Title

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Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9106p9hr

Journal

The CATESOL Journal, 18(1)

ISSN

1535-0517

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Publication Date

2007

DOI

10.5070/B5.36323

Copyright Information

Peer reviewed

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Social-Interactive Writing for English Language Learners

■ This action research investigated the effects of the Social-Interactive Writing for English Language Learners (SWELL) method on the social interaction and cognitive writing processes of a pair of elementary school Mandarin-speaking English language learners (ELLs) in California. In the study, the researcher modified Topping's paired-writing method, a highly structured process-writing approach, and designed a new model called the SWELL method to teach the pair of ELLs. Complex social and cognitive behaviors of participants were found in the study. The teacher's constant modeling of strategies to promote a positive attitude in the SWELL method played a crucial role. Use of L1 between partners was also found to be important, since it helped promote more in-depth discussions during the interaction. Furthermore, contrary to Vygotsky's (1934/2000) idea of pairing an expert with a novice to promote effective learning, this study indicated that pairing intermediate-level novice ELLs also led to constructive social collaboration and high-level cognitive thinking skills.

Introduction

The process-writing approach has been a strongly influential trend in composition research and pedagogy in the educational institutions in the US since the 1970s. It is believed to help students acquire awareness of their writing processes, learn to write from a reader's perspective, and promote students' participation in editing their own and their peers' written products through peer response activities. However, one of the main problems second language researchers have found in the process-writing approach is the lack of structures when writers interact with each other (Berg, 1999; Ferris, 2003; Peregoy & Boyle, 2001; Raimes, 1999). It means that there are usually no clear and specific guidelines in the process-writing approach, other than general direction such as brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, for students to follow when they write together with their peers. For example, Berg (1999) mentioned that a largely ignored aspect of peer response to writing, one of the widely used activities in the process-writing approach, is a carefully planned peer-response training session to provide learners with appropriate skills to participate in the required tasks. Peregoy and Boyle (2001) also emphasized that students need explicit guidelines on what kinds of things to say and how to say them when they give writing comments to their writing partners so as to benefit their group members. They also concluded that without a structured method to implement the process approach, constructive collaboration seems unlikely to happen, especially with inexperienced writers such as English language learners.

Topping (2001), a first language (L1) composition researcher, designed a clearly defined and structured procedure called "paired-writing method" to compensate for the lack of structured guidelines in the process-writing approach. It was developed to help native English speakers assist each other to write. The paired-writing method consists of the typical steps in the process-writing approach such as brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. However, each step is highly structured by providing writers with brief directions to follow when they work together. Topping also added the steps of reading and evaluating to the writing

process. In addition, Topping adopted Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1934/2000) construct of pairing up an expert with a novice in the paired-writing method to scaffold interactive and collaborative behaviors in writing. Thus, in the paired-writing method, student writers were placed in pairs, as the *Helper* and the *Writer*, to learn to write by following a six-step writing process of: Step 1–Ideas, Step 2–Draft, Step 3–Read, Step 4–Edit, Step 5–Best Copy, and Step 6–Evaluate. Because of the different needs of ELLs, the researcher in this study decided to adopt the six steps in Topping's paired-writing method but to modify it and implement it to teach a pair of Mandarin-speaking ELLs in the elementary school she taught. The method the researcher implemented is named Social-Interactive Writing for English Language Learners (SWELL) method (Appendix A). Throughout the writing process using the SWELL method, the ELLs in this study were expected to show productive social behaviors and complex cognitive thinking and problem-solving skills. The details of the SWELL method are presented in the following section.

Theoretical Framework

The SWELL method is primarily based on the construct of social-cognitive theory, which integrates research on social context with research on cognition (Freedman, Dyson, Flower, & Chafe, 1987). In this section the social constructivist views are reviewed first, followed by the cognitivist view, and then by the integrative social-cognitive theory. Finally, the researcher shows how the SWELL method is tied to the social-cognitive theory.

Social constructivists such as Vygotsky (1934/2000) believe that from the moment of birth we enter into social relations that shape and mold us. The relationships we establish with others make us complex and dynamic social individuals. In Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) construct (Vygotsky, 1934/2000), he stated that human learning is always mediated through others, such as parents, peers, and teachers, and the interactions themselves are mediated. He believed that setting up a social context in which a more capable peer gives guidance and support for a less proficient writer would provide a supportive structured framework to scaffold interactive and collaborative behaviors. Vygotsky explained that learning involves the internalization of the social-interaction process, so the learner progresses from complex to conceptual thinking.

A supporter of social constructivist theory, Santos (2001) furthered clarified that collaborative writing was not the same as mere working in groups. Instead, while students write in groups, the implementer should ensure that a composition class proceeds via constructive and well-planned group negotiation, that each participant is involved in an engaging and interactive learning climate, and that the final product represents the group's best shared effort. In other words, guiding students to write collaboratively in an organized step-by-step order becomes a crucial factor that leads to improvement in students' writing.

At the same time, cognitivists such as Flower (1993) and Hayes (1996) emphasized developing writers' mental processes, particularly strategies to create and revise text. Their model attempted to investigate what goes on in the mind of individuals as they go through the writing process, regardless of what the product looks like. They also placed considerable value on higher-order cognitive thinking and problem-solving skills such as planning, defining rhetorical problems, positioning problems in a larger context, operationalizing definitions, proposing solutions, and generating firmly grounded conclusions (Flower & Hayes, 1981, 1983). Cognitivists believe that writing is a process of discovering and revising ideas that should emphasize the writer's prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing processes. They also stated that the writing process should be learner-centered, with students developing writing strategies to meet various audiences ' needs on different topics.

Combining both the social and cognitive theories, Freedman et al. (1987) proposed a social-cognitive approach to studying writing, an approach that integrates research on social context with research on cognition. Based on past research, their critique was that studies on the writing processes either focused on cognitive processes with little attention to social processes, or focused on social process without investigating closely how it helped promote the higher-order cognitive thinking skills in one's writing. Freedman et al. (1987) explained that all learning is socially based. They stated that "cognition and social context interact in writers' understanding of the task before them, in the knowledge they bring to writing, and in the options they possess and entertain" (p. 2). Thus, they proposed that research on this theoretical concept should place instruction in writing squarely in its social context and help us see that learning to write is not simply skill acquisition, but it also is learning to enter into discourse communities that have their own rules and expectations. This integrative approach is concerned with the cognitive process people go through to write in interaction with their peers and teachers. Freedman et al. (1987) claimed that social-cognitive theory in writing-process research could help integrate a social and cognitive perspective on composition studies, provide us with the opportunity to recognize the patterned variety, and plot courses that could lead to more effective teaching and learning for all writers.

In this study, the goal was to design a clearly defined and structured writing method that would help develop writers' higher-level cognitive thinking skills in a constructive social setting. Adopting the essence of both the social and cognitive theories described above, the researcher thus developed the SWELL method and implemented it to teach a pair of ELLs. The characteristics of the social-cognitive-theory–based SWELL method are as follows:

1. The SWELL method involved pairing up 2 Mandarin-speaking ELLs, one being the Helper and the other being the Writer, who went through the stages of the writing process in collaboration. It ensured that writing is regarded as a social process relying on shared ideas and relationships between people.

2. As Santos (2001) mentioned, teachers should ensure that students write collaboratively under well-thought-out guidelines, so the researcher developed six structured steps in the SWELL method that were believed to meet the participants' linguistic and instructional needs as well as to help the ELLs proceed via constructive pair negotiation. The structured guidelines in the flowchart (Appendix A) were expected to promote the participants' higher-order cognitive thinking and problem-solving skills during their interaction.

3. In Vygotsky's (1934/2000) ZPD construct, he suggested that one should set up a social context in which an expert gives a novice guidance and support to provide a supportive structured framework to scaffold interactive and collaborative behaviors. Adopting the ZPD construct, the researcher assigned the roles of a Helper and a Writer in the SWELL method. However, the pairing up of an expert and a novice was not appropriate in this study. The reason was that in this study, both the ELL participants were at the same writing level and both were considered inexperienced writers. Thus, the pairing of the 2 Mandarin-speaking ELLs in this study was novice-novice in nature. In addition, the pair alternated the roles of Helper and Writer in each writing session to ensure that each of the participants had an equal opportunity to offer help to his or her partner and to receive help from his or her partner.

Purpose and Needs

The purpose of this action research was to investigate how the SWELL method affects a pair of Mandarin-speaking English language learners' social interaction and cognitive

writing process. The researcher was interested in the Mandarin-speaking ELLs for two reasons. First, in the district where the researcher taught, many of the Mandarin-speaking ELLs were provided with a literacy-rich learning environment at home. However, after teaching this group of students for 6 years in the district, the researcher noticed that their L2 writing skill was not very impressive compared to their other language skills, such as listening, speaking, and reading. Moreover, their L2 writing progress was much slower than other groups of ELLs in the school district, such as Israeli and European ELLs. The researcher wanted to find out if the SWELL method (Appendix A) would make a difference in the Mandarin-speaking ELLs' writing skills.

The second reason is that although Topping's paired-writing method has shown in several previous studies (Nixon & Topping, 2001; Sutherland & Topping, 1999; Yarrow & Topping, 2001) successful outcomes in improving L1 students' writing, no research has been conducted before in investigating its effects in an ESL/EFL setting. As researchers such as Gutierrez (1992) and Reyes (1991, 1992) pointed out that ELLs have unique instructional and linguistic needs that are different from native speakers of English when they learn to write, the researcher in this study acknowledged a crucial need to implement a structured and replicable peer-assisted writing method that was specifically designed to meet the ELLs' needs. In addition, according to Carson (1992), Chinese culture is highly collectivistic, and its pedagogical practices tend to reflect the importance of group harmony and face-saving. On the other hand, in the highly individualistic culture of the US, collaborative-writing pedagogical practices are geared to developing and maintaining individualism and individuated skills. Thus, when process-writing instruction is implemented in US classrooms to teach Mandarin-speaking ELLs, one should not automatically assume that it will be as beneficial to this group of ELLs as for many mainstream or other ethnic groups of students (Graves, 1978;

Hudelson, 1986). These reasons had motivated the researcher to conduct this study. Implementing the SWELL method is believed to fulfill the need to compensate for the lack of clearly defined structures in many process-writing activities, as well as to assist ELL writers more effectively since their linguistic and instructional needs are taken into consideration in the structured procedure. In addition, based on the social-cognitive theory upon which the SWELL method is built, participants were expected to show constructive operative social behaviors and complex cognitive thinking processes that were beneficial to their writing skills development.

Methodology

The action research lasted for 10 weeks, beginning in February 2004 and ending in April 2004. The study was scheduled once a week, 1 hour each session, and consisted of 10 sessions total. For each session, the participants were given a narrative writing topic to work on collaboratively. At the end of each session, they were expected to complete their final written product. In the first session the researcher trained the participants to follow and use the procedure and strategies listed in the SWELL Method Flowchart (Appendix A). After the training and modeling, the participants began to write as partners using the SWELL method. To meet the participants' linguistic and instructional needs, the 2 Mandarin-speaking ELLs were encouraged to use their first language when necessary during their interaction. They were also provided with L1 resources such as a bilingual dictionary and the researcher's explanation and comments in the L1 when necessary.

Because of the fact that both May and Brian were at the same writing level, the novice-expert arrangement based on Vygotsky's ZPD construct (1934/2000) could not be applied since neither could be considered more or less proficient than the other. Thus, in each writing session in the study, the participants alternated the role of being Helper and Writer. For example, in the 1st,

3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th sessions, May was the Helper and Brian was the Writer. In the 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, and 10th sessions, May became the Writer and Brian the Helper. During the study, the participants followed the procedure and strategies in the SWELL Method Flowchart (Appendix A) when they wrote.

Setting

The participants, Brian and May, were Mandarin-speaking students in the researcher's English Language Development (ELD) class. An ELD program is a district-specific instructional program provided for ELLs in the district where the researcher taught. ELLs who do not pass the district's language-arts benchmark when they first enroll in the district are sent to the ELD classes for a year. As in many mainstream classes, students in the ELD program are in self-contained classes taught by teachers who possess a Cross-cultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) credential. In an ELD class, subject matter is taught entirely in English and is organized to promote second language acquisition while teaching cognitively demanding, grade-level–appropriate material through specialized strategies such as Specialized Designed Academic Instruction Delivered in English (SDAIE). To exit the ELD program, ELLs have to pass the grade-level speaking, listening, reading, and writing assessments administered by the school district at the end of each school year and the annual California English Language Development Test (CELDT). If the ELLs pass the assessment, they will be put in the mainstream education classes in a new school year. If they do not pass the assessment, their parents are given the option of either continuing enrolling their children in the ELD program or moving their children to the mainstream education program.

Participants

During the time when the researcher was planning to conduct the study, there were 6 Mandarin-speaking ELLs in her class. After contacting their parents to obtain their permission for their children to be in the study, 2 participants responded that they were willing to participate in this study. In this study, pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' confidentiality.

Participant 1: Brian. Brian was a 5th-grade ELL who immigrated to the United States from mainland China in August 2002. He was an only child, and he used Mandarin at home with his parents. He finished 3rd grade in China and has attended the 4th- and 5th-grade ELD program since arriving in the United States. Based on his performance in the language arts in L2 in 2003–2004, he met the grade-level standard in his listening, speaking, and reading, but he was still below grade level in his writing skills. His grade in overall writing score in the first-semester report card (December, 2003), based on the researcher's School District Holistic Scoring Rubric for ELLs (Appendix B), indicated that he was at the intermediate level. His overall writing score was 3.

Participant 2: May. May was a 3rd-grade ELL who immigrated to the United States from Taiwan in June 2002. She attended kindergarten and 1st grade in Taiwan. When she first arrived in the US, she was enrolled in the ELD program as a 2nd-grader. She used Mandarin with her parents most of the time, but she preferred to use English with her sister. May had an active personality and was improving in her listening, speaking, and reading skills, but she showed slow progress in her writing skill. Her grade in overall writing score in the first-semester report card (December, 2003) based on the researcher's School District Holistic Scoring Rubric for ELLs (Appendix B) indicated that she was at the intermediate level, the same as Brian, who was her writing partner in this study. Her overall writing score was 2.63.

Training and Modeling of the Use of Appropriate Social Strategies

Before each writing session, the researcher modeled and reviewed with the

participants the appropriate social strategies used during the writing process. Constantly providing modeling before each writing session helped each participant become familiar with the appropriate social strategies and helped foster a positive attitude between the participants. It also ensured that the participants worked together with the intention of helping each other, not criticizing each other in negative ways. The social strategies were modeled to the participants through role-play. In the role-play, the researcher partnered with a teacher at the school where the researcher taught. They demonstrated to the participants one scenario in which inappropriate social skills were used and one scenario in which appropriate social skills were used in the following situations:

1. Offering praise. The role-play showed how to give compliments to one's partner. Suggestions the researcher gave to the participants were: Don't hesitate to complement your partner when you like his or her ideas or writing. Say, "I like this idea" or "That is a good point."

2. Offering encouragement. The role-play showed that the Helper may provide the Writer with encouragement when the Writer could not move on with his or her writing by saying, "Don't worry, let's work together to solve the problem."

3. Discouraging authoritativeness. The researcher emphasized that very often there was no definite right or wrong answer to an issue. The role-play showed that one should avoid saying, "You are wrong!" when your partner brings up a point with which you don't agree. Suggestions given were: "I see your point. But I don't agree with you because…"

4. Discouraging passivity. The researcher also emphasized that in a collaborative learning environment one should not feel shy to defend one's view. Suggestions the role-play gave were: If your partner disagreed with you on an issue, you should avoid saying, "Whatever you say."

Instead, you can say, "Thank you for your idea. But I believe …"

5. Discouraging negative language. The researcher reminded participants not to use language that would put their partner down when they made comments on their partner's writing. For example, words such as "stupid," "crazy," and "nonsense" should be avoided.

6. Asking for clarification politely. The researcher modeled ways to ask for clarification of writing. Suggestions given were: Avoid saying, "Terrible. I don't know what you are writing about." Say, "I don't understand your point. Can you tell me what you mean, please?"

Implementation of the SWELL Method

In the SWELL method, the Helper and the Writer followed six structured steps (Appendix A) while writing as partners. The six steps are: Step 1–Ideas, Step 2–Draft, Step 3–Read, Step 4–Edit, Step 5–Best Copy, and Step 6–Teacher Evaluate. The SWELL method was used to help ELLs learn to write narrative writing. Unlike the brief direction given in Topping's paired-writing method, the SWELL method provided writers with more detailed guidelines to meet ELLs' linguistic and instructional needs. The following section provides information regarding what modifications were made in each step in the SWELL method and how it was implemented in this study to achieve its optimal effectiveness.

Step 1: Ideas. In the paired-writing method, writers were provided with merely words such as "who, what, where, when, how, why, do, to, with" to help them brainstorm ideas. In the SWELL method, to help ELLs understand important components such as character, setting, problem, and solution in narrative writing, the researcher provided the participants with complete questions that mostly begin with "wh" words to generate ideas. The questions are as follows:

Who did what?
Who did what to whom?

What happened?

Where did it happen?

When did it happen?

Who are the important people (main characters) in the story?

Why did he/she/they do that?

What was the problem?

How did he/she/they solve the problem?

What happened next?

Then what?

Did anyone learn anything at the end?

What was it?

(Ask any questions you can think of)…?

To help the Writer stimulate ideas, the Helper began by asking the Writer the list of questions stated above. The Helper could raise the questions with the Writer in any relevant order. A blank option (. . .) on the list was provided to indicate that the Helper could think up his or her own questions. As the Writer responded verbally to the questions asked by the Helper, the Writer also noted key words. To encourage the Writer to come up with his or her own ideas, the Writer was also told that he or she might also add any relevant information he or she wanted to write about to the notes.

The pair then reviewed the keywords in the notes and found out if the order or organization should be changed. This could be indicated by numbering the ideas. Alternatively, the ideas may seem to fall into obvious sections, which can be dealt with in turn. Such sections could be color-coded and the ideas belonging to them underlined or highlighted with a marker. Pairs may also choose to draw lines linking or around related ideas, so that a "semantic map" is constructed. Other ways of organizing ideas include word webs, clustering, and mind maps.

Step 2: Draft. The key words in the notes created in Step 1 should be placed where both members of the pair can easily see them. As shown in Appendix A, there are five different stages in Step 2, and each has varied degrees of task difficulty. The researcher chose one specific stage from the five stages given to the participants before they moved on to writing.

However, one should keep in mind that the stages chosen should not be stagnant. They should rely on the students' writing development. In other words, throughout the study, teachers may choose a higher stage for the pair to work on when the students progress in their writing. They may also go back one stage (or more) when they find that their students encounter a particularly "hard" bit.

After the teacher chose a stage, the paired writers would receive instruction from the teacher regarding what they were expected to do in that particular stage. The pair then proceeded to write. In Step 2, Draft, the teacher emphasized that the writer did not have to worry about spelling too much when he or she wrote. There was great emphasis on having the students continue writing and allowing the ideas to flow.

Step 3: Read. The Writer read the writing aloud. If he or she read a word incorrectly, the Helper provided support if he or she were capable of doing so.

Step 4: Edit. Helper and Writer looked at the draft together, and the Writer considered where he or she thought improvements were necessary. At the same time, the Helper also considered if there were any improvement the Writer might want to make. The problem words, phrases, or sentences could be marked with a colored pen, pencil, or highlighter. There are four edit levels in this step. They are *meaning*, *order* (referring to the organization of the separate ideas in the text, organization within a phrase or sentence, or organization of the order of sentences), *style* (which includes the word choice and sentence structure), *spelling*, and *punctuation*. The Writers and Helpers may wish to inspect the draft more than once, checking on different criteria on each occasion. In Topping's paired-writing method, only words such as "meaning, order, spelling, punctuation" were listed. To provide more scaffolding to ELLs, the researcher changed the single-word direction to complete questions in this step. The researcher also added one more category, "style," to the question list since it was one of the writing components listed in the researcher's School

District Holistic Scoring Rubric for ELLs (Appendix B).

While editing, the Writer would ask himself or herself the following questions:

1. Does the Helper (H) understand what I want to say in my writing? (idea and meaning)
2. Did my writing have a clear beginning, middle, and ending? (order)
3. Did I use all the words and write all the sentences correctly? (style)
4. Did I spell all the words correctly? (spelling)
5. Did I put all the punctuation (,.?!"…") in the right places? (punctuation)

The questions for the Helper are:

1. Do I understand what the Writer (W) wants to say in his or her writing? (idea and meaning)
2. Did the writing have a clear beginning, middle, and ending? (order)
3. Did W use all words and write all sentences correctly? (style)
4. Did W spell all words correctly? (spelling)
5. Did W put all punctuation (,.?!"…") in the right places? (punctuation)

The order of each question shows the ranking of the importance of each criterion, the first question being the most important, and the last being the least. Questions 1 and 2 (which are bolded) are the two most important questions the pair should pay attention to while editing the written products. With the questions in mind, the Helper marked any areas the Writer had missed, and the Writer could make any additional suggestions about changes based on his or her own reflection on the writing. The symbol "↔" between Step 4 and 5 in Appendix A indicates that it is an interactional process between the Writer and the Helper in the Edit step. The pair discussed the best correction to make, and when agreement was reached, the new version was inserted in the text (preferably by the Writer).

If the pair had the slightest doubt about spelling, they could refer to the dictionary.

Step 5: Best Copy. The Writer then usually copied out a neat or best version of the corrected draft. The Helper could provide help when necessary, depending on the skill of the Writer. The best copy was a joint product of the pair and both students should have their names on it. The pair then turned in the completed copy to the teacher.

Step 6: Teacher Evaluate. Teacher Evaluate was the final step. In Topping's paired-writing method, this step was called "Student Evaluate" since students evaluated their own writing. However, because of the fact that the participants in this study were considered novice ELL writers, the researcher changed this step to "Teacher Evaluate" so that the participants would have an opportunity to receive comments and instructive feedback directly from the researcher. When the Writer and the Helper turned in their best copy, the researcher met with them and provided them with explicit writing and grammatical instruction as well as corrective feedback. The teacher's comments focused on *meaning/idea*, *order*, *style*, *spelling*, and *punctuation*, which were the five editing criteria stated in Step 4. The writers then were expected to review the correction and feedback together as a pair.

Procedure for Information Gathering

To examine how the SWELL method affected the participants' social interaction and cognitive writing process, field notes from participant observation were used. As a participant observer, the researcher introduced the SWELL method to the participants, taught them the strategies in each step, and observed their writing processes. Each session was also videotaped and transcribed by the researcher for reviewing purposes after the study. The participants were treated as individuals as well as a cooperative pair. While observing the participants, the researcher interpreted the patterns and themes that emerged to gain a deep under-

standing of each individual's cognitive writing-process development with the SWELL method. In addition, field notes taken from observing the interaction and collaboration between the participants were used to examine the role of the social aspect in L2 writing.

Results

Based on the social-cognitive theory upon which the SWELL method is built, participants were expected to show rich and complex social behaviors as well as cognitive thinking processes that were beneficial to their writing skills during their interaction. Through careful observation and review of the transcripts based on the 10 video recordings of interactions between the pair of participants, the researcher was able to report on the findings in the participants' social interaction and cognitive writing process when they used the SWELL method to write.

Social Aspect

The social interaction between the two participants engaging in the SWELL method was complex and productive. The participants demonstrated various types of social behaviors, categorized by the researcher as "being supportive," "helping to brainstorm ideas," "feeling responsible for partner's writing," and "developing trust." The following provides detailed examples for each social behavior.

Being Supportive. The participants supported and cooperated with each other to accomplish a writing task. *Example:* In Step 1–Ideas, both May and Brian worked together to decide the sequence of the events in the story written.

May: It is hard to decide.
Brian: That's OK. I can help you. (He points at the line.) I think this sounds like beginning, so you can put number 1 here.

This example shows that Brian not only gave the necessary support to his partner, but he also provided her with assistance in organizing her ideas in writing, such as which part should be in the beginning of the paragraph.

Helper Helping Writer to Brainstorm Ideas. When the Helper saw that the Writer could not move on with his or her writing, he or she came up with questions to help promote ideas for the writing. The pair was able to do so without strictly following the questions listed in Step 1 in the flowchart. *Example:* May was supposed to describe how she would like to spend a day with a famous person she admired. But she did not know who to write about.

Brian: Who is the famous person?
May: I don't know.
Brian: Any cartoon character, writer, illustrator?
May: I like Dr. Seuss's books.
Brian: So, maybe…(He paused and then looked at May.)
May: Oh, yeah. Maybe I can write about Dr. Seuss.

Brian's question helped May find the main character for her story.

Feeling Responsible for Partner's Writing. When the text written by the Writer was questioned or criticized by a third party such as a reader, the Helper felt that he or she was responsible for the missing information or parts that needed to be revised. *Example:*

> In Step 6–Teacher Evaluate, the researcher asked the Writer: You said that "I saw a little lion chasing a rabbit." But you didn't tell me where it happened."
> Brian felt that he should be responsible for the missing information. He asked May: "You wrote it in the notes, right?"
> Then he turned to the researcher and said, "Actually, I should read the notes to her when she wrote it. I forgot, sorry."

Developing Trust. This refers to one's belief in the sincerity and ability of one's writing partner. During the study, the researcher made sure that the participants were given

time and opportunities to establish friendship. The researcher also constantly taught and modeled appropriate strategies to foster a positive attitude between the participants. It was noticed that mutual trust gradually developed between the participants throughout the study. Brian changed from not wanting to cooperate with his partner, because of lack of trust in the beginning sessions, to being relaxed in the social interaction as well as being trustful and open-minded to his partner's suggestions. The following two detailed examples show how the gradual growth of these two participants' relationship made a difference in their social interaction and the quality of their ideas in writing. The first interaction was transcribed during the first writing session when the SWELL method was first introduced to the participants and when they were first paired as writing partners. The second one was transcribed from the sixth writing session when the pair had become more familiar with the SWELL method and also had become closer friends.

Example of the first interaction (from the first writing session): Brian was writing about an occasion when he got lost in an unfamiliar place. May was his Helper.

May: Who did what to who?
Brian: No one did anything to me. Something just happened to me.
May: Oh. What happened?

Brian could not move on. May went on and asked more questions.

May: What happened? Anything happened, like, when you go to a place, and your parents forgot you. What would you do?
Brian: I got lost.
May: How did you get lost?
Brian: (Quiet, no response.)
May: Like you want to go to a place, you forgot your mom and dad and you just found your place yourself?
Brian: No.
May: Then what did you do? Did your mom

find that you are lost?
Brian: I got lost at an unfamiliar place.
May: What happened to you?

Brian did not answer. So May went on elaborating her question.

May: Did anyone find you? Like did your friend found you?
Brian: (No response.)
May: How about did you have a sister or brother?
Brian: No.
May: Did you go to the police station?
Brian: Why?
May: So you can tell the police that you can't find your parents.
Brian: I wrote, "My friend found me inside a house." I think that's enough. You should ask the questions on the list.

Throughout the interaction, Brian's response was mostly brief and his attitude showed his doubt of May's ability in helping him to generate ideas. However, several weeks after they had worked together as writing partners, the researcher noticed that they had established a much closer bond with each other, which helped develop their trust in each other. The following example shows how much the social interaction between them and the quality of ideas had changed because of the increase of trust.

Example of the second interaction (from the sixth writing session): The topic for the writing session was to describe how one would spend in 3 hours a prize of $10,000. Brian was the Writer, and May was the Helper. Instead of beginning the question-answer activity in Step 1–Ideas in the SWELL method right away as they did in the previous example, they chatted a little about their opinion on this topic. This is an indicator that they had become more comfortable with each other.

Brian: If I had so much money, I would save it.
May: I would spend it all.

Brian: But then you will have no money.

May: But the topic said, "Pretend."

Brian: That's right. (He paused a little.) OK, let's start. Why don't you ask me questions now?

May: Who are the main characters in the story?

Brian: Me.

May: What happened?

Brian: I got $10,000.

May: When did it happen?

Brian: Sunday 12 o'clock.

May: Where did it happen? What place?

Brian: At the park.

May: What is the problem?

Brian: I need to spend $10,000 in 3 hours.

May: Then what?

Brian: So I went to the shopping center to buy lots of things.

May: What did you buy?

Brian: A bike and a robot.

May: Do you still have money left? What else can you buy?

Brian: I still have a lot of money left. Maybe I can buy a tree house.

May: Good idea! I always want a tree house. How much is it to buy all these things?

Brian: (He calculated the entire cost.) I still have $4,000 left. Can I just throw it in the water?

May: Maybe. How about buy a camera?

Brian: I don't need a camera, though. Oh, maybe a TV. I am done!

In this example, Brian was not resistant or hesitant in responding to May's questions. He even chatted with her before beginning to write. Because of Brian's increasing trust and cooperation, May did not have to come up with many extra questions to help him move on. In addition, we can see that his acceptance of May had helped the ideas for his writing flow more smoothly and improve in quality.

Cognitive Aspect

In addition to constructive cooperative social behaviors, the structured design of the SWELL method had helped generate many complex and dynamic cognitive activities between the participants. The following paragraphs describe the types of cognitive strategies the participants employed when they used the SWELL method to learn to write.

Use of L1 or L1 Dictionary. Vygotsky (1934/2000) stated that one's use of psychological sign systems such as language and external resources to assist social interaction is the sign of using semiotic mediation, which is a strategy necessary for higher mental functioning. The participants in this study were found making use of this strategy to cope with task demands during their interaction. They used their first language (L1) and external aids available such as hard copy and/or electronic dictionaries for help. *Example*:

May: What would you do if you have $10,000?

Brian: I want to buy a huge huge huge house. You know what I mean?

May: Like a *bie shu* (a Chinese term)?

Brian: That's right. What do you say it in English?

May: I don't know. I have a dictionary. (She then typed the Chinese phonetic symbols in her bilingual electronic dictionary and found the word.) Here.

Brian: I don't know this word. (He read the spelling out loud to himself.) M-a-n-s-i-o-n. But I'll just copy it down.

Use of Visual Aids. Unlike borrowing tools such as one's L1 or dictionary as resources, another cognitive mediating strategy is the use of visual aids. When the Writer wanted to express a complex idea but was not able to use words to do so, he or she might think of using visual aids such as drawings or pictures to help his or her Helper understand what he or she tried to express. This strategy was also observed in this study when May (the Writer) wanted to describe the image of an animal she created in her story to Brian, her Helper. *Example:*

Brian: How does the lion look?

May: I don't know how to say it. Can I draw a picture to show you? (Then she went on and drew a lion on a piece of paper.)

Brian: I see. So, it's a small lion.

May: No, no. How can a small lion have so much hair? (She then drew another lion on her paper to show Brian.) The lion has some *huxu* (a Chinese term for "moustache").

May: (Then she switched to Mandarin to provide further description.) *Na zhi shi zi yi jing hen da le, bu shi xiao de* (The lion is a grown-up one, not a baby).

Brian: Oh, I get it! Maybe you can write, "A father lion."

May actually wanted to express that although the lion she had in mind looked small, it was in fact a grown male lion. (This is a rather complicated idea for a 3rd-grader to express.) May created such a unusual-looking lion for her story, but she was not able to describe its appearance in words to Brian when he asked her what the lion looked like. To make herself understood, she believed that drawing a picture to show him would help him comprehend what she meant. When she realized Brian was still confused, she switched to her L1 to provide further clarification.

Scaffolding. The researcher found that throughout the study, scaffolding was a commonly found cognitive mediating strategy in paired writing. Its main function was for the writer and his or her writing partner to assist themselves and each other in achieving task goals. Scaffolding required rather high mental functioning. The strategies found included "writer self-correcting," "writer evaluating helper's comments," and "helper evaluating the usefulness of own feedback." Examples are shown below.

The first scaffolding strategy, "writer self-correcting" occurred when the Writer self-corrected himself or herself after he or she received questions or feedback from the Helper. *Example:*

Brian: (Brian wanted to explain in his writing how he spent his $10,000.) So, I went to the shopping center to buy lots of things.

May: (May realized that "to buy lots of things" is too general, and so she went on asking.) What did you buy?

From this question, Brian realized that his information was too general when he said, "To buy lots of things," and so he crossed out "lots of things" in his notes and listed two items, which were a bike and a robot, on his notes. Brian self-corrected himself after he heard the question, which he believed was rather reasonable feedback asked by his Helper.

The second scaffolding strategy, "writer evaluating helper's comments," occurred when the Helper commented on the writing or offered feedback, and then the Writer evaluated the usefulness of the comments before deciding if the suggestion should be accepted. *Example:*

Brian: What did you two do?

May: I kicked him all day.

Brian: I don't think that's a good idea. Maybe you can say something like, "I am sorry because I kicked you."

May: Good idea.

May realized that Brian's suggestion was a better one than her original idea, and thus she responded by saying, "Good idea." She then added to her draft, "I said sorry to Dr. Seuss because I kicked him."

The third scaffolding strategy found is called "helper evaluating the usefulness of own feedback." When the Helper offered help to the Writer, he or she assessed consciously whether his or her feedback was helpful to the Writer. When he or she realized that he or she was not really helping the Writer, such as giving him or her an answer directly and thus making it too easy for him or her, the Helper held himself or herself back from providing further help. *Example:* May (the Writer) explained to Brian (the Helper) that the main

problem in the story she wrote was that "I couldn't find my favorite book." Brian came up with more questions to help her expand her ideas.

Brian: What book couldn't you find?
May: What do you mean?
Brian: What is the book's title?
May: I don't know.
Brian: I can give you some ideas. (Then, he wrote the title *Harry Potter*. After awhile, he decided to erase it.)
Brian: Maybe you should think about a book's name yourself. I shouldn't write it for you.

Later in her draft, May wrote "Sleeping Beauty." The reason Brian erased the book's name he wrote was that he realized that giving May a direct answer would make it too easy for her, and that it might not be an appropriate or the best way to help May become a better writer. Thus, he evaluated his own feedback and decided that he should erase the book title he wrote so that May could come up with a title on her own.

Discussion

An in-depth field observation in this study provided the researcher a great opportunity to discover the participants' dynamic and productive interaction when they used the SWELL method to write. With the help of the structured guidelines in the SWELL method, the participants were able to participate in constructive collaboration. The participants were found to be independent and comfortable while following the procedures in the SWELL Method Flowchart (Appendix A). Many of the ideas became richer, more vivid, and more organized because of the effective collaboration between the participants. Many of the cognitive mediating strategies that required one's higher mental functioning were also demonstrated during the interaction.

Furthermore, the relationship of the Writer and the Helper plays an important role in ensuring success of the SWELL method. The modeling of appropriate social strategies before each writing session had proven to be helpful since they generated the participants' constructive cooperation and helped improve their relationship while working together. For example, at the early writing sessions, Brian's refusal to accept May's help frustrated both of them. Their writing could not move on easily because of doubts and lack of cooperation between the pair. But with the use of appropriate social-interaction strategies such as, "That's OK, I can help you" (see transcription in the Results section), Brian and May gradually built a closer friendship and became more accepting of their partner's comments, which led to the improvement in the productivity and quality of their interaction. They felt more relaxed and more willing to voice their opinion, which in turn had contributed to the development of richer ideas and better organization for their writing. It indicated that in paired writing, trust and bond between the members can be crucial and one of the determining factors that decide whether the peer-writing method works effectively. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers give the students sufficient time and opportunities to establish friendship. Teachers need to be fully aware of the possibility of any behaviors, such as attitudes of passivity and authoritativeness, that might negatively affect the relationship between the writers.

Moreover, unlike many collaborative writing programs implemented in ELL classrooms, the researcher in this study encouraged the participants to use their L1, Mandarin, when they interacted with each other. The researcher also provided them with help in the L1 when necessary. The use of the L1 was believed to fulfill the linguistic and instructional needs of the ELLs. From the examples given in the Results section, it was noticed that allowing the use of the L1 in the study provided the participants with the opportunity to be involved in using more in-depth cognitive strategies during the process of interaction. For example, the participants sometimes used L1 vocabulary to express

their thoughts or meanings when they did not know the equivalent vocabulary in English. The Helper was able to provide further scaffolding during the interaction based on his or her understanding of the L1 vocabulary used by the Writer. The Helper attempted to help find the equivalent terms for the L1 vocabulary in English and participated actively in the process of making the Writer's writing better because he or she knew what his or her partner meant. The feedback or comments made during the interaction would not have been as productive if the L1 were not allowed or encouraged in the ELL setting in this study. In addition, the use of L1 resources such as bilingual dictionaries provided the participants with valuable assistance that an English-only setting would not be able to offer.

Conclusion and Implication

The questions listed in Step 1 (Appendix A) helped the Writers establish a reader-based perspective while writing, which means that they wrote with a sense of audience. At the same time the questions listed also helped the Helpers establish a writer-based perspective while reading, which means that they were able to read the written text through the eyes of the author. During the interactive process, the ability to write like a reader and read like a writer enabled both the Writer and the Helper to reflect on their partner's comments as well as to evaluate the feedback they offered to their partner. This observation was consistent with Katz's (2004) argument that if peer response is carefully guided, ELLs are capable of providing helpful feedback on content, despite their nonnative proficiency in English.

In addition, although the method was modified to meet the instructional needs of ELLs, it should not be regarded as a one-size-fits-all method. The participants in this study were intermediate-level ELL writers, and they were found to be rather independent and comfortable with the procedures listed on the SWELL Method Flowchart (Appendix

A) after being trained to use the method. However, whether the exact procedure would be appropriate for less proficient ELL writers remains unknown until further studies have been conducted. Much teacher modeling and guidance might be required for this peer-assisted method to function effectively with low proficiency ELL writers. In other words, while using the SWELL method to promote ELLs' writing, researchers or classroom teachers may have to further modify the procedures in the flowchart based on individual learners' specific needs. One should not adopt the entire SWELL method without considering the L2 proficiency level of the target population.

Another implication is that pairing only an expert with a novice to achieve effective learning can be no more than a simplified view. Vygotsky's (1934/2000) concept of expert-novice pairing suggests that learning takes place most effectively when instruction is socially orchestrated, especially by having students work in an "expert-novice" social setting. In Vygotsky's framework the key concept is "expert-novice pairing," or having a novice student work with someone, such as an adult, who is more proficient and mature in a skill.

This study, however, examined the effect of peer-assisted writing in a novice-novice pair. The participants wrote in a pair and they alternated the roles of the Writer and the Helper. They were both regarded as "novice" writers since they were intermediate-level ELL writers who did not meet the exit requirement of the district to advance to the mainstream classes. This study showed that in a novice-novice pair, effective learning could happen during the process of the novice writers' interaction. Simply looking at the labels of "novice" and "expert" oversimplifies the issue. A thoughtful and well-structured design of a process-writing approach might be the key to benefiting the learners. Although the participants in this study were formed based on novice-novice pairing, they participated in dynamic, complex, effective, and constructive interaction as do many "expert-novice" pairs.

In addition, some past studies (Carson & Nelson, 1994, 1996) indicated that peer-assisted writing, although effective in individualistic cultures such as among native speakers of English in American educational settings, did not receive similar results in the Chinese ESL group. This was due to the fact that Chinese students' primary goal was to maintain group harmony, an important "virtue" in collectivistic cultures, which affected the nature and types of interaction they allowed themselves in group discussions. In this study, however, the conscious effort in maintaining group harmony was not found. Instead, many comments were made and dynamic interaction took place. It indicates that a peer-assisted writing model may still play a significant role in promoting writing skills of ELLs whose culture is collectivistic. In this study, the participants had lived in the US for at least a year when the study was conducted. Their young age and more than a year of exposure to the American individualistic culture might have helped them overcome the initial barriers that Carson and Nelson's (1994, 1996) adult participants faced in collaborative writing. Therefore, it may be suggested that the degree of the learners' familiarity with and exposure to Western values can be another important factor that determines whether the SWELL method works successfully in a Mandarin-speaking ELL setting.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, some recommendations are made for future research. First, the type of writing the participants learned in this study was narrative writing. Future research is needed to determine whether the SWELL method can be generalized to other forms of writing, such as expository and persuasive writings. Second, in this study, the structured SWELL method was implemented to teach elementary school Mandarin-speaking ELLs. Future research should be conducted to examine its effects on different age groups and other nonmainstream ethnic groups. In addition, the partic-

ipants of this study were intermediate-level ELL writers in elementary school, and thus further research needs to be conducted to examine the effects of the SWELL method on ELLs of different levels of writing proficiency. Last, because of the limited scope of this study, only the description of the nature and characteristics of the various types of interaction found were covered. In future research, it is worth taking a step further to investigate which type of interaction is more conducive to learning.

Author

Adeline Teo is an assistant professor at Chun Shan Medical University, Taiwan. This article was based on a research project she conducted when she taught at Collins Elementary School, Cupertino, California, in 2004. When she lived in California, she actively participated in publishing lesson plans for the ELD programs in the Santa Clara County Office of Education. She now teaches writing and research methodology courses at Chun Shan Medical University. Her research interests include ESL/EFL writing and cooperative learning.

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Appendix A
The SWELL Method Flowchart

H = Helper   W = Writer

Step 1: Ideas

H asks W questions:

Who did what?
Who did what to whom?
What happened?
Where did it happen?
When did it happen?
Who are the important people (main characters) in the story?
Why did he/she/they do that?
What was the problem?
How did he/she/they solve the problem?
What happened next?
Then what?
Did anyone learn anything at the end? What was it?
(Ask any questions you can think of) . . . . ?

↓

W answers and takes notes. W can add things that are not in H's questions.

↓

Then both H and W read the notes. Are ideas in proper places? Make changes if needed.

↓

Step 2: Draft

Teacher will give and explain to you *one* of the following jobs.

↓

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5
H writes it all, W copies it all	H writes hard words for W	H writes hard words in rough, W copies in	H says how to spell hard words	W writes it all

↓

Use the notes; begin writing. *Don't worry* about spelling.

↓

Step 3: Read

W reads drafts out loud and makes it sound good! H corrects words read wrong if she/he can.

↓

Step 4: Edit

H and W both look at draft

W asks himself or herself:
6. ***Does H understand what I want to say in my writing? (meaning)***
7. ***Did my writing have a clear beginning, middle, and ending? (order)***
8. Did I use all the words and write all the sentences correctly? (style)
9. Did I spell all the words correctly? (spelling)
10. Did I put all the punctuation (, . ? ! "…") in the right places? (punctuation)

H asks himself or herself:
1. ***Do I understand what W wants to say in his/her writing? (meaning)***
2. ***Did the writing have a clear beginning, middle, and ending? (order)***
3. Did W use all the words and write all the sentences correctly? (style)
4. Did W spell all the words correctly? (spelling)
5. Did W put all the punctuation (, . ? ! "…") in the right places? (punctuation)

↓

W makes changes ↔ H suggests changes
Use dictionary when necessary

↓

Step 5: Best Copy

W copies "best" writing from Step 4. H may help if necessary.
Write both H & Ws' names on paper.
Turn in the completed copy to teacher.

↓

Step 6: Teacher Evaluate

H and W read teacher's comments together, and then discuss and make corrections.

Score	Ideas	Style	Organization	Mechanics
5	Develops topic with the right details, examples, reasons	Word choice is precise rather than general; superior use of sentence structure and vocabulary	Clear plan of organization with an inviting introduction, thoughtful transitions, and a satisfying conclusion	Superior use of spelling, punctuation and grammar
4	Develops topic with details, examples, and reasons	Adequate sentence structure and vocabulary; sentences are complete and varied	Groups details into simple plan of organization	Adequate use of spelling, punctuation, and grammar
3	Develops topic with general rather than specific details, or often confusing	Use simple or unvaried sentences; vocabulary is unvaried but appropriate	Minimal organization, may only list ideas with little comment; may omit sections of the prompt or digresses from topic	Some misspellings of words; some mistakes in usage of punctuation and grammar
2	Fails to develop the topic; needs details, description, examples, and reasons	Sentences are brief, incomplete, or long with little meaning. Word choice is unvaried and inappropriate	No apparent order that shows beginning, middle, and ending of an event described	Many mistakes in spelling, usage of grammar and punctuation
1	Write only alphabets or isolated words	Write only alphabets or isolated words	Write only alphabets or isolated words	Write only alphabets or isolated words

Note: *Overall Score = The sum of each category /4 = _____*

Level	Overall Score
Beginning	*1–1.99*
Basic	*2–2.99*
Intermediate	*3–3.99*
Advanced	*4–4.99*
Nativelike	*5 or above*