

# Speaking-Writing Relationships in The Growth of Writing Abilities

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**Editor's note:** *An elaboration of Barry Kroll's model of the four relationships he writes about here may be found in "Developmental Relationships Between Speaking and Writing," to be published in Exploring Speaking-Writing Relationships: Connections and Contrasts, Barry Kroll and Robert J. Vann (eds.), Urbana, IL, NCTE.*

It's not unusual to hear conflicting claims about the relationships between speaking and writing, as well as contradictory advice about the implications of these relationships for the teaching of writing. Some experts in the language arts, stress the close connections between speaking and writing, and believe that students should be encouraged to draw on the strengths of their oral language when they engage in written composition. Other experts stress the differences between speaking and writing; they observe that the demands of writing require new skills, and they believe that if students rely heavily on oral language skills and strategies, the quality of their written discourse will in fact suffer. Which of these expert claims are we to accept?

Paradoxically, each claim seems to be correct. One key to understanding this paradox is to recognize that the functional relationships between oral and written language change during the individual's development of writing skills. I want to suggest that there are, in fact, four principal relationships between oral and written language and that each of the four characterizes a **phase** during the student's development of the skills of writing. I call the four phases **preparation, consolidation, differentiation, and integration**. By attending to the ways in which the relationships between speaking and writing change for individuals during these phases, we are in a better position, I believe, to understand and promote students' growth in writing.

During the **preparation** phase, our primary pedagogical goal is to help each young child learn those skills which will enable him or her to engage in the first stages of independent writing. Obviously, a child must learn the "technical" skills of handwriting and spelling. But there is also a need for the child to develop the ability to "compose." Many language arts specialists agree that having a child dictate while the teacher writes out the child's sentences is an important aspect of **preparation** for writing, both because dictation provides practice in composing original texts and because dictation translates the connection between spoken and written language into concrete form.

**Preparation** leads into the next important phase in writing development, a period in which our goal as teachers is to

strengthen written expression by drawing on the child's ability to talk well. This **consolidation** of a child's oral competence with his or her resources for writing is generally accomplished by the teacher's providing activities in which the forms and functions of writing are made similar to those of speaking. Many language arts specialists propose that children should engage in "personal writing" or exploration of the "senses" or "expressive writing" — writing which remains close to the child's experience, which addresses an intimate audience, and which provides a legitimate context for "talk written down." But **consolidation** can also involve such oral language activities as oral monologue, a form of speech which is like writing in that the communicator assumes full responsibility for sustaining the discourse.

Such **consolidation** of the child's oral and written resources may function to extend and strengthen the child's nascent writing abilities. However, since speaking and writing also differ in important ways, the child must ultimately master **differentiation** of the two modes. A child needs to learn that written texts — particularly texts with transactional functions — are often free from features which characterize the language of conversation and, furthermore, such texts are often particularly explicit in meaning. The compositions of inexperienced writers contain many stylistic features of oral language, such as the use of stock phrases or the use of "and" as an all-purpose joining device. Inexperienced writers often tend to write as though they were conversing with a reader who shares their context — as though writing were, like speaking, an interactive construction of meaning, rather than an autonomous production of text. This leads inexperienced writers to represent meaning in ways that are not sufficiently explicit — often these writers use ambiguous references, fail to define terms, omit transitional devices, and so on.

Thus, while we as teachers must encourage children to draw on their oral language resources during the early phases of their development as writers, we must actually curb their reliance on oral language during later phases of their growth as writers. Continued reliance on their oral competence might actually limit students' abilities to develop more specialized writing skills.

It seems important, therefore, that the focus in teaching shift from **consolidation** to **differentiation**, from assignments eliciting writing, drawing heavily on spoken language to assignments which require students to use the increasingly explicit and autonomous discourse of literate texts. This shift in pedagogical emphasis from **consolidation** tasks to

**differentiation** tasks does not mean that children must suddenly abandon their oral language resources, striving for an artificial, "bookish" style that is far removed from their experience and competence. During a period of transition children can continue to **consolidate** their oral and writing resources, even as they also begin to **differentiate** certain features of speaking and writing.

For mature writers the phases of **preparation, consolidation, and differentiation** come together in a systematic manner to produce **integration** of the complex relationships between speaking and writing. Mature writers both **consolidate** and **differentiate**. In fact, aspects of oral language continue to influence their writing: The expressive qualities most typical

of speech ("voice," "tone," "expressiveness") distinguish the character of the texts of advanced writers.

In this essay, I have presented a model which suggests how teachers may use the relationships between children's oral and written language resources to foster children's growth as writers. Most models have limitations, of course. This model makes writing development appear more linear and uni-dimensional than it is. It also oversimplifies the difficulties that students can encounter in the transitions between phases, particularly in the important shift from **consolidation** to **differentiation**. Nevertheless, the model defines sequential relationships between speaking and writing which are pedagogically useful to those of us who teach writing.