

Computers and Writing:

A Study Of Teaching Writing To An ESL Student By Using The Computer Software FrEd Writer

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I. Description of my project

Introduction

When I had an internship in an elementary school in the U.S., I found that it was very important and necessary for ESL students to learn how to write an essay in English because writing is often required in many courses even in the elementary education level. In addition, writing has been the most difficult part of my English as a second language learning. I was very afraid of writing essays in English when I took a college composition class in the U.S. because I not only had grammar errors but also organization problems due to Japanese writing patterns, which are different from English.

Many of my essays in college composition class were graded C or C⁻, and I was very disappointed. However, my professor explained every problem which I had in my essays after class, and I rewrote all the papers. Although this exercise helped me to improve my English writing ability, the process of rewriting was painful because I had to retype the whole essay since I did not use the computer at that time.

After I began to use the computer to write essays, I found it very effective for writing because it is easy to revise and to correct mistakes. More interestingly, I became less hesitant to write because I could concentrate my energy on producing my ideas in print, and I correct my structure and spelling errors later.

My experiences as an ESL student for my English writing improvement got me interested in speculating how the computer can play an important role for an ESL student's writing development. Below, I attempted to study the use of the computer for teaching writing to a Japanese ESL student by using the computer software FrEd Writer, a simple word processing program with a "prompted writing" feature, which will be described more fully below. At this point, let me explore issues about patterns of thinking and writing in different cultures, teaching writing to ESL students, and the computer software FeEd

Writer before I report my project.

Patterns of thinking and writing in different cultures

I realized how English writing pattern is different from the Japanese one when my college composition class professor pointed out the organizational problems in my essays. Kaplan (1977) points out that the teaching of reading and writing to foreign students differs greatly from the teaching of reading and writing to American students. He suggests that logic is culture-specific and is not universal, and that rhetoric also varies from culture to culture. He intends to point out that there are thinking patterns in different languages.

Kaplan suggests that the assumption that anyone who can write an adequate essay in her first language can also write an adequate essay in a second language is unreliable. My experience supports this view because I can write well in Japanese, but I had difficulty writing essays in English due to its different writing style in my first semester at college in the United States. Kaplan says that foreign students who have acquired syntactic structures may still be unable to compose papers adequately. These students use a culture-specific rhetoric and a pattern of sequential thinking which breaks the expectations of English-speaking readers, and appears to lack organization and cohesion.

Kaplan says that the thinking patterns of speakers and readers of English follow a sequential order. For example, it is suggested that an English expository paragraph usually begins with a topic sentence which is supported by examples and illustrations. Then, it develops a central idea which relates to all the other ideas in the whole essay. By following this process, writers are expected to prove something or to argue something.

It is revealed in the Kaplan's study of ESL students' essays that different native language groups have different writing patterns. For example, Arabic-speaking students rely on a complex series of parallel

constructions. On the other hand, Oriental writing shows an indirective approach, which Kalpan calls “turning and turning in a widening gyre” (Kalpan, 1977, page, 276). The subject is never defined directly, but many tangential views are provided, which English readers would consider awkward and unnecessary indirect. Kalpan also introduces a digression in French and a complex structure pattern in Russian.

His study points out that

“each language and each culture has a paragraph order unique to itself, and that part of the learning of a particular language is the mastering of its logical system” (page,280).

As Kalpan points out, it is apparent that ESL teachers must be aware of their students' native language writing patterns which may be different from the English one if the teacher is able to provide appropriate writing instructions to them. ESL students need to learn the logic of English as well as English syntax.

Teaching writing to ESL students

McLaughlin (1985) says that writing skills require a number of dimensions of the language: “vocabulary, diversity of vocabulary, accuracy of spelling, grammatical correctness, quality of sentence structure, and effectiveness of expression” (page 211). It is essential for teachers to teach grammar, structure, spelling, and punctuation to ESL students. In addition to these, I attempted to teach my ESL subject how to organize a paragraph and how to revise in order to develop the paragraph in my project.

Teachers need to know what is wrong with their students' essays and what they can do to improve them. Heath (1985) points out that negative comments such as “This is not well-organized”, “This jumps all over the place” or “Too many short paragraphs” (page,2) will not

help students to improve their writing skills, but students may be able to improve their writing if they are instructed how to organize a paragraph.

This may not be an easy task because the students may have different thinking and writing patterns, as shown in Kalpan's study (1977). Japanese thinking and writing pattern is probably the Oriental Pattern that Kaplan refers to which prefers indirectness. I was struck that I had to develop my theme step by step very thoroughly when I began to write essays in English because I got used to the Japanese indirect writing pattern. The major difference between the Japanese and the English writing pattern is probably that a topic sentence comes at the very beginning in an English paragraph, while it comes at the end in a Japanese paragraph.

Besides this cultural difference, ESL students who have excellent ideas may have difficulty in writing since their energies are concentrated on low level decoding and encoding skills. However, it is reported in the study of computer assisted compositions (Woodruff et al, 1981-82) that children consider sentence openers such as "I think...", "One reason is...", or "For example ..." (page 134) helpful when they write. I also believe that prompts such as "What is your topic sentence?" or "Write your topic sentence?" or "Write a few sentences which support your topic sentence" help students to organize an paragraph.

The second objective of my project was to teach revising skills. I believe that ESL students who have passed the freewriting stage like my subject need to learn the revising skills to improve their essays. Daiute and Kruidenier (1985) point out that young writers do not take the objective perspective that would help them criticize what they write. For the purpose of teaching revising skills, I tried to have my subject look at her sentence structure. I also hoped that my subject found it easier to revise at the computer.

Discussion about the computer Software: FrEd Writer

I wished to examine FrEd Writer, which runs on APPLE II family of computers with my Japanese ESL subject who is in the 7th grade. FrEd Writer was called FREEWRITER by Paul Lutus which donated stripped-down version of his program. Al Rogers revised the program, adding printing modules, frozen text features, and commands which you easily can send FRED test files over telephone lines to remote computers. Rogers renamed the program FrEd Writer which stands for Free Educational Writer to reflect its new educational slant.

A special feature of FrEd Writer is that it has the capability of allowing the creation of "prompted" writing files. This means that the teacher can create her own prompt file of "on-screen" directions which are hints and steps for guiding students' writing. The directions, which are enclosed in prompt boxes, help a student develop her writing, and the final writing can be printed without the prompts. My prompts were created after I read my subject's first essay which was written without using the computer; the kinds of prompts which I created will be discussed in the project section.

I also found a useful exercise which has students join two sentences without using "and" in sample FrEd Writer prompted files. Since ESL primary writers usually write short sentences as seen in my subject's writing (see appendix), I planned to use this exercise as one of the activities in our sessions.

As stated above, FrEd Writer has the capability of allowing the creation of "prompted" writing files, and a teacher can create her own guiding steps and hints for her student's writing development. This is why I wanted to use FrEd Writer for my project in order to examine how the computer can interact with both the teacher and the student. The teacher may be able to find problems in her student's essay and to create prompts to provide steps which guide that student to a better essay. My second reason for using FrEd Writer is that it is not

a "fancy" expensive software, but rather it is shareware and can be copied free. This allows ESL teachers to use FrEd Writer with the very low cost of merely purchasing a floppy disk.

II. Project

Description of my subject

My subject is a Japanese 7th grade ESL student who came to the U.S. because of her father's business. She has been studying in a public school in a middle class city near Boston for a year. I have known her since she came to the school where I had an internship in the ESL program and in the Japanese bilingual program. She is a hardworking student who hopes to be listed in a honor roll this semester and has made progress in her English proficiency. She could not write English when she came here; however, she has written many wonderful stories in her ESL classroom journal since she reached the 7th grade.

My subject takes mathematics, social studies, science, English, arts, computers and ESL. I was very surprised to hear that she had to write a report in mathematics, in social studies and in science because students are seldom required to write an essay in those areas in a Japanese school. As writing is often required in the American school, it is important for her to learn how to write and organize an essay in English.

Procedure

Description of the the activities

Three sessions were held for my project: one at my subject's home and two in the computer lab. As I believe that students may be more motivated to write when they decide a topic by themselves, I asked her what she would like to write. She told me that she would like to write about her school and wrote an essay in about twenty minutes independently. Daiute (1985) suggests that "useful prompts are those given by a reader in response to a piece" (page 81). Using the essay

which she wrote at home, I created prompts to my subject's essay. The following activities are those we had in the computer lab (see appendix for transcription of the sessions). I intended to use the sample prompts for a descriptive paragraph provided with FrEd Writer for our first activity, and to create my own prompts. I also had my subject do a sentence-joining exercise without using "and", because this exercise would be useful for the revising activity in our second session.

Lab Session 1

- 1) Write a descriptive paragraph at the computer without the sample prompts.
- 2) Write a descriptive paragraph at the computer with the sample prompts.
- 3) Complete a sentence-joining exercise without using "and".
- 4) Rewrite a paragraph at the computer with my first prompts which I created for her essay.
- 5) Find spelling errors as homework.

Lab Session 2

- 1) Correct the spelling errors at the computer.
- 2) Revise some of the sentences which can be joined with my second prompts.
- 3) Discuss and instruct grammar errors.

Results

My subject has been learning how to use the keyboard in her computer class and is familiar with the computer. She tried to put her fingers on the standard position and enjoyed using the computer. It was very interesting to note how different her paragraph was which she produced with the sample prompts from the one she wrote without the prompts. The following essays were her descriptive paragraphs; the first is the one without the prompts, while the second one was produced with the sample prompts.

Writing a descriptive paragraph

A descriptive paragraph without the prompts:

I like Public Garden. Because there are a lot of animals and there are many trees. I like squirrel. They are very friendly. I always bring the Penuts to feed them. They like Penuts very much . There is no squirrel in Japanese garden. Japanese squirrel and American squirrel are different. I like American squirrel very much. So I like go to public garden.

A descriptive paragraph with the sample Prompts:

The sample prompts:

- *****
- * Copy and complete the following sentence:
* My special place is ____ . OR The place I remember best is ____ .
 - *****
 - *****
 - * Describe how your place looks.
 - *****
 - *****
 - * Describe the first thing or person you see when you enter your place.
 - *****
 - *****
 - * Describe two other things or people you see at your place.
 - *****
 - *****
 - * Describe any particular smells at your place.
 - *****
 - *****
 - * Describe any sound at your place.
 - *****

- *****
- * Describe any activities you do at your place.
- *****
- * Describe how you feel when you're at your place.
- *****

A paragraph with the prompts:

My special place is Public Garden. There are many animals and trees. There are many ducks in the pond. I saw many squirrels at first in the garden. I also saw many kinds of trees and flowers. I smelled trees and flowers. I heard cry of ducks. I feed peanuts to squirrels and ducks. I feel like in the zoo.

Although my subject made spelling, grammatical and tense errors in her paragraph with the prompts, her paragraph became more descriptive with clearer imagery than the one without the prompts. It is also important to note that she said, "Oh, this is very easy to write," when she finished writing the paragraph with the prompts.

Sentences-joining exercise

The second activity which we had was an exercise to join two sentences without using "and" (see appendix for the whole exercise). The following sentences are one of the exercises:

A light clicks on. I look inside.

When a light clicks on, I look inside.

Although my subject considered the exercise difficult, she found it interesting because she could feel that the sentence which was joined sounded better. The following excerpts from my lab session journal describe how we solve a difficult exercise:

Subject : I don't know what to do with the second one.

Me: Let me see. "I am feeling hungry. I go to the refrigerator."

Why do you go to the refrigerator?

S : Because I am feeling hungry.

M: Right. But do you know another word for "because"?

S : "as"?

M: Right!

S : "As I am feeling hungry, I go to the refrigerator."

Rewriting activity using prompts

The final activity was rewriting her essay about her school with the prompts which I created. The following essay was written at home without prompts:

I have American friends in Lawrence school. They are so kind to me. I enjoy the school life. Today, we had gym in 4th period. We played "Team hand ball". I didn't know how to play it. So I asked my Japanese friends. But they didn't know either. Then I asked my American friend. Her name is "Kito" . She taught me how to play it.

At first 5 minutes, our team got 3 points and another team got 2 points. Then second 5 minutes, our team got more than 4 points and another team got 1 point. At end of the game, we won the game. I was so happy. I think people who won the game were happy. I had very good time in gym. I like Lawrence school very much. Because everybody are kind and I had a lot of happy thing in the school.

I had a little difficulty creating prompts for my subject's essay after I read it because I wondered what kinds of prompts would be helpful for it. I also worried how I should create the prompts without disturbing her original essay. The first prompts which I created to my subject's essay after some struggle:

* What are you going to write? Please write your topic or title.

* What is your topic sentence? Find it from your essay and write
* it down.

* Describe how your friends are kind to you. Give me at least two
* examples.

* Describe one incident when you felt happy with your friends at
* school.

The first reaction of my subject to my first prompts was very interesting because her reaction was what I wanted to teach to improve her paragraph. The following conversation was from my lab session journal:

Subject : What is a topic sentence?

Me: A topic sentence is your main idea of your essay. You have your topic sentence in your essay which you wrote at home.

S : Well... maybe this last sentence?

M: Exactly! Can you read it?

S : "I like Lawrence school very much. Because everybody are kind and I had a lot of happy thing in the school."

M: Very good. You know what? The Japanese write a topic sentence at the very end of a paragraph, but we need to write it at the very beginning of a paragraph in English.

S : I always write my main idea at the end.

M: Me too, but that's a Japanese way. English writing style is different from the Japanese one.

S : Yeah, write a topic sentence, and give examples. Right?

M: Great!

As our session went on, I came to notice that an interaction between a teacher and her student was very important. Although my subject tried to follow the prompts, she needed a help from me because she did not know what a topic sentence was. This interesting finding will be explored in the discussion section. I was also surprised to find that my subject already has noticed that writers need to give examples to support their topic sentence even though she did not know what a topic sentence was. She was also aware that she always wrote her main idea at the end of a paragraph.

The essay which she wrote at the computer with the first prompts:

My friends

I like Lawrence school very much because everybody are kind and I had a lot of happy things in the school. We played "Team hand ball" in the gym. I didn't know how to play it. I asked my friend whose name " Kito". She taught me how to play it with gesture and she tried to use easy word to make me understand. When I read the book I made mistake. But my friends didn't laugh. When my friend invite me to the party, we played the game and ate snack together.

Although she had the paragraph which she wrote at home with her while working at the computer, she deleted the description of the game and added why she liked her friends. She said that it was not necessary to describe the game part to explain how she felt about her friends when I asked her why she had deleted it. The description of her friends' kindness to her, such as how her friend tried to make her understand

or how they do not laugh when she make mistakes, got powerful in her second writing. Another interesting finding is that she joined two sentences, "I like Lawrence school" and "Because everybody are kind and I had a lot of happy things in the school", and this may have been due to the exercise which she had earlier in our session. Although she had organized the paragraph better, the next step was to correct grammatical mistakes and to join sentences. Before our second lab session, I created the prompts to have her join sentences, and discussed about grammatical mistakes with her.

Lab session 2

The purpose of our second session was to teach revising skills to help my subject correct grammatical mistakes and to join sentences. The prompt which I created to have her join sentences is:

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*****  
* Join the following sentences into one sentence as you did in the  
* exercise.  
*****
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The following sentences were the target sentences to be joined:

I didn't know how to play it. I asked my friend whose name "Kito".
When I read the book I made mistake. But my friends didn't laugh.

After my subject finished correcting her spelling mistakes which she found as homework, we began to work on joining sentences and correcting grammatical errors (see appendix for the whole description for what we did.). The following conversation was important to note because my subject found that the joined sentences became better.

Me: Next one is a little difficult...

“When I read the book I made mistake. But my friends didn't laugh.”

Do you know a word “although”?

Subject : No, but I think I have heard it.

M: “Although” means “*dakeredomo*” in Japanese. You can use it like this.

“Although when I read the book I made mistake, my friends didn't laugh.

S : I see. (She began to revise the sentences.)

M: OK. We still need to work on this sentence. You had better bring “I made mistake” right after “Although” because it sounds natural.

S : I see. (She began to revise the sentences.)

“Although I made mistake when I read the book, my friends didn't laugh.

After we worked on correcting these, plural and article (see appendix.)

S : “Although I make a few mistakes when I read a book, my friends don't laugh.”

M: Great sentence!

S : This sentence sounds cool!

Although it took time to revise two sentences, it was apparent that my subject noticed the difference between her old sentences and her new ones. By repeating this kind of exercise, I hope that ESL writers can create better sentences. The following paragraph is the one which we corrected errors:

My friends

I like Lawrence School very much because everybody is kind and I have a lot of happy times in the school. We played “Team hand ball” in the gym. As I didn't know how to play it, I asked my

friend whose name is "Kito". She taught me how to play it with gestures and she tried to use easy words to make me understand. Although I make a few mistakes when I read a book, my friends don't laugh. When my friends invite me to their parties, we play games and eat snack together.

M: Very nice paragraph, but I think you need a final sentence which makes it better. What do you think?

S : Yeah ... it doesn't sound it ended.

M: Right, let me make a prompt for you.

I created the prompt:

* How do you feel when you are with your friends?

S : I feel happy when I am with my friends.

M: What a nice sentence to end your essay!

(She inserted her last sentence.)

It appears that my subject wrote more easily with the prompts and that sentence-joining exercise helped her to understand what made a sentence sound better. An interesting finding was that she had already noticed that writers had to give examples to support their topic sentence in English essays even though she had not known what a topic sentence was. It was also important to note that she developed her essay not only with the prompts but with her teacher.

III. Discussion

I had two objectives for my project: one was to examine how prompting software FrEd Writer would help an ESL student to organize a paragraph, and the other was to teach revising activities to improve her writing of paragraph. For the first objective, a paragraph without prompting and one with prompting was compared in order to assess

whether the prompted files were helpful or not. For teaching revising activities, I focused on a sentence structure even though my subject made a number of grammatical mistakes, such as tense, plural/singular, definite/indefinite articles, and spelling. However, I hoped that my subject would find correcting those mistakes easy at the computer and she should not worry about them while writing and would focus on the content and the organization of her paragraph.

In addition to these objectives, I have found the importance of teacher-student interactions from our sessions. Although my subject considered prompts helpful, she sometimes needed my help while interacting with them. From the interactions, I speculate that students may be able to learn how to take their writing objectively.

Prompting Writing

The first reaction of my subject to the sample prompted descriptive paragraph was very interesting because she found it easy to write by following the prompts. She also felt that her descriptive paragraph with the prompts sounded better than her paragraph without them.

It appears that the prompts guided my subject efficiently, and I speculate that these prompts may help students who cannot do self-monitoring or cannot read their text while writing. Brown (cited in Daiute, 1985) points out that poor self-monitoring students share in the benefit of guided prompts to improve their composing and revising skills. Daiute (1985) also suggests that guided self-monitoring helps writers to set social contexts, to take alternative points of views, to manage their mental activities, and to learn standards of writing behavior.

Immature writers who have not acquired self-monitoring and reading skills while writing may train themselves by the guided prompts. However, I am afraid that they may lose their creativity if they are too dependent on the prompts. Daiute (1985) suggests that children should write their essays without prompting after they use a prompting program once or twice to practice writing paragraph because her study reveals that

some children revise more when they use prompts, but others do better on their own. Applebee and Langer (cited in Daiute) also found that such explicit training in writing is useful during the developmental stage and should be removed when it is no longer needed.

An important question to my mind is how they come to be able to create their prompts on their own while writing. According to Daiute, children who practice writing a paragraph with a prompting program several times can get ideas from it and incorporate the strategies on their own. Although her study is based on native English speaking children, I assume that ESL children also may develop the skills after the practice.

Teacher-student interactions may play an important role to teach how students can take their essays objectively to create prompts on their own. Although my subject understood what prompts had been prepared for, she sometimes could not solve the required problems. For example, she did not know some conjunctions, such as "as" and "although", and she needed my instructions. I also learned what kinds of prompts to provide from the interactions with my subject. For example, after she finished the revising activities using my prompts. I noticed that her essay needed a final sentence to conclude her essay. So I created a new prompt, "How do you feel when you are with your friends?". After she responded to it by writing, "I feel happy when I am with my friends", my subject felt that this sentence made her paragraph better.

It also may be interesting to have students create prompts for other students' paragraph because they may be able to find what is needed to improve their peers' paragraph. By repeating this exercise, they may increase their use of a self-questioning strategy which efficient writers employ since studies (Daiute, 1985, Daiute, 1986a, Dickinson, 1986) suggest that collaborative learning leads children to better mastery of writing.

Although prompting writing may help students to write more easily, it is important for students to become independent writers. It may be influential for teachers to be a model how they create prompts for their

writing as I created the final prompt for my subject. I speculate that students may learn how they can create their prompts on their own by interacting with teachers and by looking at the process how their teachers create prompts. I believe that an important goal of teaching writing is that students need to learn what they can do to improve their essay.

Revising Activities

The sentence-joining exercise helped my subject to understand what made a sentence sound better. The exercise prior to her revising activities was useful because she became conscious of what she was doing while revising at the computer. I also noticed an important aspect in the process of revising, having students read aloud their text, when my subject said that her joined sentences got cool. This is what Burke (cited in Pea and Kurland, 1982) emphasizes the importance of when writing of "the voice of the body behind the text" (page 59).

Although my subject did sentence-joining exercise prior to revising, she did not notice that there were a few sentences that could be joined when she worked on her first essay. Daiute (1985) points out that Piaget's developmental theory says that at first children are not even aware that they are aware because children have only one point of view. I, therefore, believe that children may need a "guide", like prompted writing, which lets them become aware of what they can do.

When I spoke with my subject after the project, she told me that she was trying to produce sentences using conjunctions in her ESL writing assignment. It appears that she became aware that she needs to pay attention to the sentence structure without prompts. She, however, has trouble writing because she cannot write when she pays attention to the structure. I told her not to pay attention to the structure at first, but try to write what she is thinking about. She can find sentences to join after she finishes writing; however, this will be painful if she does not use the computer because she has to rewrite a whole essay. In this

way, she may realize the effect of the computer.

My subject made a number of grammatical mistakes in her paragraphs, such as tense usage, plural/singular agreement, use of the definite/indefinite article, and spelling, and we corrected them at the computer while revising. I, however, believe that these errors are developmental errors, and she will be able to reduce them as her English proficiency increases. Although it is important for teachers to explain these errors, it may be more effective for them to let students know how easy it is to correct errors at the computer. My subject mentioned that she could not write when she paid attention to grammar; this suggests my view that ESL primary students should be encouraged to produce their ideas in print rather than to write a paragraph while paying too close attention to grammar.

Implications for the computer use in both regular and ESL classrooms

ESL students who have passed the free writing stage, especially those who are in middle school need to learn how to write an essay since writing is often required in many subjects. According to my subject, she has to write a number of essays in ESL, English, social studies, and in even mathematics and science. Topics vary widely depending on the subject, and I speculate that prompting computer software like FrEd Writer may play an important role providing steps to ESL students who have not learned how to organize an essay. ESL students may appreciate prompts which meet the needs of students' essay topic. For example, the following prompts are the sample prompts for bookreport in FrEd Writer:

- * Write the title.
- * Write the author.
- * Write several sentences about the story. What happens? Where? When?
- * Tell about something you learned from the story.
- * Write some sentences about why you liked the story.

I believe that ESL students may write better and easier by following the prompts. For those who have good ideas on their minds but have trouble presenting them in print may appreciate these guiding steps.

Cummins and Sayers (in press) point out that access to computers of language minority students is especially restricted. It is found that 22% of regular classroom teachers who teach limited English proficient students use computers, while 50% of all regular classroom teachers use computers (Roberts & staff, cited in Cummins and Sayers). It is also reported that only 1% of commercially available software programs are designed for ESL students. This indicates that both ESL and regular classroom teachers may not aware how they can use computers for ESL students. Kahn (1988) introduces the effect of the computer use with an emergent ESL writer and reports that he could compose more sentences at the computer than he wrote with a pencil and paper.

I hope that many regular and ESL classroom teachers find their ways of using the computer with their ESL students. Prompted software like FrEd Writer may be very helpful for ESL students to learn how to write an essay. It does not take a long time creating prompts for an essay topic, and I hope that not only ESL teachers but regular classroom teachers create prompts when they assign an essay topic. ESL students should be encouraged to learn how to organize an essay by practicing prompting writing and to become proficient writers who do not need prompts someday.

IV. Concluding remarks

Teaching writing is considered important in American education, and the development of the technology has introduced a new method of writing improvement. ESL students should be expected to learn and to improve their writing abilities as mainstream children are expected.

In my small case study of teaching writing to an ESL student using the prompted software FrEd Writer, I have found that my subject could

write easier and better by following the guiding steps which were prepared by the teacher. As I mentioned earlier in this paper, different language groups have different writing patterns which make it difficult for them to organize an essay when they write in English. Those who have different writing patterns, as well as immature writers who have not acquired self-monitoring skills, may appreciate such prompting writing for learning how to organize an essay.

It is also important to note that ESL students who need to pay attention to many dimensions of the language, such as sentence structure, spelling, tense and other grammatical features, may appreciate the use of computers because they can focus their concentrations on the productions of their ideas in print, and later correct other technical errors.

Both ESL and regular classroom teachers may lead ESL students to write better and more easily by providing prompts for their essay topics. However, an important goal of teaching writing to ESL students is that they should learn the format of an English essay and produce prompts on their own after they practice writing by prompted computer software programs. I hope that they learn how they can be an independent writer during their interactions with prompts and teachers.

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Appendix

1. A descriptive paragraph with prompts

- *****
- ** A DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH
 - ** the first draft
 - ** Answer each question with at least one sentence. Use your
 - ** clusters to help you think of ideas.
- *****

** COPY AND COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SENTENCE AS

** YOUR TOPIC

** <<SENTENCE: My special place is_____.

** OR

* The place I remember best is_____.

My special place is Public Garden.

** DESCRIBE HOW YOUR PLACE LOOKS.

There are many animals and trees.

There are many ducks in the pond.

** DESCRIBE THE FIRST THING OR PERSON YOU SEE

** WHEN YOU ENTER YOUR PLACE.

I saw many squirrel at first in the garden.

** DESCRIBE TWO OTHER THINGS OR PEOPLE YOU SEE

** AT YOUR PLACE.

I also saw many kind of trees and ducks.

** DESCRIBE ANY PARTICULAR SMELLS AT YOUR PLACE.

I smelled trees and flowers.

** DESCRIBE ANY SOUND AT YOUR PLACE.

I heard cry of ducks.

* * DESCRIBE ANY ACTIVITIES YOU DO AT YOUR PLACE.

I feed peanuts to squirrels and ducks.

* * DESCRIBE HOW YOU FEEL WHEN YOU'RE AT YOUR
* * PLACE.

I feel like in the zoo.

2. Sentence-joining exercise

Exercise

These sentences tell a story. Make each pair of sentences into one longer sentence, so that the story flows more easily and is more interesting. Try not use "and" to join sentences.

Example:

* * I sneak through the house. My sneaking is quiet.

I quietly sneak through the house.

* * Shadows are everywhere. The shadows are huge.

Huge shadows are everywhere.

* * I am feeling hungry. I go to the refrigerator.

As I am feeling hungry, I go to the refrigerator.

** It makes a hum in the darkness. Its hum is soft.

It makes a soft hum in the darkness.

** I pull open the door. My pull is carefull.

I carefully pull open the door.

** A light clicks on. I look inside.

When a light clcks on, I look inside.

3. An Essay with my first prompts.

** What are you going to write? Please write your topic or
** title.

My friends.

** What is your topic sentence? Find it from your paper and
** write it down.

I like Lawrence school very much, because everbody are kind and I
had a lot of happy things in the school.

** Describe how your friends are kind to you. Give me at least
** two examples.

We played "Team hand ball" in the jim. I didn't know how to play
it. I asked my American friend whose name "Kito". She taught me

how to play it with gesture and she tried to use easy word to make me understand. When I read the book I made mistake. But my friends didn't laugh.

* * Describe one incident when you felt happy with your friends
* * at school.

When my friend invite me to the party, we played the game and ate snack together.

4. An Essay with my second prompts.

* * What are you going to write? Please write your topic or
* * title.

My friends.

* * What is your topic sentence? Find it from your paper and
* * write it down.

I like Lawrence shool very much, because everybody is kind and I had a lot of happy things in the school.

* * Describte how your friends are kind to you. Give me at least
* * two examples.

We played "Team hand ball" in the jim.

* * Join the folling sentences into one sentence as you did in the
* * exercise.

As I didn't know how to play it, I asked my American friend whose name is "Kito".

** The following sentence is very good.

She taught me how to play it with gesture and she tried to use easy words to make me understand.

** Join the following sentence into one sentence.

Although I make a few mistakes when I read a book, my friends don't laugh.

** Describe one incident when you felt happy with your friends at school.

When my friend invite me to the party, we played the game and ate snack together.

** Describe how you feel when you are with your friends.

I feel happy when I am with my friends.

5. My Lab Session Journal

Session 1

I examined prodos of FrEd Writer and found its other interesting features. For example, it has an exercise of combining two sentences, and I found it interesting to use it with my subject because a couple of my subject's sentences could be combined. The exercise requires students to change adjective into adverb and to use adverb clause, and I had my

subject do this exercise in our second session.

The first activity in our session was to have her write a short paragraph using a sample prompt writing of FrEd Writer in order to see how the sample prompts would work. Before I let her work on it, I asked her to write a short paragraph without using the computer in order to see the difference of the two essays.

After she finished writing the essay without using the computer, she worked on the sample descriptive writing of FrEd Writer. After she followed the prompts, she said, "Oh, I could write so easily!" This was her first reaction to the essay on her favorite place.

The second activity was to do the exercise of combining two sentences. She said, "This is not easy," when she was told to work on it, but I explained to her how she could do by using the example.

Subject: This is not easy.

Me: Don't worry. I will help you. Look at this example.

"I sneak through the house. My sneaking is quiet.

I quietly sneak through the house."

The combined sentence sounds interesting, doesn't it?

S: Yeah!

M: Let me read what you have to do. "These sentence tell a story. Make each pair of sentence, so that the story flows more easily and is more interesting. Try not to use "and "to join sentences."

I also read all the sentences to her to make her understand what the story was like, and she asked me about words which she did not know such as shadows, hum, and click. She began working on the exercise.

S: (She began to read the two sentences) "Sahdows are everywhere. The shadows are huge." This is difficult! But... "Huge shadows?"

M: Exactly!

S: "Huge shadows are everywhere."

- M: Very good! Can you do the next one?
S: I don't know what to do with the second one.
M: Let me see. "I am feeling hungry. I go to the refrigerator." Why do you go to the refrigerator?
S: Because I am feeling hungry.
M: Right. But do you know another word for "because"?
S: "as"?
M: Right!
S: "As I am feeling hungry, I go to the refrigerator."
M: Great!

She dealt with the third and the fourth ones quite easily, but she asked me for help for the last one.

- S: I don't know what to do with this one.
M: OK. "A light clicks on. I look inside." When do you look inside?
S: When a light clicks on.
M: You just said it.
S: "When a light clicks on, I look inside."
M: OK, but you need a comma after "on".
S: "When a light clicks on, I look inside."
M: Good. What do you think the joined sentences? Do you think that they are better than the original ones?
S: Yeah! They sound cool!

The third activity was to have subject write her essay at the computer by following my prompts.

- S: What is a topic sentence?
M: A topic sentence is your main thought of your essay. You have your topic sentence in your essay which you wrote at home.
S: Well... maybe this last sentence?

M: Exactly! Can you read it?

S: "I like Lawrence school very much. Because everybody are kind and I had a lot of happy thing in the school."

M: Very good. You know what? The Japanese write a topic sentence at the very end of a paragraph, but we need to write it at the very beginning of a paragraph.

S: I always write an important thing at the end.

M: Me too, but that's a Japanese way. English writing style is different from the Japanese one.

S: Yeah, write a topic sentence, and give examples. Right?

M: Great! So why don't you begin writing?

S: Sure!

My subject began to write at the computer.

S: How do you spell "gesture"?

M: g-e-s-t-u-r-e, but don't worry about spelling because you can correct misspelled words later.

S: OK.

My subject kept writing.

S: I'm finished.

M: Good. Do you want to print it out?

S: Yeah!

M: Here you are. Do you like it?

S: Yeah, I can write at the computer more easily than I write with a pencil and a pen because I don't have to use an eraser.

M: Great! That's why I wanted you to write at the computer. By the way, for homework, you have to find your mistakes in your essay. I also want you to find sentences which can be joined. Do you remember the exercise we did at the beginning?

S: OK.

Session 2

My subject found her spelling mistakes and corrected them in the hard copy of her essay. Although I assigned her to join sentences together, it was difficult for her to do so. Her essay also had a couple of grammar mistakes, and I decided to explain what her mistakes are on the screen.

S: I found my spelling mistakes.

M: Good! Then why don't you fix them on the screen?

S: Sure! But, how can I go to the misspelled words?

M: Move the cursor like this.

S: I see. It's easy to correct my spelling mistakes at the computer.

M: Yeah.

She finished correcting her misspelled words, alot (= a lot), jim(= gym) and lafe(= laugh).

S: I didn't know how to join the sentences.

M: OK. Let's do it together. The first one is...

"I didn't know how to play it. I asked my Amerecan friend whose name "Kito".

You are missing something after name. Do you know what it is?

S: Ah..."is".

She inserted "is" after "name".

M: Do you remember the exercise we did last time? There is the answer in that sheet.

S: (looking at the sheet) Ah, using "as"?

M: Great! Can you join the sentences using "as"?

She began to join the sentences on the screen.

S: "As I didn't know how to play it I asked my American friend whose name is "Kito".

M: Good! But, you need a comma when you see "as".

S: I see. (She inserted ",", after "it".)

M: Then next one is a little difficult...

"When I read the book I made mistake. But my friends didn't laugh."

Do you know a word "although"?

S: No, but I think I have heard it.

M: "Although" means "*dakeredomo*" in Japanese. You can use it like this, "Although when I read the book I made mistake, my friends didn't laugh."

S: I see. (She began to revise the sentences.)

"Although when I read the book I made mistake, my friends didn't laugh."

M: OK. You still need to work on this sentence. You had better bring "I made mistake" right "Although" because it sounds natural.

S: I see. (She began to revise the sentence.)

"Although I made mistake when I read the book, my friends didn't laugh."

M: Good, but you still need to work on this sentence. Do you still make mistakes when you read a book?

S: Yeah.

M: Do you make a lot of mistakes?

S: No, just a few.

M: So you need to say, "Although I made a few mistakes..." You used the past tense "made", but you mean that you still make mistakes and your friends always don't laugh. Right?

S: Right.

M: So you need to say that in a simple tense.

S: OK.

- M: You also used “the”, but you don’t mean a particular book, do you?
S: No.
M: You need to say “a”.
S: English is difficult!
M: Don’t worry. I still have a trouble with that!
S: Let me fix my sentence. Do we need a “,”?
“Although I make a few mistakes when I read a book, my friends don’t laugh.
M: Yeah.
S: This sentence sounds cool!
M: Yes, it does! The next sentence has a similar mistake.
“When my friend invite me to the party, we played the game and ate snack together.”
Can you find what is wrong with your sentence?
S: Tense?
M: Right.
S: “Invited”?
M: Good!
M: Do you wanna print out to see how it sounds like?
S: Yeah!!!
M: Here you are. Can you read it?
S: Sure.

My friends.

I like Lawrence School very much because everybody are kind and I had a lot of happy things in the school. We played “Team hand ball” in the gym. As I didn’t know how to play it, I asked my American friend whose name is “Kito”. She taught me how to play it with gesture and she tried to use easy words to make me understand. Although I make a few mistakes when I read a book, my friends don’t laugh. When my friend invited me to her party, we played a game and ate snacks together.

- M: Very nice essay, but I think you need a final sentence in your essay. Don't you think so?
- S: Yeah... it doesn't sound ended.
- M: Right, let me make a prompt for you.
(I began to create the prompt: "How do you feel when you are with your friends?")
- S: I feel happy when I am with my friends.
- M: What a nice sentence to end your essay!
- S: (She began to insert her last sentence.)
"I feel happy when I am with my friends."
- M: Great! Let me circle other grammar mistakes in your essay.
(I circled "are" after everybody and "had" in "I had a lot of happy things...")
Do you see what are wrong with them?
- S: I need to say "have" for "had".
- M: Right, because you still have happy things at school. Is that right?
- S: Yeah!
- M: But that sentence is still awkward. You had better say, "I have a lot of happy times."
- S: (She corrected things to times.)
- M: "Everybody" is counted as "one", so you need to use "is" instead of "are".
- S: OK.
(She corrected the mistakes.)
- M: Let's get your essay printed out!
- S: My essay got so cool!
- M: Do you think that it was easy for you to follow the prompts?
- S: Very much!
- M: Your friend didn't use just one gesture, did she?
- S: Se use many gestures.
- M: You have to use plural.
- S: (She corrected it.)

M: You are talking about parties, but are you talking about many parties?

And, not only one friend but other friends invite you to their parties, right?

S: Yeah!

M: Then, you'd better use the simple tense.

S: OK.

M: You are not talking about a particular game, right?

S: Rihth.

M: And you play many games and eat many snacks, don't you?

S: Right.

M: Then, you need to change them from singular to plural.

S: All right.

M: Read your paragraph, please?

S: Sure.

My friends

I like Lawrence School very much because everybody is kind and I have a lot of happy times in the school. We played "Team hand ball" in the gym. As I didn't know how to play it, I asked my friend whose name is "Kito". She taught me how to play it with gestures and she tried to use easy words to make me understand. Although I make a few mistakes when I read a book, my friends don't laugh. When my friends invite me to their parties, we play games and eat snacks together. I feel happy when I am with my friends.

M: What a great paragraph!

S: I like it, and it is cool!!!

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