Navajo blankets lay on the backs of chairs and across the second-story banister. Since the 1940's, movie stars like John Wayne, Katherine Hepburn, Spencer Tracy, and Gregory Peck had stayed at this hotel when filming movies in the Four Corners region. Black-and-white signed photographs of these actors hung on the walls, all suggesting the hotel's more elegant past.

I heard people speaking Navajo for the first time, its clipped cadence unlike any language I had heard before. That night I stood on the balcony outside my hotel room and felt small, looking out into a night replete with stars so different from the hazy skies of my metropolitan upbringing. For the first time, I could see the edge of town where the lights ended and total darkness began. I felt far from everything and everyone I had ever known.

On Monday morning, I visited my classroom. When I arrived at the school, my new principal promptly took me to my classroom—a revamped storage room—and introduced me to my students. The children greeted me, “Yah-ta-hey” (*Hello*). My students predominantly spoke Navajo. I did not. My five years of undergraduate study and teacher preparation brought me to this moment, and now I had no idea what to do or how I could possibly communicate with children who did not yet speak English.

I struggled that first year to understand how most of my students did not have running water or electricity, how they lived along dirt roads that became treacherous and impassable when there was snow or rain causing students to miss school—sometimes for a week at a time, or how some children could live in dorms at the school, so far from their families. That year, I learned to speak enough Navajo to maintain some semblance of control so I could keep my job, but I never learned enough to communicate thoughtfully with parents and community members. I was working hard, and I wanted to be a good teacher. I wanted my students to love learning to read and write, but I couldn't understand what prevented my students from learning—other than the fact that they did not speak English or spoke very limited English. So I blamed my students, their families, and their culture. That year, I found myself thinking (and sometimes even saying) things like:

1. In order to learn English, children must be immersed in English-only environments.
2. If I let the children speak their own language, then I don't know what they are talking about.
3. These children are not invested in being literate in their first or second language.

Looking back, I know these opinions and misunderstandings about language learning were uninformed and prevented me from being the best teacher for those five- and six-year-olds. Ultimately, these beliefs excused me from offering the best education to my students.

Luckily, I had teaching colleagues who were patient with me. Joan, my teaching assistant, who was Navajo, talked to me each day after school and told me how I misunderstood things my students said or did. One day, I asked the children where my scissors were. Jake looked at me and pursed his lips together like he was kissing the air. Then other children did the same thing. I had no idea what this kissing motion meant or why Jake didn't answer me. I thought the children were being rude, until Joan told me that pursing one's lips indicated direction and location because using one's fingers was considered rude. I also learned that holding hands was taboo, so all of the hand-holding songs I learned as an undergraduate had to be modified. Daily

events like these continually reminded me of my own unexamined cultural beliefs and practices.

Joan had been forced to attend a boarding school run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, far from her family and community. She told me about being beaten for speaking Navajo and having her hair cut, the ultimate humiliation for a Navajo child. She invited me to see her group that performed traditional Navajo dances and recommended books for me to read so that I could begin to understand and learn about the unique culture in which I was teaching.

In addition to trying to become more sensitive to my students' cultural practices, I also had to address the academic challenges that some of the students faced. The Reading Recovery teacher told me that by second grade, some of our students were already one year behind. I knew that if I was going to be an effective teacher of Navajo children, I had to learn more so I could support my students in all aspects of their lives.

To do this, I read professional literature that colleagues had given me so I could learn more about language and literacy learning. This reading, in conjunction with conversations with my coworkers, helped me see the rich language and cultural resources my students carried with them each day. I began to document my observations of the children in order to understand what they did know. I discovered that my kindergarten students loved imaginary play. On the playground, they would turn small rocks into cars and build make-believe racetracks in the dirt. They loved reenacting stories I read to them. They also often sang songs when swinging, and so Joan and I recorded their songs and made charts with the words for shared-reading time. By the end of the year, I felt like I finally was getting some things right.

Shifting Perspective and Pedagogy

Two years later, I got to teach my former kindergartners when they entered third grade. While I couldn't take away the mistakes I made as their kindergarten teacher, I worked hard to be a better teacher by building on the following practices, which supported my students' first-language resources:

1. Integrating Navajo into my instruction
2. Having Joan help me translate during whole-group teaching and conferences
3. Reserving daily instructional time for Navajo language instruction
4. Guiding class inquiries into Navajo language, history, and culture
5. Teaching explicit literacy strategies that helped students monitor their own reading and writing in English
6. Incorporating literature that related to my students' lives
7. Inviting community experts to the classroom to teach about important contributions Navajos have made in our cultural, political, and professional lives
8. Shifting away from writing prompts and toward writing for more authentic purposes

I wasn't a perfect teacher that year (I'm still not), but I became more informed. I implemented many of the practices above within a writing workshop framework (Graves 1983). My students wrote narratives about shearing sheep, visiting the medicine man when they were sick, going to the hospital to see their grandparents. They wrote Navajo alphabet books for the kindergarten classes, recorded interviews with elders in the community, then wrote short biographies of the elders' lives, wrote a class newsletter, and wrote nonfiction pieces. Twenty years later, I still have some of that student work because those children taught me lessons that I carry with me each time I begin work with new children, teachers, and schools.

I share my experiences with my Navajo students because, as educators, we have to acknowledge our limited experiences so we can open ourselves to learning more. I was like most teachers in the United States, 83% of whom are White, monolingual, and middle class (National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov>). I was also part of the 90–97 percent of teachers who did not receive any training in working with English language learners (National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov>).

We must challenge ourselves to have high expectations for ourselves as both learners and teachers when we walk into a classroom with diverse needs. My

experience reminded me that each new place I worked—from Belize as a Peace Corps volunteer to Indiana as a substitute teacher and doctoral student, to South Carolina as a professor—required that I come to know my students as individuals. It required me to work to identify and document the resources that children bring with them to school. Through strong teaching, multilingual students can expand their range of literacy practices. And we, their teachers, can also grow and change as we get to know our students as individuals with talents, strengths, interests, and concerns, because we no longer expect them to conform to us or to curriculum that is irrelevant.

The Languages We Speak Matter

Language is inextricably linked to our identities, not only as learners but also as human beings (Carey 2007; Nieto 2010). When children come to our classrooms, they have grown up in families and communities where they have already learned a lot about language and the nuances of communicating. I've learned that what children know when they come to school is fertile ground for learning and cultivating a relevant curriculum (Allen 2010; Freeman and Freeman 2007). My Navajo students knew things that I did not know. They knew how to herd sheep, tell creation stories, sing traditional songs, keep a fire going, speak Navajo, use traditional herbs for healing, and so much more. Denying someone the language(s) with which they first learned to make meaning of their world is to deny them a significant part of what makes them who they are, as well as prevents them from using what they know in order to learn. This is true not only for students who come to school speaking other languages and language varieties than those of their teachers. It is part of our human experience. We each develop an ear for the language communities where we grew up. We are attuned to these regional and cultural ways with words, and we have biases toward them.

The Shifting Demographics of Our Classrooms

English language learners are not new to U.S. schools, but this population continues to become more diverse. Children who are considered English language learners may have recently immigrated to the United States, been born in the

United States, be refugees from war-torn areas, live in relative economic comfort or be economically vulnerable (Salomone 2010). English language learners may speak more than one language. Some may speak some English, while others are newcomers to English. Some may have had extensive educational experience and be literate in the languages they speak, while others may have had limited or no previous schooling (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova 2008). Because of these varied backgrounds and contexts, we need to make intentional efforts to get to know our students in order to address their individual instructional needs and understand their experiences.

States like California, Texas, Arizona, Florida, New York, and New Mexico (where I was living and working) have a long history of educating large populations of children who speak languages other than English (Edelsky, Smith, and Faltis 2008). However, in the past thirty years demographics have shifted, and the percentage of English language learners has increased significantly. Between 1980 and 2009, the number of school-age children speaking languages other than English at home rose from 4.7 to 11.2 million (National Center for Education Statistics, Indicator 6). More to the point, children in U.S. schools speak more than 350 different languages, with approximately 77 percent of those students speaking Spanish (National Center for Education Statistics). And today English language learners are enrolled in schools across the country in "new growth states" like North Carolina, Indiana, Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina, where educators are confronting the challenges of educating larger ELL populations than ever before (National Center for Education Statistics, Indicator 8).

Sadly, we are not meeting the needs of this growing multilingual population. Nationally, English language learners have a fifty percent drop-out rate, twice the national average (Espinosa, 2008). With one in five children in the United States now speaking languages other than English at home and in their communities (National Center for Education Statistics), and with most teachers having little or no professional development in supporting English language learners, we have a lot of work to do in order to avoid failing more students.

Possibilities Instead of Problems

When we turn on the radio on any given day, we hear about the “global economy.” While English is a significant part of the global economy, so are many other languages, including Chinese, German, French, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Spanish. We live in a time where speaking multiple languages is an asset. As a result, Danling Fu points out in her book *Writing Between Languages*, multilingual children are at the leading edge of the global economy (Fu 2009). She further notes that even though acquiring language is a complex cognitive process, over half of the world’s population speaks more than one language. This implies that children are certainly capable of learning more than one language.

Researchers like Luis Moll, Sonia Nieto, Kris Gutiérrez, and others help educators move from seeing educating ELLs as a *problem* to be solved and instead as a *possibility* to be engaged. They remind us that ELLs have tremendous linguistic and cultural resources, coping mechanisms, and resilience that can support these students in academic contexts (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova 2008). For instance, English language learners come to classrooms already speaking a language, such as Spanish. They have done what all children do when they start school: learned a language. Gutiérrez and Orellana (2006) urge researchers and educators to reframe conversations about English language learners that position ELLs as problems:

. . . we might ask how well schools and classrooms adapt to the presence of students from non-dominant groups, or how schools and classrooms can be transformed to better serve these students. This shifts the onus for adaptation from students to the institution. Or we can push the question further, by asking not how people change to fit their context or how contexts change to fit people but rather how change occurs both in the participants and the contexts of their participation. (119)

Too often English language learners are expected to adapt to dominant ways of teaching and learning (for example, teachers asking questions and children

providing short answers). English language learners read and study academic content that often does not mention contributions from cultures or people from outside the United States or from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (Nieto 2010). Holidays like Christmas are celebrated with a disregard that so many cultures do not celebrate Christian holidays (Nieto 2010). When we learn *with* and *from* our students, we have opportunities to build on students' strengths through talk, shared inquiries, and a curriculum that is relevant to their lives. I am drawn to the idea that all human relationships have the capacity and potential to change who we are and inform our teaching.

It is because of that belief that I have committed my teaching career to developing multilingual students' potential. I am both optimistic and realistic when it comes to teaching English language learners; we have a lot of work to do. We know that it takes five to seven years, and sometimes longer, for English language learners to acquire academic English—the vocabulary associated with school-related content (August and Shanahan 2006; Cummins 1996). This means we need to provide excellent instruction within meaningful learning contexts, where we are continually monitoring multilingual children's learning and supporting their academic development.

How This Book Can Help

All of this data means we have to teach writing *while* children are learning to speak, read, and write in English. We cannot wait until children reach a certain level of English proficiency before we introduce them to writing, and we cannot teach writing under the guise of fill-in-the-blank worksheets or other narrow language exercises that are frequently used with English language learners (Fu 2009; Rueda, August, and Goldenberg 2006; Samway 2005). When multilingual children engage in writing projects that are personally relevant, build on their background knowledge, use their home languages, and require them to write for authentic reasons, ELLs become more engaged in writing and develop understandings about writing processes and practices (Freeman and Freeman 2001; Fu 2009; Samway 2006).

This book will give you insight and practical tips to engage multilingual students in a writing workshop process. Specifically, I'll offer my experience and advice in the following areas:

1. Setting up a writing workshop that engages all levels of multilingual learners (Chapter 1)
2. Building community through shared language practices and adapting focused mini-lessons for multilingual students (Chapters 2 and 3)
3. Scaffolding independent practice for a wide variety of multilingual learners (Chapter 4)
4. Tailoring conferences to support multilingual writers during independent writing time (Chapter 5)
5. Facilitating and encouraging multilingual students to share and reflect (Chapters 6 and 7)

As you read each chapter, you'll find specific tools and strategies that will help make your writing instruction meet the needs of multilingual writers. You'll also find students' writing samples with explanations of the significance of the multilingual writer's work. Each chapter ends with classroom and student observations and/or planning notes, based on the information in that chapter. My goal is for you to see how each idea presented in this book can become part of a cumulative story of instruction, as well as the true step-by-step story of how we become better as teachers.



Conferences

*Helping
Multilingual
Writers
Realize Their
Intentions*

For years, I watched skilled teachers like Carl Anderson, Isoke Nia, and Nancy Reynolds conduct writing conferences, and I've conducted conferences with many children in my own classroom. But I had never experienced a conference as a writer until I was a graduate student at Indiana University. I was working on a research article for a class and met with my professor, Randy Bomer, to discuss my first real entrée into conducting classroom research.

I was nervous when I went to Randy's office that day. Before Randy would discuss any of my writing, he asked me to talk about my research and what I thought was interesting in the data that I had collected. I was worried that he might tell me I had no business writing a research article or that I should just give up on graduate school. Randy had never led me to believe that he was even capable of saying such things, but I was worried about what such an accomplished writer and researcher would say about my writing.

As I talked, Randy looked at me and then jotted down notes. Every now and then, Randy would stop and ask me a question, which told me that he was listening to me. After I finished talking, he asked me to talk more about a metaphor that I had used in describing my data. I told him that I saw very young children often acting as lifeboats for one another during literacy events: jumping in to help

a friend write or read a difficult word. I made this comment without really thinking much about it, but Randy brought it to the forefront of our conversation and asked me to explore it more. He then recommended that it might be a useful way for me to write about my classroom observations.

When I left Randy's office that day, I was inspired to write. I felt that inside the "drafty" writing I had completed there was a kernel of good thinking that I could develop further for publication. I also finally understood what it meant to have a writing conference that carries the writer forward.

That experience also reminds me of the vulnerability we feel as writers. We all know that feeling, when trying seems like too much of a risk, where it feels safer to be invisible, or when the chance of failure feels like a complete erasure of self. Our own experiences obligate us to provide both instructional and emotional support in and through writing conferences. These two kinds of support are not different, rather they overlap. Many of our multilingual students already know vulnerability, as an outsider, as newcomers to English, when experiencing a new culture or a different instructional framework and/or school. So a writing conference is always an invitation to be recognized, inspired, and poised for the action of writing.

When I conduct professional development with classroom teachers or work with preservice teachers, they are often scared of writing conferences in general and of conferring with multilingual students in particular. They are scared that they will say the wrong thing. They worry that they may not know how to help a writer, or if they'll be able to refer to the right mentor text, or how they will communicate without a shared language. And the list of worries goes on. I always ask teachers if any of them remember a teacher sitting next to them to ask them how their writing was going. Many of us do not have memories of teachers who were interested in us or in our writing. I remind them that the first step is to remember that a conference is a conversation first. The rest of the skills will follow.

A Conversation About Writing

Writing conferences occur during independent writing time and are the ideal context for individualized instruction, understanding our students, and engaging in authentic conversations with students as writers. As Lucy Calkins (1994) reminds us, these

conferences are writer-to-writer conversations, with teachers sharing their experiences as writers. Conferring with writers is always the highlight of my classroom visits because these conversations identify all the intentions that inform the words on the page. In everyday life, we talk through problems with people we trust, and in writing that authentic habit serves the same purpose. Sometimes the talk is enough for the student, and all I have to do is listen.

Unlike minilessons, where there's a momentary emphasis on teacher talk rather than child talk, conferences are more balanced, with children often talking more than we do. When we sit down to talk with a child during a conference, we want them to look forward to talking with us about their writing, so the conversation needs to be joyful and purposeful. Because some multilingual students have difficulty with extensive conversations in English, we want to make sure that our students feel a level of comfort with us, even if our exchange isn't in fluent English. Sometimes the student isn't the one who is uncertain, but rather it's the teacher who needs clarity on the student's process and intention.

Initially, conducting conferences with multilingual children can feel difficult and may even feel awkward at times, just like real conversations can. But writing conferences are rewarding, and they bring richness to our teaching that is indispensable. My goal is that by the end of this chapter you'll see how the instructional framework of a writing conference is actually a trajectory from uncertainty to action.

In this chapter, I share two essential writing conference responses that demonstrate our desire to listen to and teach from our multilingual students' strengths. In each section, I share strategies and examples of language that we may use with students that reflect these intentions. These sentence starters are not prescriptive, and they are certainly not exhaustive. Instead, they are meant as an entry into what might feel like a different way of teaching. I know that the opportunity I had to listen in on Isoke Nia's conferences with students helped me to refine my teaching and my thinking about conferences over the years. I'm hopeful that these models for writing conferences will feel helpful to you in similar ways and that they'll help you avoid the "red-pen grammarian" that can unintentionally silence your multilingual writers.

First Response: Listen Actively and Record

Because I am working toward a level of independence that allows students to trust their own voice, listening is always my foundational move. Really listening to another means giving them your full attention. In many contexts, listening may mean making eye contact and nodding. It may mean uttering an affirmative phrase. It may mean repeating what the other person said and asking them if that is what they meant. All of these actions signal listening, and our multilingual students need to know that we are indeed listening to them and that we are interested in them and what they have to say.

Conferences can feel strange when we have been used to asking questions that we know the answer to, such as, “What is the capital of Peru?” But when we ask a question like, “What did it feel like when the children teased you on the bus?” the only appropriate action is to listen and be intent on understanding. To help keep the focus on what matters, I challenge teachers NOT to instruct. This includes not teaching any spelling, editing, or grammar rules when they first begin conferring. This is especially important with multilingual children. If you are like me, this will be hard. After all, many of us know how to address editing and grammar. We know how to mark up writing. We know how to teach the difference between *to*, *two*, and *too*. But conferences need to be about addressing writers as storytellers first. And that involves our ears more than our pens. Some of the strategies below can help with the art of listening.

Listen for Content, not Correction

When conferring with multilingual writers, I accept their English language approximations. For example, if a child says, “Me, dad, mom goed to Wal-Mart last night,” I do not correct him. Instead, I listen, knowing that the point of the conference is communication, and this sentence is easily understood. Some of the following sentences indicate what listening for content may sound like:

- What would you like help with today?
- Show me what you have done so far.

- Talk to me about something new you are trying.
- Why is this piece of writing important?
- Tell me about this writing.

Observe Before Speaking

Some students who are newcomers to English or to the classroom may not yet feel comfortable talking one-on-one during conferences. It is vital to have strategies for communicating with these children when we do not have a shared language. In these conferences, I observe quietly for a few minutes, taking notes and watching for the student's writing behaviors before I speak. Early on, I may point to something on the paper that the child is doing well, smile, and move on.

Facilitate Communication

Another strategy to implement with multilingual children in the early stages of learning English is to ask more yes/no questions. I know this seems contrary to the vision of writerly conversations that I advocate, but these kinds of questions serve as an early conversation scaffold. Children can answer me with a nod. I often talk more than the child does, pointing to their work and smiling or naming what I notice, for example:

- Is that your dog?
- Oh, I see you have five people in your picture. Who is this?
- Is that you?
- And then what happened?
- Show me a part of your writing that you like (or dislike), etc.

Go to the Children

I encourage teachers to move around the room rather than pulling children aside for conferences, because, as Larson (1999) found in her research, when teachers conduct conferences among students, other children "overhear" these conferences. You may be talking to one student, but your suggestions may well work for other

writers nearby. In a video where I am conferring with a first-grade writer, one of his classmates can be seen in the background, physically leaning in and listening to the conference. When I asked the first grader to whom I was talking to turn to a new page in his writer's notebook, the student behind him (who was eavesdropping) immediately did the same thing that I had just asked her classmate to do. Children who are nearby may also chime in during a conference, offering an insight or a suggestion. Also, students can overhear us attempting to learn students' languages. It is in these kinds of conversations that we build a sense of community as writers.

Record Your Conference Notes and Your Teaching Point

It's imperative that we have some record of our teaching, partly because it is impossible to keep it all in our minds. Writing while conferring saves time and helps maintain records, but most importantly it helps you stay focused on the student with whom you are conferring. When I confer with a student, I jot down notes in a notebook with a section for each child. I include the date, what the child is working on, what the child said, and what I taught, as well as what I may look for the next time I visit the child. (See an example of my conferring notes in Figures 5.5A and 5.5B on pages 103–104.)

Facilitating Communication to Confer with Newcomers to English

Sometimes we don't conduct writing conferences with newcomers to English because we don't want to intimidate the student, or we worry that we won't know what to say. Sometimes we are uncomfortable just trying to communicate. But we are doing a disservice to multilingual children when we do not take the time to confer with them. Conferences give us the most detailed view of children's ongoing literacy learning and understanding. Also, it's worth remembering that most human communication is nonverbal, so the inability to speak Arabic, French, or Vietnamese, while inconvenient, does not prevent us from communicating with our students who are beginning to learn English.

When I first confer with a child who is a newcomer to English, I find out if the student can write in his or her first language. This is important information that will help me facilitate writing development. If the student can write, or has begun to learn to write, in his or her first language then I encourage the student to continue

to do so, and I may have a conference like the one I had with Akira in her first week of school. If the student does not yet write in his or her first language, then I will observe during writing time, encouraging the student to draw first so I can support further writing in English. In the following conference, I show you what an early conference with a student who is just starting to learn English may look like and how I facilitate communication.

Akira: Second Grader, Emerging English Speaker, Fluent in Japanese and Chinese

When I first met Akira, she had just arrived from Japan and was a newcomer to English. On Akira's first day in the classroom, I sat down with her during writing time and used the conference time as an opportunity to talk with her. We began to engage in a series of back-and-forth questions and answers about how to say things. I waved my hand and said, "Hi" and wrote *Hi* in English. She then wrote "Hi" in Japanese (see Figure 5.1).

Tasha: Hi, Akira. My name is Tasha. (*I point to myself and say Tasha.*) What is your name? (*I point to Akira.*)

Akira: (very quietly) Akira.

Tasha: This is how we write "Hi" in English. (*I write "Hi" and then wave to her.*) Can you write "Hi" in Japanese?

Akira then writes characters in Japanese.

Tasha: How do you say, "Hi" in Japanese?

Akira says Hello in Japanese, and I repeat after her (Ohayō). (She giggles.)

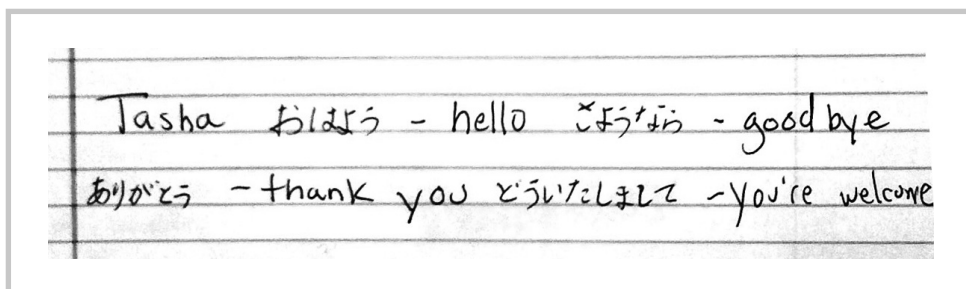


Figure 5.1

Tasha: Can you write it in Japanese?

Akira writes *Hello* in Japanese.

Tasha: Good-bye! (*I stand up and wave as though I am leaving. When I sit back down, I write goodbye.*)

Akira writes *good-bye* in Japanese and teaches me how to say, "Good-bye" in Japanese (Sayōnara).

This continued for *thank you* (Arigatō) and *you are welcome* (Dōitashimashite), all phrases that Akira would use in school. My goal in this conference was to see if Akira could write in Japanese. I do not write or speak Japanese, but because Akira was able to make marks that were either Japanese or that closely approximated Japanese, I knew she was comfortable writing.

I had no idea whether what Akira said to me was perfect Japanese or not, but that was not important since the goal of the conference was bigger than "getting it right." I wanted to demonstrate a genuine interest in Akira and show her that I wanted to communicate with her. I wanted her to know that her language(s) were important resources and that she could teach others in her classroom. I wanted her to get used to writing and talking to me, and I wanted to create a warm and inviting atmosphere. I wanted to give Akira more attention in those early days of school in the United States. Here are some other strategies I used in this conference:

1. I used gestures to convey meaning.
2. I repeated the Japanese words that Akira said and wrote.
3. I made sure Akira knew that she could write in Japanese while she was learning English in her new classroom.
4. I increased my wait time (up to a minute) for a response.

Using Illustrations to Scaffold Communication

I think many children, not just multilingual children, avoid writing because they don't feel confident about letter/sound relationships, especially as their peers may be growing in their writing fluency. I also think that for some multilingual students, writing in English, on top of hearing it all day and reading it all day, can just feel

exhausting. When children arrive at school who are newcomers to English and do not yet write in their home languages, I most frequently turn to their illustrations and drawings as a launching point. Through these, I am able to engage children in conversations about their lives, teach storytelling, and build connections between illustrations and written words.

Carlos: First Grader, Emerging English Speaker

Carlos frequently avoided writing time. He started school in kindergarten as a newcomer to English, and at the beginning of first grade he was producing short phrases orally. While many of his peers were writing simple sentences, Carlos was still producing random strings of letters, occasionally writing words we could identify. On this day, in late August, I used Carlos' drawing to verbally scaffold his storytelling.

Tasha: Hi, Carlos. What are you doing as a writer today? (*I point to his picture.*)

Carlos drops his writing on the floor (*not an uncommon occurrence when I come by to confer with him*).

Tasha: Read your writing to me.

Carlos: (*looks at his writing*) I play Power Ranger. I play soccer. I play park. I play donkey.

Tasha: You played with the donkey? Did you ride it?

Carlos nods and smiles.

Tasha: (*pointing to his drawing*) Wow! You were playing Power Ranger and you played soccer and you played at the park *and* you played with the donkey! Look, you also wrote, "Mexico." See it? (*point to the one word I can read*) Carlos, this is the most writing you have done. Writers write a lot, just like you did. Congratulations! Muy bien!

Carlos smiles.

In this conference, I noticed that Carlos had made a detailed drawing of a park or fair in Mexico. I knew it was in Mexico because Carlos had said during the minilesson that he wanted to write about Mexico. I was thrilled that Carlos focused on his drawing and spent the entire writing time engaged—a new practice for him (see Figure 5.2).

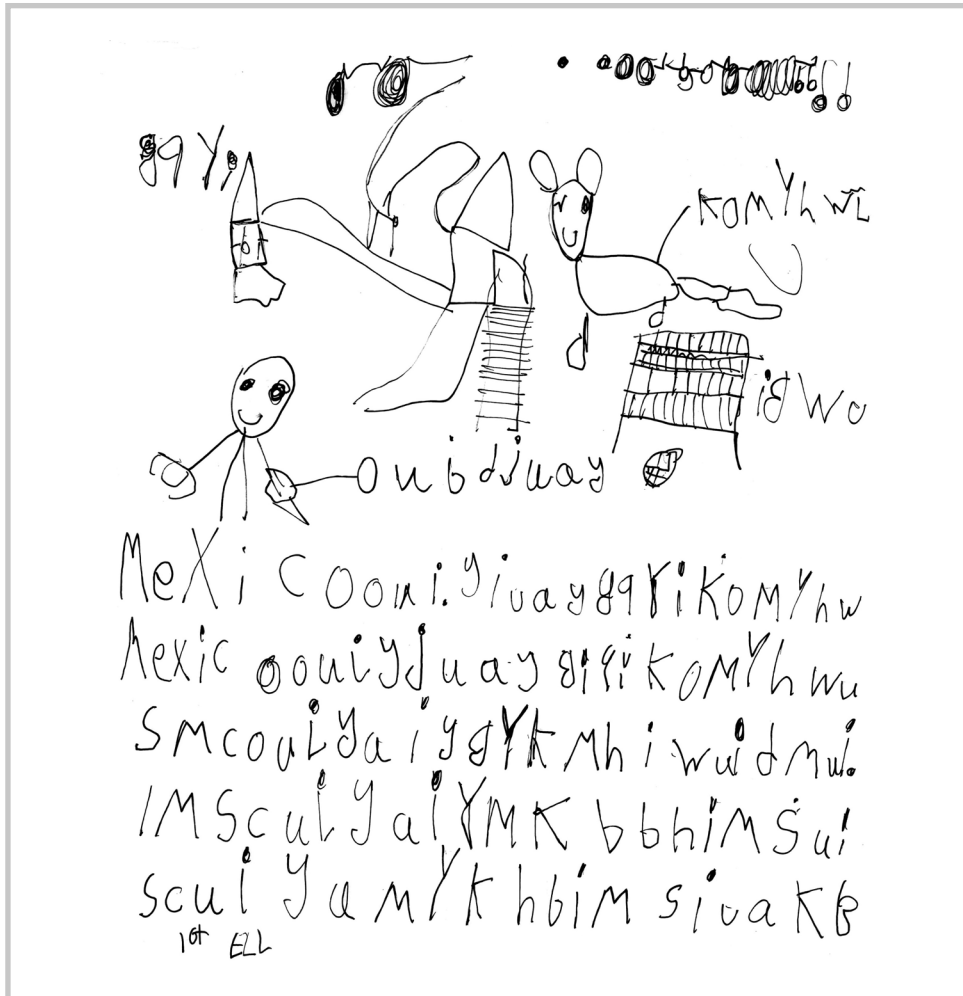


Figure 5.2

I used the following strategies to validate his work.

1. I repeated his entire story back to him, establishing that I listened to him.
2. I noticed that he wrote a number of letters at the bottom of the page, including a clearly written word: Mexico.
3. I drew upon my history with him as a writer and celebrated this new growth in his writing.

4. I noticed that most of his writing was short, complete sentences.
5. I didn't correct any of his approximations, such as "I am playing the park," because I wanted to encourage him to talk with me and to continue writing.
6. I didn't ask Carlos to write anything more on his paper.
7. I pointed to the drawing as I retold what I heard him say.
8. I asked embedded yes/no questions.
9. In my notes, I recorded that I wanted Carlos to continue to practice telling stories from his drawings.

Use Listening for Content, Not Correction, to Teach Labeling

When we listen with an ear for the message a speaker is conveying, we turn our attention to meaning making. This kind of listening helps us teach to a student's intentions and consider one thing that may move this writer along, something that is just within this writer's grasp (Anderson 2000).

Lisa: Kindergartner, Spanish Speaker, Developing English Speaker and Writer

Labels are a great resource for multilingual writers. They can be used during read-aloud, minilessons, and shared writing, and when we conduct experiments during science time. Really, the opportunities are endless! This is an ideal time to help children learn English vocabulary, particularly when we ask them to also say these words in their first language(s), because it helps children make a connection to what they already know. Making these connections explicit for multilingual students supports their language learning (Goldenberg 2008). By listening closely to Lisa, I had the opportunity to do this kind of teaching.

Tasha: What are you writing about, Lisa? (*She had drawn a car with four stick people, a road, some stoplights, and two parallel lines.*) (See Figure 5.3.)

Lisa: My mom got sick. We went to hospital.

Tasha: Oh no. Is she OK?

Lisa: Yes. She came home.

Tasha: Oh, good. I am glad. What is that? (*pointing to the two parallel lines in her drawing*)

Lisa: The thing boys and girls walk.

Tasha: How do you say that in Spanish?

Lisa: *Acera*

Tasha: Oh. In English, we call it a "sidewalk." Will you teach me how to say it in Spanish?

Lisa: *Acera*

Tasha: *Acera*

Tasha: I'll say it in English, *sidewalk*, and then you say it in English, OK?

Tasha: *Sidewalk*

Lisa: *Sidewalk*

Tasha: Lisa, you can make labels for your drawing just like Ms. Rodríguez did in her writing today. Where could you put some labels? (Lisa points to the sidewalk and then to the people in her drawing.) What will you label first?

Lisa: Car. (Lisa writes car and then points to the sidewalk.)

Tasha: Wow! You know how to spell *car*. Do you want to label the sidewalk? Lisa nods.

Tasha: OK, let's say it slowly. (We stretch out the word *sidewalk*, with Lisa saying the letters with me as she writes them.) Lisa, look, you stretched out all the letters. When you make other drawings, you can add labels just like this.

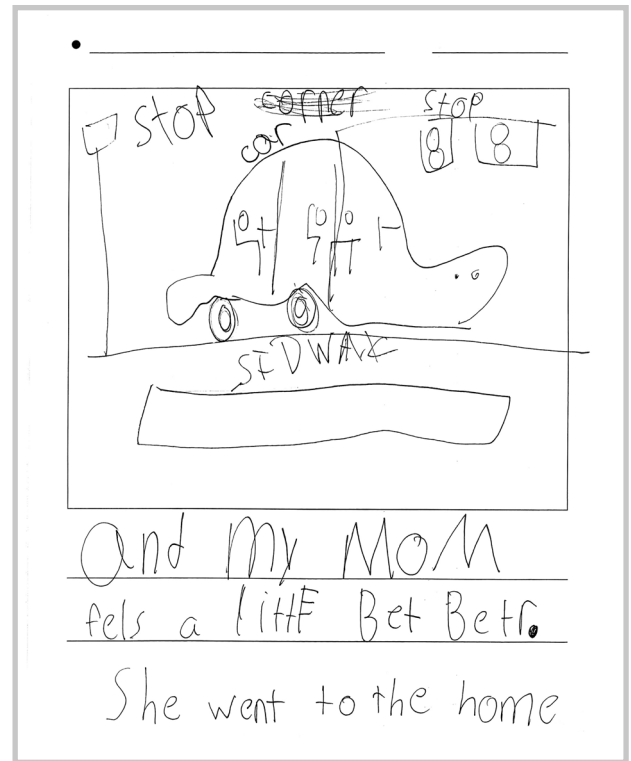


Figure 5.3

Because conferences are layered with meaning and multiple strategies, here are some of the strategies I used in this conference to extend Lisa's learning:

1. I addressed Lisa first as a person by asking about her mother, then as a writer.
2. I asked her about the details of her drawing.

3. I asked Lisa to say a word in Spanish, and then I practiced it, reinforcing that we are all language learners.
4. I taught Lisa a word she can use immediately in her writing and that may become part of her vocabulary.
5. I asked Lisa to add a label that can support her text later, when she adds lines to her story.
6. By listening, I supported Lisa in writing a label that she wanted to try.
7. I explained to Lisa that this strategy does not just apply to this current piece of writing but to her future writing as well.

Second Response: Teach from Students' Strengths

By listening and talking to children about their experiences, their lives, and their writing, we remind students that we care about who they are and what they have to say. All of us need these reminders, and multilingual students are no different. Of course, it's not about just recognizing the student as a person, it's specifically acknowledging the work that led to the writing on the page before us and then teaching from that work.

One way to support children during writing time is to "notice and name" (Johnston 2004) what they are doing as writers. For multilingual students, this noticing and naming is essential because we're helping students to see the skills and genius in their own work. We are drawing attention to their smart writing moves and developing meta-awareness of their own writing processes. Our response answers a few implied questions from students. In the section that follows, I unpack these questions and identify some key strategies for answering them, specific to multilingual writers.

Identity: "Do you remember who I am? Do I matter to you?"

Every writing conference we have becomes part of the shared history that we create with our students. Implicit when we confer with students is a concern about whether we know our students, what we remember about them, and what they care about.

When we make our teaching point in a conference, bringing what we know about the student into our teaching raises the level of our work beyond simple strategies to complex human engagement that's tailored for the student next to us. Here are some ways I reference what I know about students:

- You are like [this writer] because you keep writing about [X], something I know you are passionate about.
- You talked about [X] in morning meeting a few days ago, and now I see it is coming up in your writer's notebook.
- Your family told me how responsible you are at home, and I saw this in your writing about [X].
- I read [X] this weekend, and it made me think about you and that you have been writing about [X].

Significance: "How is my writing talking back to the world?"

Often missing from formulaic writing instruction is a sense of significance, but writing workshop and writing conferences are steeped in meaning. Conferring with children reinforces the point that the writing work they are doing matters beyond a grade and a single reader (the teacher). In writing conferences, we have opportunities to remind students of the wider audiences for whom they are writing:

- I bet [X] is going to giggle when she reads [X].
- Who did you write this for?
- Your writing [X] made me think about [X].
- Writers like you

Extending: "How do I put that in writing?"

For multilingual students, conferences often afford teachers the time to talk about idiomatic expressions and other nuances in the English language. Although we do not want all of our conferences to focus only on the English language, some of our conferences provide timely support and specific language instruction that multilingual

students may need. These conferences sometimes take the form of coaching conferences. Coaching conferences (Anderson 2000) are conferences where you are the more experienced writer, verbally extending what a writer may not yet be able to do on their own. I like to think of it as equivalent to whispering in a writer's ear; it helps move their thinking and writing forward.

In the early grades, these kinds of conferences often include stretching out sounds for young writers, helping them to "hear" the sounds that make up words. Other times, coaching conferences may help a writer do something they have never done before, such as create a scene using dialogue. In the conferences below, I act as more of an expert than I may normally do, coaching the children as they listen for sounds in words and begin to spell phonetically. As you can see from the other examples in this chapter, these are not the only kinds of conferences, but I also want to illustrate that there is a time and place where we help students with spelling, generating text, and mechanics. In addition, research shows that teaching skills within meaningful contexts support multilingual students' literacy learning (Freeman and Freeman 2001; Goldenberg 2008).

Use Mentor Texts to Note Significance

Children's literature and other published writing (student and professional) are my favorite teaching partners. Between the covers of books and the print in newspapers, blogs, and essays are texts we can use to mentor our students, texts that show them writing practices and craft that will help them grow not only as readers but also as strategic writers who study texts to inform their writing lives (Ray 1999). (See also Appendix C for more suggestions.)

In a study of bilingual writers, Kyleen Jackson's fifth-grade students studied Monica Brown as a mentor author. Kyleen carried a couple of key titles to use in conferences to suggest (and sometimes insist) that students notice, try, or emulate. Referring to mentor texts helps us to stretch students as writers by teaching specific skills and reinforcing their writing identities. Here are some sample suggestions:

- You use metaphors in your writing, just like [X].
- A poet you might want to read is [X].
- [X] writes a lot of nonfiction, like you.

- Let's see how [X] uses point of view in [her] writing and how you might too.
- I know you have been reading [X], and I can see [X] in your writing.
- This sentence makes me think of when this writer does [X]. You're both using this tool to . . .
- Remember when we talked about how writers sometimes show us what they are thinking and how we call that internal dialogue? Where is a place you might want to try that in your writing?

Inspiration: "Why should I return to my writing?"

Inherent in any writing conference is the expectation that the writer will delve back into her writing. When a writing conference is inspirational, the writer leaves the conference with more energy than when she began. The writer should feel like this writing work is worth exploring, much like I did in my writing conference with Randy.

This idea becomes important when we begin to explore the content of our conferences with multilingual learners. If all of our conferences are focused on editing and grammar, then the conference is not inspirational. It turns into a litany of all that is wrong with students' work. I have worked with many multilingual learners over the years who have been subjected to too many red pens that have crossed out and corrected verb tenses and pronouns. This often leaves students reluctant to write. When we make other observations about students' writing and their writing process, we have opportunities to build up students' resilience and inspire them to go back into their writing. Here are a few ideas:

- The topic you are talking about is important because . . . , and when you revise [X] it will . . .
- I thought the way you described [X] was original. I hadn't thought of that before, but it makes sense because . . .
- This part where you showed [X] is called [X], and writers use it for many reasons, just like you did. Are there other places you might do that again?
- Where do you want help?

Identity as a Writer: “What kind of writer am I? Am I getting better? Can I get better?”

When we notice and name students’ learning, we are inherently marking students’ growth and reminding them that this daily work they are engaging in is worthwhile and that we, as their teachers, see it. Naming this growth and helping student’s recognize it themselves is inspiring and helps writers return to their writing with energy. This is crucial for multilingual writers. Here are some observations that can help clarify identity for writers:

- You are writing a lot.
- You are adding a lot of detail.
- You are writing much more in English than you used to.
- You told your story to [X] in Spanish first, and she noticed that it helped you write even more words on the page. Sometimes telling a story in [Spanish] first makes writing easier.
- How are you changing as a writer from the beginning of the year?
- What did you notice about yourself as a writer today?
- You wrote this whole story in Spanish! I can’t wait until everyone hears it.

Recognizing Identity to Teach Bilingualism as a Writing Strength

Nowhere else in our day do we have more of an opportunity to recognize and build on a student’s individual linguistic and cultural resources more than we do during writing conferences. This is where we can ask questions about children’s language resources without putting them on the spot, where we demonstrate our desire to learn and understand and to know what our students know, and where we can teach strategically so that children continue to see and experience the value of speaking and writing across languages. It is especially important for students who already are literate in another language so we can help them build on that resource.

Esperanza: First Grader, Spanish Speaker, Expanding English Speaker and Writer

Several years ago, Theresa Kelly, a first-grade teacher conducted an action research project as part of her Master's program. She wanted to know what would happen if she encouraged her multilingual students to write in their home language(s). Most of her multilingual students spoke Spanish and English. In January, Theresa and her students engaged in a brief unit of study about nonfiction writing. Theresa taught her students how to interview one another, and then the students turned their interviews into books about their friends (see Figure 5.4). Esperanza, a student who spoke English and Spanish, loved to write and was very excited about asking her friend Jane questions. Since the fall, she had become increasingly interested in writing in Spanish.

Theresa: What are you writing today, Esperanza?

Esperanza: About Jane.

Theresa: What have you learned about Jane?

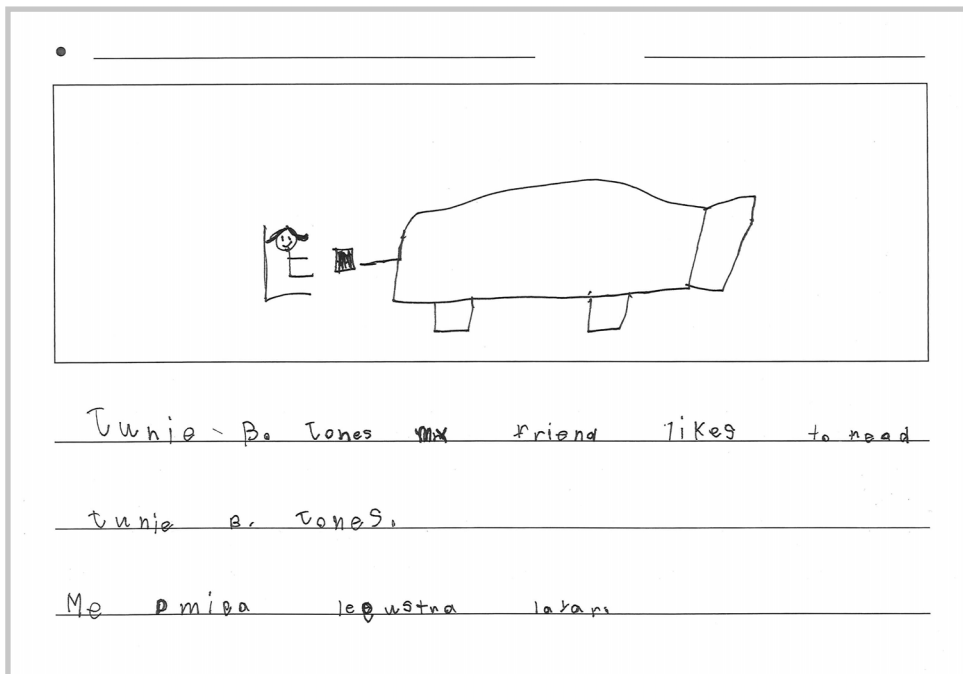


Figure 5.4

Esperanza: She likes to read. But I don't know how to write it in Spanish.

Theresa: So, you want to write it in English and Spanish?

Esperanza: Yeah, so Jane's mom can read it.

Theresa: Of course! You are thinking about your audience, the people who will read this book. Let's see what you have. "My friend likes to read." Well, how do you say that in Spanish?

Esperanza: *Mi amiga le gusta leer.*

Theresa: OK, I think I can help you with some of those words. You know how to spell *mi* and *amiga*, right?

Esperanza: Yes. (*begins to write mi amiga*)

Theresa: OK, let's ask Tasha how to write *le gusta*.

Tasha: You know the first letter for *le*.

Esperanza: L.

Tasha: *Le* is a tricky word because it makes a different sound [in Spanish] than it does in English. It has an *a* sound but it is an *e*.

Esperanza: Oh. (*writes the letter e*)

I then watched as Esperanza listened for the letter sounds in *leer*, which she approximated with "layar." In this conference, Theresa asked Esperanza what she was writing today. She also asked her what she had learned about her friend. These opening questions help guide Theresa, but then Esperanza lead the way for Theresa when she said that she wanted to write her book in English and Spanish so that Jane's mother could read her writing. This is exactly what we hope will happen in our conferences: that children will tell us exactly what they want. Other strategies Theresa used to support Esperanza:

1. Theresa reminded Esperanza that she knew how to write *Mi* and *amiga*.
2. Theresa accepted approximations and did not correct Esperanza's grammar.
3. Theresa noticed that Esperanza is becoming a writer who clearly understands audience and purposes for writing and shares that with her.
4. Theresa encouraged and facilitated multilingual writing as a norm.

Cultivating Community to Return to Writing Work

Writing can feel like lonely, tiring, and exhausting work. Writing conferences are the place where that loneliness is lessened, because writers are able to talk, think, and share. They have the opportunity to ask someone else to think with them. Our very youngest writers are often talking to one another, over each other, and even writing on top of each other's words, but as children get older this highly interactive writing shifts, and the writing conference brings it back to the social. Just the opportunity to have someone say something nice or help to solve a writing puzzle is just what a writer needs to return to the individual work that all writing entails.

Carlos: Fourth Grader, Expanding English Speaker

By fourth grade, Carlos, the student I conferred with earlier in this chapter, had grown to like writing. His fourth-grade teacher was doing a unit of study on responding to writing prompts, helping the students consider what test makers were asking and how to write thorough responses. In the following conference, I helped Carlos delve back into his writing by asking him how I could help him respond to a prompt about demonstrating love for others:

Tasha: What part do you feel still needs some work, Carlos?

Carlos: (*points to a sentence that says I show love by kindness.*) I think it needs more.

Tasha: Carlos, you are really thinking like a reader and a writer because you know it needs something more and you aren't quite sure what to do about it. So, what are some ways that you show love?

Carlos: When I leave to go to the bus stop I give my mom a hug and a kiss. Sometimes, if they can't finish something like taking the trash out, I will do that too. My mom really likes it that I still give her hugs and kisses.

Tasha: I bet your mom likes that. One of my nephews went through a phase where he didn't want to give good-bye hugs and kisses to his mom, and she was really upset. I bet your family appreciates all of your help too. See, Carlos, what you said is just the kind of example your reader needs so they can understand how you show you love and care for your family. Adding what you said will make the piece better, but you already knew that. You just needed to talk first. That happens for me all the time as a writer.

Like Esperanza, Carlos identified what he wanted in a writing conference. This is a very different conference than we had when he was a first grader. Here are other strategies I used to support Carlos as a writer:

- I put Carlos in charge of the conference by asking him what kind of help he wanted.
- I listened to Carlos and demonstrated that by repeating what he said and sharing my own example.
- I asked him to talk as a rehearsal for his writing.
- I named his writing moves and validated his process and writing instincts.

A Willingness to Step into the Unknown

I think conferences give teachers a feeling of being slightly out of control because we don't know what multilingual students will say, and we may worry that we don't have the perfect response for a student. If you feel this way, I encourage you to breathe. If, at the end of a conference, you have learned a little bit more about your student and have had a conversation with them about their life and what they are doing as a writer, you are off to a good start. If you tell a student that you are so interested in what they are doing as a writer that you want to take their writing home so you can think about what you should teach them, then you have shown your student that you are a thoughtful person who contemplates your teaching.

The more you read your students' writing and the more familiar you become with your own writing process, with those of the writers you study in your classroom, and with children's literature that you share, the more strategies you will add to your repertoire. It's important to remember that any time we enter into a conversation with another person, we don't know what they might say. Teaching is scary, and it is also rewarding. You get to engage in conversations with young writers about the things that matter to them. The wonderful thing about writing conferences is that you will build up your confidence. Day after day of conferring with writers will have you looking forward to this precious time where you help your students grow, one writer at a time.

What Can This Look Like?

Documenting my writing conferences helps me keep track of the students I have talked to, what we have talked about, and what I am currently teaching. Note-taking, like writing, is highly individual. I always write during conferences, and I tend to record exactly what children say. If I don't do this I usually can't remember all the richness that was in the student talk. But I encourage you to develop your own habits for note-taking. I offer the brief notes from my fourth-grade conference with Carlos as one possibility among many (see Figures 5.5A and 5.5B). I should point out that I

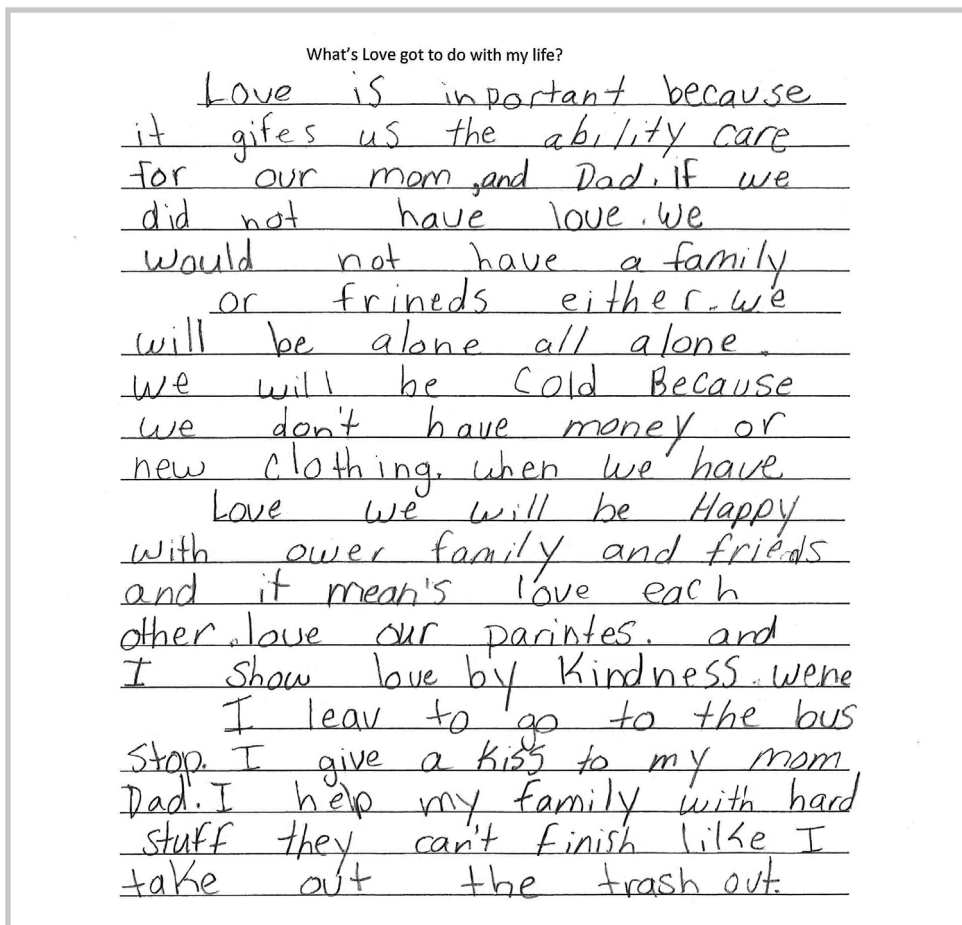


Figure 5.5A

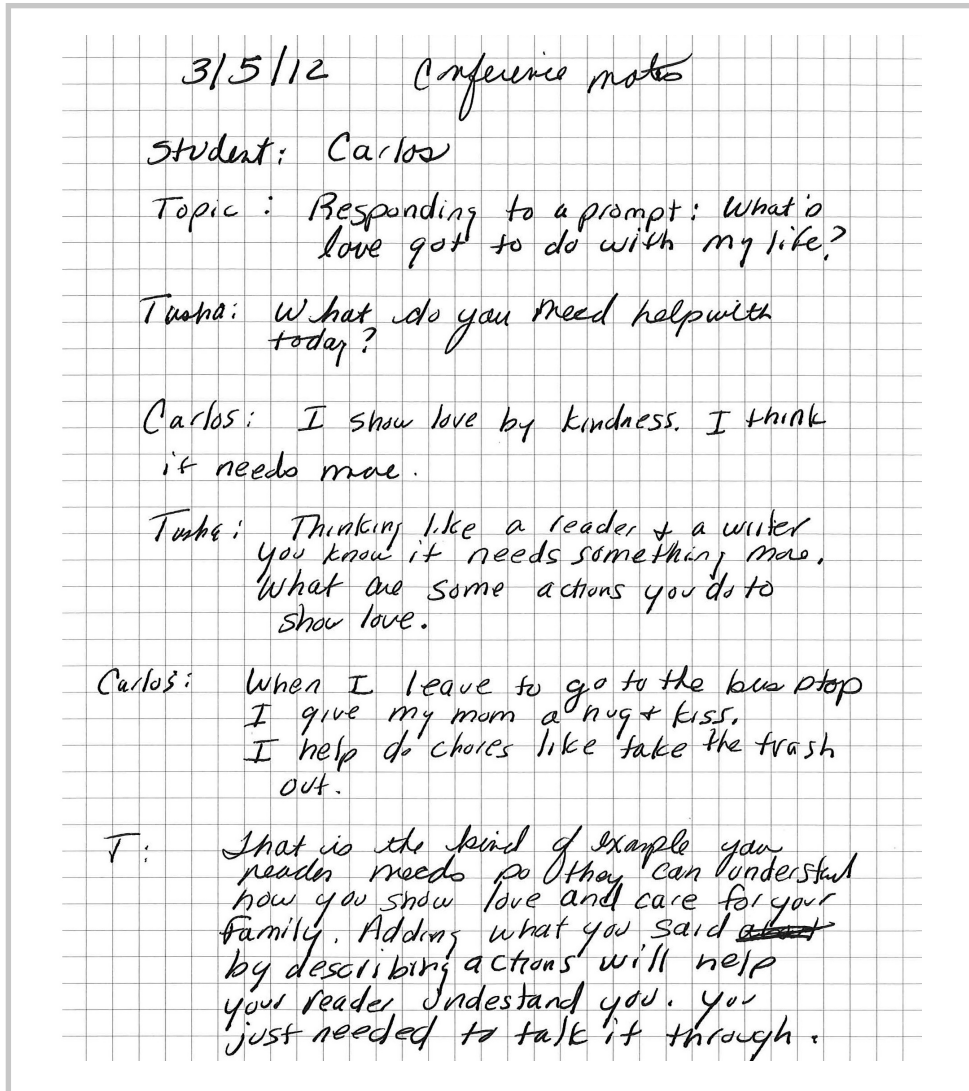


Figure 5.5B Here's how I use the information I gathered to help me decide what to do next

find it helpful when conference notes have the date, the kind of writing the student is working on, what I taught, and next steps.

I could use Carlos' example with the other children during share time or in a mini-lesson to highlight the need to read one's writing like a reader and to ask what else the student may need to do in their writing. I can ask Carlos to explain this to everyone.