

**SELF- AND PEER-PROOFREADING FOR  
EFL YOUNG BEGINNING WRITERS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Proofreading is considered a necessary skill that has been much talked about but rarely taught. In this paper, we will present a study that incorporated proofreading in some EFL beginning writing classes. About 121 second graders participated in this study. Most of the students had had over one year of writing experience prior to this study. In order to foster students' awareness on errors made in their writing, self- and peer- proofreading activities were added to their writing class in Spring, 2008. This study intended to find out if these young writers can proofread their and others' writing as well as what can be learned from such a practice. It is found that these young writers are able to self- and peer-proofread their and others' written work. In addition, we have learned that the students hold positive attitudes towards the proofreading activities; they show awareness of writing mechanics; they employ the "spelling line" strategy to express ideas; their grammar awareness is enhanced; they revise their peer's work based on their interpretation; and finally, they learn to give and take corrections. The findings shed light on the understanding of the implementation of proofreading in young EFL learners' writing class.

Key Words: young EFL learners, writing, proofreading

**INTRODUCTION**

An ongoing EFL writing project has been carried out in some primary classes for two years since August 2006 when 107 children, aged six and seven, entered Siang-he Primary School located in Chiayi County, Taiwan, to be grade-one students. The project started with Free

Drawing and/or Writing in the first semester to explore the possibility of incorporating writing into an EFL curriculum for young learners and inspire thoughts for the future design of classroom writing activities. Encouraged by the results from the students' production of free drawing and/or writing (Chang, Chang, Shen, & Hsu, 2009), we designed and carried out Structured-Web Writing activities (Chang, Chang, & Hsu, 2008a) based on the notions of the Interactive Writing Approach for the following three semesters. More amazing outcomes on students' writings were observed.

Proofreading was added to the writing project in the second semester from January 2008 to June 2008 when these students were in grade two. The observation obtained from the proofreading activity contributes to the understanding of the proofreading performance of young EFL beginning writers of limited English ability. This paper reports the practice of self- and peer-proofreading in Interactive Writing lessons in four grade-two classes of 121 EFL students.

#### **THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The writing process involves far more than putting letters and words on paper. A writer needs to have a purpose, think of the audience, generate and select ideas, construct the text, reflect and evaluate during the process. The terms used might be different; however, generally speaking, the composing process includes three stages: prewriting, writing, and revising.

Prewriting which includes any directed experience, activity or exercise that encourages the student to write is viewed by First (1995) as a stage which provides the basis for success of writing. Writing is the drafting stage during which "the writer experiences clearly what s/he has to say" (Temple, Nathan, Temple, & Burris, 1993, p. 204). Seeing revision—re-seeing—as the vital step in the writing process, Messmer (2001) believes unless writers reconsider and redraft, they are not truly writing.

The Process Writing Approach, replacing the product-oriented method, engages writers in the process of writing to cyclically and recursively progress through the stages of composing (Tompkins & Friend, 1988). Since a writer may circle back to a previous stage or ahead to another stage whenever he needs to and chooses to, all the stages should be valued. However, though each stage should be valued,

we should all agree that writing lessons need not always include all composing stages and these stages do not need equal emphasis for students of different proficiency levels and at different stages. Each stage must be viewed in light of the needs of language learners. Indeed, an effective writing program requires teachers' understanding of related issues.

For beginning writers, the revising stage is probably never the focus. However, seeing blunders (which can be neglected mistakes or developmental errors) on the written sheets produced in the above-introduced writing project, we wondered how we could help these young beginning writers become aware of these blunders. Proofreading to check local elements rather than revising to take care of global elements was thus considered. Proofreading was then introduced and implemented in the hope that being aware of blunders and being able to correct them would facilitate language learning. Proofreading, the focus of this paper, and some related issues are reviewed below.

#### **What is Proofreading?**

The explanation given in the dictionary is "When someone proofreads something such as a book or an article, they read it before it is published in order to find and mark mistakes that need to be corrected" (Sinclair et al., 1995).

Proofreading is for sure a reading skill. However, involving different skills from reading, it "involves a deliberate effort to counteract the 'normal' process of reading" (Harris 1987, p. 464). When reading for comprehension, we move eyes rapidly to focus on mostly content words, ignoring function words and even some content words (Nuttal, 1982). As soon as we grasp the meaning, our eyes move ahead. When we write, we write what we think. Thoughts are in our head. When we proofread, however, the mind reads words for our thoughts even if some words haven't been literally written on the page (Eschweiler, 1998). Therefore, simple reading, reading for comprehension, is not an effective proofreading strategy at all. Strategies for successful proofreading need to be instructed.

#### **Strategies to Proofread**

We, teachers, always remind students to proofread their writing before submitting assignments and we complain about their not doing it

or failing to locate and correct the mistakes/errors. How many of us are aware of the process of proofreading and are conscious of the strategies we, as writers, ever employ to proofread? Proofreading seems to be a necessary skill that is much talked about but rarely taught (Hall, 1984). Inexperienced writers might simply read their writing as they read anything else and argue that they did proofread when scolded by teachers for not doing it.

Deficiencies in proofreading skills are usually due to a lack of instruction rather than “carelessness, laziness, lack of motivation, dishonesty—or even mediocre verbal skills” (West 1983, p. 286). Unfortunately, teaching of spelling or mechanics does not guarantee proofreading ability (West, 1983). West explained though writers may make fewer errors as a result of that instruction, their ability to locate errors does not improve and claimed the only way to improve proofreading is to teach proofreading.

A couple of strategies have been introduced, including using the computer spellchecking software and self/peer reading aloud writings. As Eschweiler pointed out, computer spellchecking does help a lot but it should not be a substitute for the human eye. Proofreading orally, being the most general and most useful proofreading strategy (Madraso, 1993), is briefly introduced below.

*Peer read-aloud*

Have a proofreading partner read aloud your writing. After you work on a piece of writing for days, or even weeks, months, it could be difficult to distance yourself from the writing and come back to check it objectively. We are so familiar with what we wrote that “we tend to see what we intended to write rather than what is actually on the printed page” (Bruck, 1997, p.578). Proofreading partners can only read exactly what is on the page. Errors thus become obvious when the proofreading partner catches some “strange feelings” in his/her read-aloud voice.

*Self read-aloud*

Having a proofreading partner is ideal but might not be always possible. Reading our own work might not be ideal but it can be done with caution and care. Eschweiler (1998) reported that teachers working with adult students in remedial writing courses found 60 percent of the grammatical errors/typos could be caught by these adult students when they read aloud their own writing. These adult students had about a third-grade reading level. Eschweiler assumed that if reading aloud work

for them, it can definitely work for younger students.

According to Eschweiler, when reading aloud, the writer should make sure the thoughts and the word combinations flow smoothly, check for redundancies, overuse of particular words or phrases, and sentences that could be misinterpreted by someone not familiar with the topic. These tips should be instructed to proofreading partners as well. In addition, some other tips are suggested and four of them are *Touch*, *Proof on Paper*, *Pace Yourself* and *Use the Handy Card Method*.

Kemper, Nathan, Sebranek, and Elsholz (2002) suggested that young writers touch each word with their pencil and underline words that may be misspelled. Bruck (1997) explained that proofreading the printout of a piece of writing is more effective than trying to proof off the computer screen because you proofread contextually (versus a screen at a time) and you can circle words, punctuation, numbers, etc. for checking later. Besides, instead of proofreading the whole piece, you can proofread a couple of pages or sections at one time (Bruck, 1997). You allow yourself to take breaks to clear your mind and refresh yourself to avoid missing simple errors due to fatigue. Eschweiler recommended using a card or a piece of paper to block out all text except the one line to be examined. This method slows the proofreader down and if an interruption occurs, you know exactly which line to go to resume the task.

#### **Proofreading and Spelling Development**

Reading aloud to proofread involves sounding out words of letters. It requires the knowledge of the alphabetic principles. This is particularly true for young language learners because they do not have a big number of sight words. Therefore, they need to decode letter by letter in order to sound out words. Proofreading is thus said to facilitate spelling development.

Describing proofreading as the “missing link” in spelling development, Martino (as cited in Kervin, 2002) and Turbill (as cited in Kervin, 2002) claimed that the skill of proofreading connects the areas of reading, writing, and spelling development. In 1977, Torbe, holding a similar viewpoint, pointed out that proofreading is a good spelling habit because it requires children to engage actively in the process of spelling analysis. Spelling can actually be seen as a cognitive act. Proofreading which is suggested to facilitate spelling should thus also involve a similar cognitive process. Below the cognitive process for spelling

performance is reviewed for a better understanding on the relationship between proofreading and spelling development.

*Spelling as a cognitive act*

Spelling is a cognitive act in which spellers coordinate several sources of word knowledge (Drake & Ehri, 1984; Henderson & Beers, 1980; Pinnell & Fountas, 1998; Simon & Simon, 1973; Zutell, 1978). Simon and Simon proposed an information processing model to explain the cognitive act on spelling. According to them, spellers need four kinds of information to produce the spelling of a word. They are 1) the alphabet (letter names and shapes), 2) phoneme-grapheme correspondences, 3) a word bank comprised of the spellings of specific words (including visual information acquired from reading experiences and motor information acquired from writing experiences), and 4) orthographic rules, such as spelling patterns.

Simon and Simon explained further the process. While spelling, spellers first access their word bank for the spelling. If the spelling is there, they write the words. If not, they try to generate a possible spelling through segmenting the pronunciation of the word into phonemes and transforming the phonemes into letters based on the knowledge of phoneme-grapheme correspondences and common spelling patterns. The cognitive act of spelling goes on when spellers evaluate whether the spelling written down looks right (visual inspection) or sounds right (auditory inspection).

*Stages of spelling development*

The stages of children's spelling development confirm the cognitive demands of spelling (Wong, 1986). Researchers (e.g., Henderson & Beers, 1980; Hill, 1999; Morris, 1981) have identified several stages of spelling development. The terms used to label the stages differ but the characteristics of children's spelling at stages described are similar. The terms proposed by Hill (1999) are *prephonic spelling*, *semiphonetic spelling*, *phonetic spelling*, *transitional spelling*, and *independent spelling*.

*Prephonic spelling*, the beginning spelling stage, means when learners use drawings, symbols, numbers, letter-like symbols, and letters to represent spoken messages. At the second stage, *semiphonetic spelling*, a word may be represented with one letter or two, usually the initial consonant letter and occasionally the final consonant letter. Moreover, often letter names are used to represent a syllable sound, for example *KR*

for *CAR* with the letter name of *R* representing *-ar* in *car*. The third stage, *phonetic spelling*, is when writers invent the spellings phonetically. At the stage of *transitional spelling*, the fourth stage, learners begin to use common letter patterns. Finally, in the *independent spelling* stage, learners become more proficient spellers using different strategies for spelling rather than relying on phonics as a major strategy.

*Proofreading and cognition*

Children's proofreading their or others' writing to detect spelling errors should involve a similar information process explained by Simon and Simon (1973). Furthermore, children's correction on spelling, if any, tells at which Hill's spelling stage they are at the moment; their self-correction on other writing mechanics, such as letter size, letter shape, punctuation, space, etc., indicates either their learning progress, their increasing consciousness, or simply their being more concentrative this time; their peer-correction, if any, gives messages similar to those conveyed in their self-correction. Moreover, if children fail to correct written work by peers of higher proficiency levels in such a proofreading practice, this proofreading task then becomes a reading task for these children to learn from reading. All these above mentioned possibilities confirm that proofreading is a cognitive act that children are capable of performing.

*Proofreading in spelling instruction*

The primary goal of spelling instruction is to help young writers expand their knowledge of the principles of English orthography and broaden the range of strategies they use to spell unknown words (Rymer & Williams, 2000). In the syllabus for New South Wales mandatory K-6 English (as cited in Kervin, 2002), the way to teach spelling is outlined and proofreading as a tool for helping spelling development from Stage one (6-year-old learners) to Stage Three (11-year-old learners) is strongly recommended. Using her grade-two class in Australia to examine proofreading as a spelling strategy, Kervin (2002) reported that being more conscious of spelling skills and proofreading strategies, including when and where to proofread, all students' spelling improved over the year. Her students became skilled at identifying errors in their first drafts and more willing to fix their mistakes.

Shepherd (as cited in Kervin, 2002) also reported the observation on grade-two students' gradually seeing the need to proofread their work as they became aware of the skill and more confident with the actual

writing process. Davis (1995) advocated that teachers invest time and energy into teaching the proofreading process as a natural progression to make it a meaningful activity.

Being identified as a powerful strategy in children's development as a speller, proofreading has been neglected to be taught as a skill (Madraso, 1993; Turbill, 2000; Wilde, 1990), due to teachers' not knowing that proofreading needs to be taught or teachers' being unclear about how to teach proofreading. Unfortunately, not much was found on teaching proofreading in the literature. The issues on editing, feedback-giving, peer-reviewing and error-correcting related to composition are well researched but not proofreading which is always under the umbrella term of editing.

As introduced earlier, the practice of proofreading was carried out in a writing project implemented in four grade-two EFL classes. The practice of proofreading will be elaborated in the following section.

## **PROOFREADING IN GRADE TWO EFL CLASSES**

### **Background**

Being inspired by some scholars' advocacy on the incorporation of writing into a language curriculum as early as possible (e.g., Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004; Hudelson, 1989; Linse, 2005; Paul, 2003; Samway, 1992; Scott, 1996; Tompkins, 2008), even for EFL learners (e.g., Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004; Paul, 2003), and being bold enough to challenge ourselves, we started a writing project in September 2006 with 106 grade-one EFL learners in Siang-he Elementary School. Of this ongoing project, the setting, the participants, the materials, and the writing activities conducted before the proofreading practice was implemented are briefly explained in the following sections.

#### *The setting*

Siang-he Elementary School, a public school, located in Chiayi County, was established in 2003. The system operating in Siang-he is similar to that in most other public elementary schools, except for its English education. The English subject is introduced in grade one at Siang-he rather than grade three as regulated by the Ministry of Education. Three periods of 40 minutes each per week are scheduled for the English subject.



Since September 2006, Siang-he has had a native-English-speaking teacher without any knowledge of Chinese assisting with the English instruction. Such a teacher who is usually on a yearly contract is assigned by the Ministry of Education to areas where qualified English teachers are scarce. At Siang-he, this teacher co-teaches with every Mandarin-speaking English teacher for one period of one class per week, that is, each class has two periods taught by the Mandarin-speaking teacher alone and the other period co-taught by both the Mandarin-speaking and the English-speaking teachers.

According to Ms. Hsu, one of the authors and the English teacher at Siang-he, English is the major language used by both teachers in this co-taught period with Mandarin being used occasionally when instructions and/or explanations could not be easily understood by students. As for the other two periods, both languages are used, again, with Mandarin mostly for explanations and instructions.

*The participants*

The participants include the English teacher, Ms. Hsu, a native Mandarin speaker and qualified English teacher, two academics as well as over 100 second graders (106 in Fall 2006 and 121 in Spring 2007) from four classes at Siang-he elementary school. A pretest of 35 question entries was given to these first graders in September 2006. They were tested on letter identification (e.g., listen and circle the letter), picture identification (e.g., listen and circle the picture of *apple*) and picture-name reading (e.g., match the picture of *apple* with the word *apple* in print). Only 14 out of the 105 students taking the pretest got a score in the 70s and 60s out of 100 points; 24 students, 50s and 40s; 30 students, 30s and 20s; 37 students, under 19 points, even zero. This indicates that though 67 of them reported being exposed to English activities in kindergarten, most students' English knowledge was rather limited.

*The materials*

The materials used for the first year were a children's song book, a book with rhymes, and a self-developed textbook for the alphabet, pictures with picture names and a workbook (see Chang, Chang, & Hsu, 2008b for details), not very different from those available on the market along with some easy readers for the second semester. The materials used for the second year were a new song book, more chants, and self-developed materials for more practice on the alphabet and phonics

(visit <http://163.27.95.130/fet/index.htm> for details).

*The writing activities*

The majority of the three-period class time was planned for classroom activities, not very different from those conducted in other elementary school English classes, such as singing, chanting, repeating after the teacher, questioning and answering, recitations, etc. Writing activities were carried out for 10 minutes at the end of the third period each week<sup>1</sup>. For four semesters from September 2006 to June 2008, the writing activities could be broadly categorized into two phases with unstructured activities for the first semester and structured activities for the following semesters. In the first phase with unstructured activities, free drawing and/or writing was practiced while in the second phase, structured-web activities were implemented.

To encourage these young learners to explore writing, in the first semester, the teacher encouraged them to freely write or draw what they wanted to based on what they had learned. The above format of the writing activity was modified to be more structured for the following three semesters because of our intention to use the limited class time more effectively. Interactive Writing lessons with structured-web activities were planned and implemented for the second through the fourth semester, from January 2007 to June 2008, with the integration of instruction on lexical parts of speech in the third and fourth semesters (see Chang, Chang, & Hsu, 2008 for details).

Examining their written products, we found many blunders (either neglected mistakes or developmental errors). As mentioned earlier, we wondered how we could make these young beginning writers aware of their mistakes. Proofreading was thus added into the writing project in the second semester of their grade two year, from January 2008 to June 2008. With two research questions in mind, we expected to explore the possibility or the necessity of introducing proofreading to young EFL beginning writers. The research questions are:

- a. To what extent can young writers self- and peer-proofread their and others' writing?
- b. What insights and implications can be derived from implementing proofreading in young EFL students' early writing activities?

### **The Practice of Proofreading**

As mentioned, the proofreading practice was motivated by the thought of raising these young writers' awareness of writing mechanics. We actually did not know whether they could proofread their writing and what we should expect in such a practice. We decided to just give it a try for further plans. With the addition of the proofreading session, four sessions of 10 minutes each repeated as a cycle for one writing task: Share-the-pen Session in Week 1, Individual Writing Session in Week 2, Proofreading Session in Week 3 and Sharing Session in Week 4. Four cycles were completed in Spring 2008.

The practice of composing interactively in Week 1, writing individually in Week 2, and shared-reading for instruction in Week 4 was conducted in the same way it had been conducted in the previous two semesters. As to proofreading, Ms. Hsu had no experience and the two academics, based on the experience with college students, viewed "proofreading" as an "easy" task. We often told our college students to proofread their writing and assumed they know what to do and how to do it. To us, proofreading is an "easy" task for our students. Therefore, if they fail to proofread, our speculation for the reason may be that either they are too lazy to do it or they procrastinate their assignment till the last minute and therefore they have no time to do it. Teaching college students in a department of foreign languages, we seem to take it for granted that our students should know how to proofread, which is actually considered hard and also requires instruction, according to Hall (1984), Kervin (2002) and Madraso (1993).

Unlike college students, these young EFL learners did not have any experience with proofreading. We then decided to introduce proofreading in an "easy" way that the students could manage. We suggested that Ms. Hsu directly tell the students that she would return the written sheet for checking and that they should not erase their original texts.

The following is what Ms. Hsu said to the students before the first proofreading. The excerpt is translated from Mandarin to English:

Last week we wrote in a hurry and we might thus have some neglected mistakes. We would like to make our writing better. So, we like to check our writing. I will return your sheet for checking and for correcting to make it better. For example, if you spelt *apple* as *aple* in a hurry. Today you find it and you can rewrite it under or

beside *aple*. Besides, what should we do to the first letter of the word at the beginning of a sentence and what should we put at the end of a sentence? You can check these and correct any mistakes. Don't erase the original writing. Correct the mistake with the blue pen by writing it either under or beside the wrong one. (Classroom tape, September 27, 2006)

A couple of concerned students asked whether points would be deducted. As a matter of fact, their writing was never graded, so no points could actually be deducted. Ms. Hsu simply assured the students that points would never be deducted and emphasized again this activity was about making the writing better rather than about grades. Completing the self-proofreading with a blue pen in a couple of minutes, they were instructed to exchange the sheets with another student for peer-proofreading using a red pen.

After examining the work from Writing 1, we planned for what to say on their writing performance as well as their proofreading performance in the Shared-reading Session the following week. For the proofreading performance, for example, we showed exemplary samples on correcting letter writing, spacing, period, adding *and* between nouns, adding *to* between verbs, etc. This principle was followed for the other three writing activities, that is, examine their writing and proofreading performance and share with the class some observations for further instruction on both writing and proofreading in the following week's Sharing Session.

#### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In order to collect clear data for analysis regarding the students' proofreading performance, Ms. Hsu arranged to have the students do individual writing with a pencil, self-proofreading with a blue pen and peer-proofreading with a red pen. Before the students were engaged in self-proofreading, blue pens were distributed by the group leaders. Then these pens were collected and put away after self-proofreading was finished. Finally, red pens were given when the students were ready for peer-proofreading. This procedure was very important to ensure that these young writers would make corrections with the right pen. In order to answer both research questions, the written items in pencil and the corrected items in blue and in red (Appendix A for samples; visit <http://163.27.95.130/fet/index.htm> for more) respectively were first

examined for correction types, such as spelling, grammar, mechanics, ideas, etc., Then, accuracy and/or appropriateness of the correction are counted for frequency.

Since the beginning of this ongoing project, in the period when the writing activity was conducted, a camcorder had been set up in the back of the classroom facing the blackboard in front of the class. This arrangement was intended to take footage of Ms. Hsu around that area for her instruction and responses to the class. However, Ms. Hsu always carried a wireless microphone while teaching and often walked around in the room. Therefore, she did not always appear in the recording but her voice was always well recorded. These students had been used to the camcorder standing there, and therefore, the existence of the camcorder did not seem to cause any distraction from the students. Since some students might be recognized in the recordings, these tapes (10 minutes x 16 writing sessions, four sessions as a cycle for one writing task) were only viewed for examining the teacher's instruction to the class without being shown to irrelevant people.

Ms. Hsu's responses to our inquiries regarding the students' written products and classroom practices in recordings through emails/phone calls as well as her reflective talks during the casual chat in our gathering at the end of the semester were also important data to be analyzed. In addition, another data source came from a questionnaire of 15 questions (Appendix B) administered in the last class meeting. These questions read aloud in Mandarin by Ms. Hsu to these students asked whether they liked the writing activities, the self-proofreading activity, the peer-proofreading activity, the shared-reading activity, etc. These students worked on a separate sheet (Appendix C) to circle their answers to each question. Giving reasons for further explanations on their answers was invited and encouraged but not mandatory. These students' circled answers were calculated for quantitative data and their written explanations were examined for qualitative data.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Our first research question is to what extent these young EFL beginning writers can self- and peer-proofread theirs and others' writings. This question is to be answered first with the students' attitude towards the proofreading practice learned from the questionnaire responses given by the students in the last class meeting of Spring, 2008. Other findings

proving that self- and peer-proofreading was manageable to these young writers of limited English ability are presented later.

The second research question is what we can learn from implementing proofreading in young EFL students' early writing activities. What we have learned are 1) They hold a positive attitude towards the practice of proofreading, 2) They are able to engage in proofreading, 3) They show awareness of writing mechanics, 4) They employ the "spelling line" strategy to record ideas, 5) They enhance their grammar awareness through correcting mistakes, 6) They revise their peers' work based on their interpretation, and 7) They learn to give and take corrections.

#### **Positive Attitude towards Proofreading Practice**

The questionnaire results indicate that 81.3 percent of the 118 students who responded to the questionnaire held a positive attitude towards the self-proofreading activity and 74.6 percent of them, the peer-proofreading activity. Those holding a positive attitude towards self-proofreading gave some reasons on the questionnaire in mixed codes of Mandarin characters and the Mandarin phonemic symbols. These reasons are 1) It makes my writing better (10 students), 2) I can correct my mistakes (8 students), 3) It is more fun correcting the mistakes (7 students), 4) I am happy to do so (2 students), 5) I can develop my creativity (1 student), f) I feel like I am a teacher (1 student), and g) I can know my weaknesses and strengths (1 student). The reasons for holding a negative attitude are: 1) I cannot find any mistakes (5 students) and 2) I do not like to change this, change that (2 students).

The reasons for holding a positive attitude towards peer-proofreading are 1) I can correct others' mistakes/products (12 students), 2) It is interesting (9 students), and 3) I feel like a teacher (4 students). The reasons for holding a negative attitude are: 1) Boring (7 students), 2) There might be disagreement between the writer and the proofreader (2 students), 3) I have to correct others' writing (1 student), and 4) The writer had everything wrong (1 student).

#### **Capability to Engage in Proofreading**

The written sheets written in pencil, blue ink and red ink were analyzed. The proofreading performance was examined by counting the number of self-proofreaders and peer-proofreaders who changed entries

in the written sheets. It is found that in Writing 1, 42 out of 121 students (34.7%) did self-correction, in Writing 2, 55 students (45.5%), in Writing 3, 62 students (51.2%) and in Writing 4, 76 students (59.5%). As to peer-proofreading, in Writing 1, 56 students (46.3%) did peer-correction, in Writing 2, 83 students (68.6%), in Writing 3, 77 students (63.6%) and in Writing 4, 95 students (78.5%). The percentage increases from Writing 1 to Writing 4 on both self- and peer-proofreading, except the one on peer-proofreading in Writing 3.

Some inaccurate or insufficient corrections in peer-proofreading were found. For example, eight students rewrote some correctly-spelt words into wrongly-spelt words and 29 students rewrote wrongly-spelt words into other wrongly-spelt words. In addition, seven students tried to complete their partners' incompletely-spelt words but still spelt them inaccurately. Though the above 44 students failed to correct appropriately on some spellings in peer-proofreading, they still had successful corrections on other entries in peer-proofreading others' written sheets. Ten proofreaders marked their peer's written sheet with only either red crosses (means 'wrong') or checks (means 'correct') as feedback. Except for these above-mentioned four types of failure correction or insufficient feedback, the majority of the corrections did help the students' writing. Therefore, the fact of the increasing percentages of proofreaders in action indicates that these young EFL learners were able to engage in proofreading and became more and more comfortable with and competent in proofreading. As reviewed, proofreading and spelling are both cognitive acts. In the following sections, what these young EFL proofreaders did in the proofreading task are presented to further explain their being capable of performing such cognitive acts.

#### **Awareness of Writing Mechanics**

Some students showed their awareness of the writing mechanics on letter writing, punctuations and spacing. Some self- and peer-proofreaders showed their awareness of the contrast between letters in the following sets: b/d, d/p, b/p, m/w, P/p, S/s, and M/m. While proofreading, some students rewrote *bab* into *dad*, *rab* into *rad* (i.e. red), *boll* into *doll*, *bog* into *dog*, or *dig* into *big* (in total 16 students), *dig* into *pig* (3 students), *big* into *pig* (1 student), *com* into *cow* (2 students); *Pig* into *pig* (6 students), *Small* into *small* (3 student) and *My* into *my* (3 students). This shows their recognizing letters of similar shapes but

facing different directions (e.g., b/d) or going different directions (e.g., b/p, m/w, P/p) or having different sizes (e.g., S/s). In Writing 2, one proofreader peer-corrected a word written vertically into horizontally and in Writing 4, one proofreader self-corrected his vertically written word into a horizontally written word. They were aware of the direction of writing in English.

They rewrote letters (92 students, 76.0%), whole words (108 students, 89.3%) or complete sentences (6 students) to make the writing appear neater. They also rewrote to separate some words in a sentence or all the words in a sentence to make obvious space between words (8 students). They even redid the period at the end of a sentence to make it rounder, darker and clearer (23 students, 19.0%). Twenty-nine students (24.0%) added a period to end their sentences and three students changed the period into a question mark for their interrogative sentences.

#### **Spelling Strategy for Speeding up Writing**

Besides being allowed to spell inventively, they were instructed with a “spelling line” strategy. This strategy was termed so by Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) but the term was not known to us until we were reviewing the literature for this report. Two years ago, at the beginning of the project, these students were instructed to spell a word with spelling lines for letters they did not know. Take *cat* and *black* as examples. They may spell them as c\_t, c\_ \_, bl\_k, or b\_ \_ \_ if they know the number of segment (phoneme) in the word but they do not know what letter(s) to put down for the segment(s) (the multi-line-spelling strategy). They may spell it as c\_, \_t, or b\_, b\_\_k if they are not sure of the number of segment(s) (the single-line-spelling strategy). The spelling-line strategy was instructed in the hope of facilitating phonemic awareness to speed up the spelling development from Hill’s semiphonetic stage to phonetic stage, that is, to facilitate the development of phonemic segmentation and the awareness of the vowel letter(s) in words.

Table 1 presents the findings on the number of students who employed the spelling strategy and who succeeded or failed in filling in the line(s) to yield the targeted/guessed words. In the four writings, 24, 28, 22, and 33 students employed the single-line-spelling strategy respectively; 13, 5, 5, and 7 students employed the multi-line-spelling strategy respectively. Only three of them employed both strategies on the same written work with reasons unknown to us.



Table 1. Number of Students Employing the Spelling-line Strategies

	Single-line-spelling strategy			Multi-line-spelling strategy		
	Employ- ing the strategy	Correctly filled in by oneself	Correctly filled in by peers	Employ- ing the strategy	Correctly filled in by oneself	Correctly filled in by peers
Writing 1	24	8	4	13	2	1
Writing 2	28	5	8	5	1	X
Writing 3	22	5	1	5	1	X
Writing 4	33	6	9	7	X	1

*Note.* X indicates no proofreaders were found trying to fill in the lines to complete the spelling.

While proofreading, some of them (self proofreaders) filled in the line(s) to successfully complete the intended words, and some of them (peer proofreaders), to successfully complete the guessed words based on their interpretation of the writer’s intention. For example, in Writing 1, eight self-proofreaders successfully filled in the line to complete the word they intended to have but failed in spelling it properly in the previous week, and four peer-proofreaders filled in the line to accurately complete the word for the original writer based on their own interpretation or guess.

This spelling-line strategy is also expected to help them record ideas in an easier way with the focus on meaning first and form later. Expecting conventional spelling not only slows them down, inhibits their writing but also denies the teacher an opportunity for diagnostic teaching (Smith & Elley, 1997). Showing their awareness of the letter-writing mechanics and their ability to fill in the spelling-line(s) to yield accurately-spelt words in the later proofreading practice, these students are said to be developing “spelling conscience” (Turbill, 2000). As indicated by the term, they literally become more conscious in writing letters and spelling out the words.

The percentages of writers employing the spelling-line strategy are 30.6% for Writing 1 (37 out of 121 students), 27.3% for Writing 2 (33 students), 22.3% for Writing 3 (27 students) and 33.1% for Writing 4 (40 students). The percentages are not high; not many of them successfully filled in the lines to yield correct words. Thus far we cannot conclude on their spelling development, but we are excited to know that some of them did learn the strategy. This finding also manifests two phenomena. First, some of them did improve in spelling. Second, temporary

incapability of spelling conventionally did not keep them from expressing ideas.

#### Enhancing Grammar Awareness

Some successful sentence-level corrections were found on adding the article *a* (8 students), *an* (1 student), *the* (1 student) before nouns, adding *and* between nouns (1 student; e.g., I see a dog *and* a cat.), adding *to* between two verbs (3 students; e.g., The pig likes *to* take a bath.), and adding *can* between the subject and the verb (3 students; e.g., I *can* see a yo-yo in the box.). Some other successful corrections were made on adding the plural suffix *s* to yield plural nouns (17 students; e.g., I see dogs in the zoo.) and deleting *s* to make single nouns (4 students; e.g., I see a yo-yo~~s~~ in the box.). Twelve students either added a preposition word (e.g., I play yo-yo *with* my mom.) or changed the preposition words (e.g., We play on the beach. *On* was changed into *at*.) or rewrote the whole sentences (e.g., *I have box yo-yo* was rewritten into *I have yo-yos in the box.*) to make them grammatically accurate.

Paul noted that when a learner learns to write the pattern in addition to its spoken form, “she will have internalized the pattern much more deeply than if she just knew it orally” (Paul, 2003, p. 100). If the learner has internalized the pattern, it means “she is able to use it more flexibly and communicatively in novel situations” (Paul, 2003, p. 100). Some studies also show that more complex language forms in a learner’s developing language system appear first in written text rather than in spoken interaction (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000; Weissberg, 2000).

As mentioned, writers search for the four kinds of information to generate spellings (Simon & Simon, 1973). We would assume that writing certain language patterns, in terms of grammar, might require another information processing model. Similarly, another information processing model might be applied in the process of reading for comprehension, since reading initiates a mental dialogue between the reader and the writer with the dialogue activating and refining the reader’s existing schema (Heimlich & Pittelman, 1986). The processing for proofreading should then be even more complex, since the reader is mentally dialoguing with the writer, detecting mistakes and writing to correct the mistakes, with more than one information processing model functioning.

Therefore, being able to detect and correct one’s own and others’ mistakes seems to be even more advanced than being able to produce a

particular language item in print. That is to suggest that these capable proofreaders had internalized the language patterns they wrote and corrected. Though only a small number of students showed their awareness of grammar in their proofreading performance, without this proofreading practice, we would not have had the chance to examine the visible record to learn about these students' development in terms of grammar awareness, provide appropriate assistance and plan further instruction. One thing to be noted here is that grammar awareness was never the focus in these EFL classes, yet the proofreading practice seemed to contribute some great opportunities for consolidating grammar awareness. Given the opportunity to write and proofread, the writers could progress at their pace to produce comprehensible output (Swain, 2000), examine it, and revise the product to be even more comprehensible.

#### **Revising Based on Reader's Interpretation**

Peer-proofreaders were found to complete the writers' incomplete sentences or revise the writers' complete sentences based on their interpretation of the context, including their identifying the initial letter for an appropriate word, or their intention to present the original writer's or their own ideas. For example, filling in the blanks, one peer-proofreader completed *Cow is p\_ \_ \_* as *Cow is p i n k \_*. Since the other sentences in the context were all about animals and colors, the peer-proofreaders thus interpreted that the writer needed *pink* here in the context. Another example is on *I ply ia yo-yo* (this might be *I play is a yo-yo*). The peer-proofreader rewrote it as *I like ply is a yo-yo*. One more example is on *I yo-yo, a dog....* The peer-proofreader rewrote it as *I like a yo-yo, a dog....*

In addition, some peer-proofreaders changed the writers' words in the brainstorming bubbles for ideas and used the newly-written word to revise the writer's sentence. For example, while proofreading his peer's written sheet, a proofreader changed *dag* in the bubble into *dog* and revised *Im See a dag in apple* as *I can see a dog in box*. One more example is that four peer-proofreaders inserted an adjective word into the writer's sentence to modify the noun in the sentence. For example, one peer-proofreader inserted *yellow* into the sentence *I have a yo-yo* to make it *I have a yellow yo-yo*. Another possible explanation for such revisions is that the peer-proofreader probably confused the role of reader with that of writer. Three other writers added adjective words in

their own sentences to make the sentences longer and richer in meaning.

These young proofreaders, as readers, either “communicated” with their peer-writers to interpret the message conveyed by the incomplete or imperfect written product or “communicated” with themselves as the originators to edit to enrich their own product. This is another valuable opportunity contributed by the practice of proofreading.

#### **Learning to Give and Take Corrections**

From the classroom tape and Ms. Hsu’s reflection, we learned about a couple of arguments between writers and readers in the first two proofreading sessions. Writers complained about peer-proofreaders’ miscorrecting their writing. For example, “My *dog* is correctly written but she rewrote it (or she crossed it out).” Peer-proofreaders complained, “She scolded me when I corrected her writing.” Light verbal fights of this kind took place and were reported to Ms. Hsu.

Ms. Hsu talked with these students to teach them to communicate with their proofreading partner to find out why their writing was corrected that way or to explain why they corrected others’ writing that way. Ms. Hsu told them through communication, both could learn from each other. The one miscorrecting others’ writing could learn the correct forms from the explanation; the one whose writing was miscorrected could consolidate what they had learned through explaining to their partners. Ms. Hsu also told peer proofreaders to teach their partners a few words if their partner produced too little or nothing for proofreading. For Writings 3 and 4, no arguments were taped and reported by Ms. Hsu.

Ms. Hsu reflected to share a case which further demonstrated the “side effects” gained from the practice of proofreading. An advanced writer produced plenty of words and sentences in careless handwriting in 10 minutes. Showing his product in the Sharing Session, Ms. Hsu complimented this writer’s accomplishment. Ms. Hsu continued to encourage him to pay more attention to handwriting. The writer responded angrily in Mandarin, “Then you don’t read; that is for me to read.” Ms. Hsu explained to the class in Mandarin, “The purpose of writing.... So, you write to have readers understand your message. To communicate well and to respect readers, you are expected to write well....” According to Ms. Hsu, this writer later improved a lot in handwriting. Ms. Hsu reflected to say, “This is a good chance to teach communication, social interaction and to shape their characteristics.”

## CONCLUSION

This proofreading practice started with two research questions. They are to what extent young EFL beginning writers of limited English ability can self- and peer-proofread theirs and others' writing and what insights and implications can be derived from implementing proofreading in EFL young students' writing class.

The findings presented indicate that proofreading is manageable to these students of limited English abilities. Moreover, these valuable findings suggest to us that proofreading practice as well as writing practice provides a window for practitioners and researchers to learn about language-learning related issues on young EFL learners at the beginning stage.

Leki (2005) proposed that "writing instruction is better suited than any other kind of language instruction to operating at the students' current level of proficiency without holding other students back" (p. 87). That is because each individual is writing to push his/her FL output based on his/her level of proficiency (Swain, 1985). The product can be each individual's best performance. As to proofreading, Calkins (1994) suggests three steps for proofreading: getting distance from the composition, which means that a writer ought to look at his writing from a reader's point, proofreading to locate errors and correcting errors. Getting some distance has new meanings in our case. We gave the writers a week to stay away from their work and come back to work on proofreading. During this one-week interval, the writers received more *i+1* input (comprehensible input, Krashen, 1985) to progress. Proofreading provides opportunities for revisiting what had been learned and produced. Their progress might thus enable them to examine their *i-1* leveled product to detect and correct the imperfect production from the earlier *i-1* level.

Two points as limitations are to be brought up below before classroom implications are suggested. The first point is that having no control groups for comparison makes the reliability and validity of the results questionable. However, in this study it is inevitable. In this study, we did not have the freedom to divide the participating students into control and experimental groups because of the requirement from the school authority that the same materials and activities had to be used in all the classes of the same grade. Besides, it was also difficult to locate a control group from another school with a similar context where second graders were introduced to English writing. Therefore, what has been

reported in this paper merely reveals what was practiced in the writing project and the observations obtained during the process and from the students works.

The other limitation is the time frame for this study on proofreading. During a 4-month period, four proofreadings were conducted to yield the limited data. Developmental performances cannot be traced with such limited data. Examining factors affecting the performances is rather difficult, too, because the collected data did not cover what the students encountered in other English classes at school, after-school English programs, or even other English learning contexts, such as in a home setting. The obtained data could only be analyzed superficially in terms of quantity and difference among the linguistic items produced in pencil, in blue ink and in red ink.

One more thing, not a limitation but worth mentioning, to be noted is about the affluent resources Siang-he Elementary School possesses, which are three periods for the English subject from the grade one year, an English-native-speaking teacher to assist with teaching in class and also provide stimuli after class, the two academics to serve as the think tank, etc. It may not be easy for other teachers to duplicate the practice at Siang-he. However, there may still be implications for them.

Generally speaking, the major classroom implication yielded from the findings of this proofreading practice is that proofreading practice as beneficial as writing practice to language learning could be incorporated into an EFL language learning curriculum in an early stage. Proofreading should not be neglected as Madraso (1993) pointed out that many teachers have neglected to teach this skill.

As a conclusion, opportunities for writing and proofreading could be given to students even with limited English ability. As suggested by Kervin (2002), teachers should make the classroom a “proofreading friendly” environment in which various proofreading strategies can be introduced. The introduction of simple class proofreading symbols which are meaningful and accessible to students could help students engage in proofreading early on. The findings of this paper have shed some light on the understanding of the implementation of self- and peer-proofreading in young EFL learners’ writing class.

We like to end this paper with some general suggestions based on this ongoing study to teachers working with EFL learners, especially when they intend to involve young beginning learners in writing.

*Proofreading for EFL Young Writers*

For starters, give students a blank sheet to freely write and/or draw based on what they have learned. Collect the finished work to select a couple of the sheets for whole-class shared-reading, based on your teaching/learning goals, or simply select works with features catching your attention, something you would like students to see and learn from, or just something interesting enough to be shared. Scan the selected sheets to be shared with the students and display them through the computer monitor or the overhead projector. Either have students point out whatever catches their attention or guide them to see what you intend to have them learn from. Gradually, you can introduce proofreading by returning their written work for self checking and then peer checking. Let students be responsible for their writing instead of making corrections for them, which will probably help them learn the language better and also write better as time goes on. (For detailed information for our practice, see Chang, Chang, & Hsu, 2008a, 2008b; Chang, Chang, Shen, & Hsu, 2009.)

## NOTES

1. In the first year, the writing activity was conducted in the co-taught period; however, since the native-English-speaking teacher did not know Chinese, there was not much language interaction that took place between the native-English-speaking teacher and the students. The teacher mostly circulated the class to keep the students on the task.

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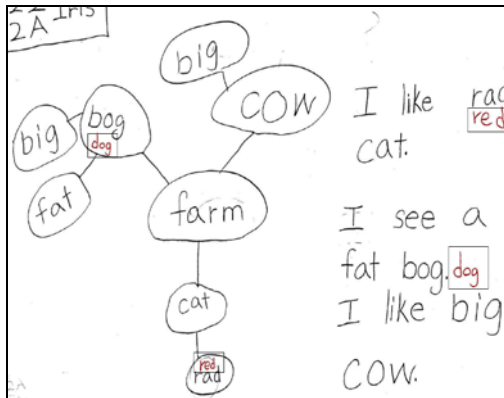
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**APPENDIX**

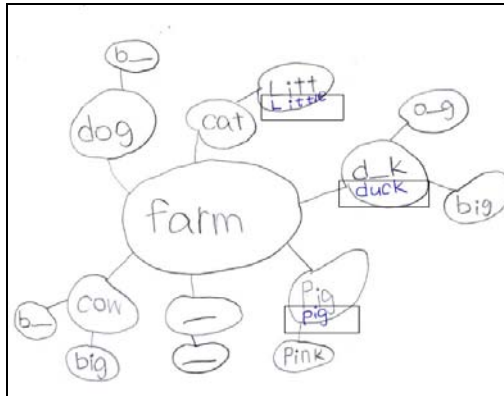
**Appendix A. Sample Sheets of Writing in Pencil, Blue and Red in Ink**

(visit <http://163.27.95.130/fet/index.htm> for all the work collected in this ongoing project)

a. The corrected-in-red items are squared



b. The corrected-in-blue items are squared



**Appendix B. Questionnaire on the Participants' Attitudes Towards the Writing Project**

※A version in Mandarin was read aloud to the students.

Instruction: Listen to the teacher's reading aloud the questions and circle your answers on the response sheet. You can write explanations for your responses, if you want. If you do not want to write any explanations, it is okay.

1. Did you like the drawing-writing activities in the English classes?
2. In the English class, sometimes Ms. Hsu would lead all to brainstorm ideas to be put in bubble clusters. Then, some students would fill ideas in such bubbles on the blackboard. Did you like these activities?
3. Ms. Hsu gave you a piece of blank paper so you could brainstorm ideas to be put in your own bubble clusters. Did you like this activity?
4. After creating the bubble clusters with words, you also wrote sentences using the words in the bubble cluster. Which activity did you like more, creating bubble clusters with words or using words in bubble clusters to write sentences? Or, did you like both? Why?
5. When you engaged in the drawing-writing activities, did you create bubble clusters before writing sentences or did you write sentences before creating bubble clusters? Why?
6. Did the bubble clusters help you with more ideas for writing?
7. We had an activity in which you checked and corrected your own writing with a blue pen to make it better. Did you like this activity? Why?
8. When you checked and corrected your writing with a blue pen, what did you check first?
9. We had another activity in which you checked and corrected your partner's writing with a red pen to make it better. Did you like this activity? Why?
10. When you checked and corrected your partner's writing with a red pen, what did you check first?
11. Which activity did you like more, checking and correcting your own writing or your partner's writing? Or, did you like both of them?
12. Did the activity of "checking and correcting to make the writing better" make you like the drawing-writing activity more?
13. Which activity did you like more, the drawing-writing activity or the checking-correcting activity? Why?
14. After completing the drawing-writing and the checking-correcting activities, Ms. Hsu displayed some sample writings on the computer for shared reading. Did you like to have yours displayed?
15. Did you like to see others' writings be displayed?

**Appendix C. The Response Sheet for the Questionnaire** (a portion of the response sheet)

※A version in Mandarin was given to the students.

Instruction: Listen to the teacher and circle your response. You can write explanations for your responses, if you want. If you do not want to write any explanations, it is okay.

1.   yes                   no comment           no  
because\_\_\_\_\_

2.   yes                   no comment           no  
because\_\_\_\_\_

3.   yes                   no comment           no  
because\_\_\_\_\_

4.   create bubble clusters           write sentences           like both  
      dislike both                   no comment  
because\_\_\_\_\_