THE WRITING DEVELOPMENT OF
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS FROM TWO GRADES

BY

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Abstract

The current study is a qualitative case study that investigated the writing development of seven Chinese-speaking English language learners (ELLs) from kindergarten and 3rd-grade ESL classes in an elementary school in the Midwest and intended to discover the factors that affect students' English writing development in a one-year period. Guided by the sociocultural theories of learning, different data sources such as classroom observations, interviews with participants, as well as students’ writing samples from the seven cases were collected to delineate the factors that influenced participants' writing development. Those factors emerged as the author identified the features running across cases and across grade levels by using the within- and cross-case analysis.

The close examination of the cases demonstrated that in both grades writing instruction critically affected students’ participation of writing activities, their perception of writing and writing development in general. Parents' perception of and support for writing also were found to have great impact on students' English writing development in school setting. The study also illustrated different features that characterized young writers from the two grades. Kindergarteners tended to use pictures in their writings and thus generated unique understanding of composition. In addition to some scholars' findings of the non-linear development in young children's spelling, the study revealed the non-linear characteristics in kindergarten ELLs’ development of story telling. Among 3rd grade participants, the writing technique in a familiar language was not automatically transferred to the writing in the other language.

All the evidence calls for educators of ELLs to pay attention to the individual needs of young writers within meaningful, interactive and explicit writing instruction. Communication with parents about their perspective of writing also will enable teachers to better accommodate
writing instruction in class. The study further suggests the collaboration between ESL teachers and native language teachers or parents to facilitate the transfer of writing techniques between languages.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

With more opportunities open economically, politically and financially, we are seeing an increasing population of ELLs (ELLs) studying in the United States. According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, there was a 46% increase of ELLs in from 1990-2000 (ELLs, n.d.). ELLs are becoming a great part of student body in the 21st century as well. Such an increase calls for educators to take more consideration of the uniqueness of ELLs in their instruction. The current study will focus on the writing development of ELLs in elementary schools. Framed by sociocultural perspective, the study attempts to find out how kindergarten writers in English as Second Language (ESL) class develop their writing, how third-grade ESL students progress as writer, and what are the similarities and differences between these two grades. I aim to discover how the features in the writing development in both grades may inform educators in teaching writing and literacy instruction in general.

Rationale for Choosing the Topic

Three major reasons inspired me to choose the topic of ELL’s writing development: a) The importance of writing in school curriculum, b) My own experience of volunteering and researching in ESL classes, and c) My working experience in the University of Illinois Writing Project.

Developing ELLs’ writing skills is an important goal for schools and teachers. According to Illinois Learning Standards, writing is one of the basic skills that students need to master (Illinois Standards, 2002). It is closely connected to reading, speaking and listening. As an essential aspect of academic learning in school curriculum, writing has critical impact on reading
skills and higher order thinking skills (Harries, 2003). Baker, Gersten & Graham (2003) stated that children with learning disabilities may improve their higher thinking capacity with the help of writing, and such a conclusion may be applied to general education settings too. Zamel’s (1992) research about reading also indicated that writing helped students to engage, connect and make meanings of existing texts.

However, writing has been a challenging subject in elementary schools. Due to their limited English proficiency and lack of background knowledge in some content areas, ELLs are facing extensive difficulty in learning to write. Peregoy and Boyle (2005) stated that ELLs need more time in acquiring skills in academics rather than everyday tasks. The ideas of basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) also tell us the difficulty of writing (Cummins, 1979, 1980, 1981a & 1981b). The former is the face-to-face conversational proficiency, while the latter refers to the cognitively demanding aspect of language proficiency. Cummins suggests that acquiring capacity in academic learning might take a longer time than developing communicative skills (1979). Collier (1992) confirmed Cummins’s assertion and concluded that intermediate-grade ESL students, who arrived at the US at the age of 8-11, were faster achievers; and children who came to the US at younger age may need more first language instruction to acquire CALP. In addition, teaching writing to ELLs, simultaneously with content knowledge, is quite demanding for educators as well, especially when high stakes test are implemented (Clair, 1995; McCartney & Ro, 2007). Hernandez (2001) asserted that not many teachers have extensive theoretical and pedagogical knowledge of second-language acquisition. The lacking of specific knowledge regarding teaching writing to ELLs may intimidate teachers from exercising effective writing instruction in their class.

The second reason for choosing this topic comes from my own experience of
volunteering and researching in ESL classes. The current research on children’s writing
development, therefore, can serve as an extension of my early research on 4/5-grade ESL writing.
Ever since year 1 in my doctoral program, I had been a volunteer tutor for a 4/5-grade ESL class
in a local elementary school. I went to the class weekly to help the ESL teacher with various
activities. I had been to other ESL classes in the same school as well. The visits to those classes
became great additions to my previous teaching experience in China where I taught English to
4/5 graders. I was also extensively informed of how instruction was implemented in classes with
students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the U.S. This experience prompted
me to know more about ESL writing. Therefore, I conducted my early research in a 4/5-grade
ESL class in 2007 to investigate the teacher’s teaching strategies and students’ learning strategies
during writing conferences. I used interviews, observations as well as collecting writing samples
to follow the writing activities of Chinese students in the class. I found that the both teacher and
students were active participants in the social context of classroom. For example, the teacher
scaffolded the conversation by negotiating, guiding, asking for mediation and making written
remarks. As for the students, using resources in and out of class was the most apparent feature.
They turned to their friends, adult helpers, parents, as well as Chinese websites for help when
they encountered problems in writing.

However, some questions remain unanswered during my early research. While I focused
on the learning and teaching strategies in the study, I put less emphasis on the writing samples.
When I was looking at the sample writings that Chinese students created a few months later, I
kept reflecting on some common features in these entries. I felt that those features may inform us
of the characteristics of ELLs’ writing development at certain level. Although I analyzed some
writings in one of my course papers, I felt the analysis could be more extensive and systematic.
Therefore, I extend my early research to the current study that investigated the writing development of ELLs from two grades.

My determination of conducting such a study was strengthened by my conversations with teachers from the Summer Institute of the University of Illinois Writing Project (UIWP). Summer Institute, the core activity of UIWP, invited talented teachers from different grade levels and disciplines to share their experiences as teachers and writers. By working as an assistant, I had the opportunity to have numerous conversations, both formal and informal, with local teachers; and thereby was informed of many existing issues in writing instruction. By discussing with teachers, I learned that many teachers wanted to know how their students’ writing had developed through the years. Some wondered what previous teachers did to handle the problems in the early years of schooling. I considered the teachers of Summer Institute as representatives of many school teachers who had the same concern. Conversation as such reminded me that many teachers were lacking the knowledge of children’s writing development, especially how students’ writing abilities grew over time. The current study may answer some questions that teachers raised that summer, and expand our understandings of writing instruction in elementary schools, especially in ESL classes.

**Conceptual Framework**

Studies pertinent to writing development were conducted from various perspectives. Researchers found that writing is a complex process and learning to write is a long and intricate process as well. For instance, emergent literacy researchers view children’s writing from a more developmental perspective. They believe that there were stages that children had to experience in their writing development. Although they outlined the importance of interactions with parents in this process, they put more emphasis on children’s own progress.
Similar to researchers of emergent writing, cognitive scholars see writing as an independent action. They stress the writing process that writers experience during composition, as well as the task environment and long term memory. Many investigations from cognitive perspectives concentrate on the writing process of adult writers by using Flower and Hayes’s (1980) think-aloud protocol, which displays the problem solving process of a writer. Children’s writing from a cognitive point of view is less examined; however, researchers such as Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) have described the difference between expert writers and novel writers. They pointed out that, compared with expert writers, children often easily lose the global pictures of their writing. While cognitive researchers investigate the writing development of individuals, a number of studies use social theories to study the sociocultural relations that may affect children’s writing development.

In order to better understand the writing development of ELLs, I choose sociocultural perspective as my conceptual framework. Compared with emergent writing perspective and cognitive perspective, sociocultural perspective of writing pays more attention to interactions, contexts and students’ social beings in classrooms. Different methods such as case study, ethnography, discourse analysis, etc. have been used to entail the detailed account of context, collaboration and identities of the participants. Scholars have attempted to discover how situation may shape student’s writing development. Writing from this perspective becomes more humane and connective to readers. Such methodology may match my purpose of identifying the characteristics of children’s writing within the social context of ESL classes. Therefore, sociocultural theory was used to guide my data collection and analysis.

**Related Literature**

Framed with sociocultural theory, considerable research has been conducted about
monolingual children’s writing development (Daiute et al, 1993; Dyson, 1985, 2001, 2002 & 2008; Green, 2007; McCarthey, 2001; Moutray & Ennis, 1998; Sipe, 2001; Sperling, 1995, etc) and those studies covered a variety of topics. For instance, McCarthey (1994) discussed how students varied their interactions in form and quality, as well as how students internalized the writing techniques (Bakhtin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). Research also found that young writers could orchestrate among different learning settings and find their voices. Dyson’s (2001 & 2002) research on first graders’ writing practices explained that children’ writing in classroom was closely related to their outside life. The nonlinear nature of their writing development was complicated by the fact that children mingled their resources (their “textual toys”) and adjusted their participation in different social groupings (Dyson, 2002, p. 571).

Compared with native English speakers, ELLs are found to have both similar and different characteristics in their writing development. Research regarding the ELLs’ writing development has great impact on writing instruction. The differences in their writing development also inspired us to pay more attention to the uniqueness of second language writing. Scholars attempted to connect educational theories with classroom practices by focusing on the identities that ELL writers construct in and out of class, the relationship emerged when writers get responses from others, as well as the social contexts where ELL writers negotiate their meanings.

In addition, many studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between learning to write in English and in ELLs’ native languages. The advantages and questions of cross language transfer during writing have informed us of the possibilities of actively using first language in English writing, while at the same time leave many questions for further exploration, such as how primary grade students use linguistic transfer or the transfer of writing techniques.
The research with regard to ELLs’ writing development is extensive; however, previous research often focused on one single grade and failed to show the similarities and differences between the writing practices of primary grade level students with those of intermediate grade level students in elementary school, thus leaving a gap in our knowledge about how ELLs learn and develop their writing over a long term.

**Method and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the writing development of ELLs from two grade levels. I used sociocultural theory as my conceptual framework because it delineated the relationship between young writers and their learning context. Moreover, qualitative case study method was used in collecting and analyzing data. These methods were able to grasp the natural behaviors of both students and teachers, and more importantly, to disclose the subtle relationships within social contexts.

In addition to the examination of the development of ELLs students' writing from the kindergarten and from third grade, the study also compared the writing development of both grades, and aimed to discover the differences and similarities between students in the two grades on their perspectives towards writing, their development in grammar, organization, rhetorical style and other possible social factors that might affect the writing development of ELLs. Key questions guiding this study were

1. How did kindergarten ESL students develop writing in their native language and in English?
2. How did third-grade ESL students develop as young writers in both their native language and English?
3. What were the similarities and differences between the two groups?
In order to answer the above questions, data source, including (a) audiotaped classroom observations, (b) interviews of students, teachers and parents, and (c) students’ writing samples were collected in their Chinese classes and ESL classes in the ethnically diverse elementary school where writing is practiced in a variety of ways. Four children from kindergarten and 3 children from third grade were chosen as focal students, each child was regarded as one case in which his/her writing activities and writing samples were analyzed and compared.

Finally, by conducting this research, I hoped that I could have deeper understandings of ELLs’ writing development, especially the growth of young writers in elementary ESL classes. The results in this study may help educators, parents and even children themselves to appropriate writing in a new and perhaps more positive way and help to inform writing instruction for ELLs.

**Organization of the Study**

The organization of this dissertation is as follows:

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical perspectives used in the study. Sociocultural perspective is discussed in terms of language learning. I also explore the research concerning children's writing development, from emergent writing to cognitive theories and described why sociocultural perspective is used. The chapter also discussed how existing research may contribute to our understanding of the factors that may affect writing development such as writing instruction, response in writing, cross language transfer, etc.

Chapter 3 lists the research questions and the detailed methods used. Specifically, the chapter introduced the rationale for conducting the research, the selection of participants, as well as how analysis was processed.

Chapter 4 presents the cases of the four kindergarten ELLs to illustrate how they developed as young writers. I discuss the four children's progress in both English and Chinese
writing. I also compared the cases and summarized the significant issues about each individual case.

Chapter 5 presents the cases of the three third-grade ELL writers. Similar to the kindergarten cases, I portray the cases of three third-grade ELLs by illustrating their Chinese and writing composition. At the end of the chapter I highlight the important issues in each case and the three cases in general.

Chapter 6 serves as a discussion platform where I summarize the seven cases and identified what is significant about the students' writing development. I also provide the pedagogical implications from this research as well as suggestions for future research in ELL writing. I finally discuss the limitation of the study.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

I describe how a sociocultural perspective may shape our understanding of ESL writing development after highlighting different perspectives of studying children’s writing development. Then I present a detailed review of the scholarly research related to ESL writing development including: (a) writing instruction for ELLs, (b) cross language transfer, and (c) ELLs’ language loss.

Conceptual Framework

Different Perspectives of Writing Development. Researchers in the educational field have used different perspectives to investigate children’s writing development. For example, researchers in early childhood development find that children are engaged in emergent writing in their early years. Children have the knowledge of language even before they begin formal schooling. According to Chomsky (2002), children may understand some linguistic aspects of language, such as concepts of writing, letter-sound connections, yet how children gained such knowledge is not addressed. Hymes (1972 & 2001) pointed out that children acquired the knowledge through interaction with others, a process which enables them to obtain communicative competence in writing by internalizing the embedded social rules.

Young children, in general, experience a set of stages in their writing development. Researchers such as Ferreiro (2001) and Clay (1975) both claimed that children learn writing in a gradual manner. The writing development that children experience from infancy through kindergarten or first grade is usually referred to as emergent writing. Scholars of emergent writing emphasized the progressive stages that children experience when they are learning to write. Bissex (1980) in the study of her own child found that the child’s writing featured
decentration and differentiation, a non-parallel growth of form and function. Differentiation reflected the variation in the child’s writing development, such as differentiated audience and varied styles in writing; decentration focused on the child’s perspectives moving from egocentrism to outside opinions, such as adopting others’ views about writing and making changes in their writing.

Writing can begin long before formal and traditional schooling (Clay, 2001; McGee & Purcell-Gates, 1997). An important sign of emergent writing is invented spelling. Invented spelling is the non-conventional spelling of words created by young writers when they approximate the mastery of conventional forms of literacy. While Clay (1979) demonstrated a group of invented spellings produced by young English speakers, such spelling can be found among children from different linguistic backgrounds as well. For example, Samway (2006) stated that children who spoke Arabic, Chinese, etc all have invented spellings. Shen and Bear (2000) in their study on Chinese elementary children found that Mandarin-speaking children’s inventive characters are not random, but are based on their previous orthographic knowledge of the Chinese language. Chan and Louie’s (1992) research on Chinese preschoolers also showed that invented characters existed in children’s writing development with features such as scribbles and linear strokes.

Research on writing has also focused on writing development from the perspective of cognitive progression. Cognitive theories of writing look at the writing process and investigate the experience during the writing process that may include planning, translating and reviewing, a process proposed by Flower and Hayes (1981). Research on children’s writing development from the cognitive perspective usually focuses on how experienced writers differ from amateur writers in their writing process. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) outlined the definitions for
“knowledge telling” and “knowledge transforming” to represent children’s writing processes. “Knowledge telling” meant that children obtained the cue of writing either from the assignment or from relevant knowledge; therefore, writing became a means of telling children’s knowledge about a topic and genre. Rather than setting a global plan, children usually proceeded from one idea to the next. “Knowledge transforming” on the other hand, was often found in expert writers. It was the “reprocessing of knowledge”, which suggested that individuals complete the writing tasks that can normally be completed with the help from other people. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) based their research on monolingual children of English from England. Therefore, questions remain such as how ELLs of different grade levels develop their writing and whether age guarantees more expert writers.

Theoretical Framework: A Sociocultural Perspective of Writing. There are different approaches to writing research that aim to examine children’s writing development, such as emergent writing and cognitive theories mentioned above. Based on the uniqueness of writing development among ELLs, I selected a sociocultural perspective that can serve as a powerful frame for developing a better understanding of ELL writing, and for greater improvement in writing instruction for ELLs. Atkinson and Connor (2008) stated that: “much current research defines literacy not just as isolated reading and writing skills, but in terms of how meaning is constructed within specific sociocultural contexts” (p.518). A sociocultural perspective of writing shifts its focus from single material texts to the contexts of composition, which allows us to view writing as a situated rather than an isolated action. Writing activity itself implicates a dialogic process of creation (Ward, 1994). Writers create texts by using a range of socially and historically available resources (Prior, 2006).

The social perspective of Vygotsky is a prominent model for explaining writing
development. According to Vygotsky (1978), children’s “cultural development appears twice: first, at the social level, and later, at the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals” (p. 57). Through the process of internalization, learners may reach a higher level of development as they engage in a meaning making process with interactions among people. Children’s writing is also a process involving relationships. By interacting with others, children’s understandings and writing skills are appropriated and internalized.

Understanding the writing context is connected with another assertion of Vygotsky known as the Zone of Proximal Development, ZPD (p.84). He defined ZPD as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86). In writing, the zone of proximal development covers the span between children’s actual level of writing development and their level after receiving assistance. Assistance may involve adult guidance or peer collaboration. Adults or peers thus become the mediators that help writers to reach a higher level of development in their writing skills. Writing is then a distributed, mediated and collaborative task. A concept based on ZPD, scaffolding, calls for educators to provide necessary support for knowledge growth (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). Such instruction tends to challenge traditional practices such as teacher dominated lectures and worksheets, and promote alternatives such as collaborative learning, reciprocal teaching and authentic assessment of students’ language development.

In reviewing Vygotsky’s social theories, Wertsch (1991) maintained that Vygotsky’s
sociocultural approach was particularly important for establishing a foundation of investigating people’s mental functions. However, he critically pointed out that since Vygotsky focused on the “adult-child” structure, he failed to broaden his sight to the “historical, institutional and cultural processes” (p. 46). Vygotsky’s perspective of social learning was extended by other contemporary researchers whose theories shed lights on the writing instruction for ELLs.

The social perspective of Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasized the interrelations between person and her or his identity in a community. They asserted that learning was not only the experience of an individual, but of a social community. As social beings in communities, participants had active and meaningful engagement. More specifically, participants were engaged in the communities of practices. According to Wenger, “Communities of practice” were developed “by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor” by means of specific activities, tasks, functions and understandings, and involved identity (Wenger, personal page). Participants had different identities with regard to their participation in the community, as Lave and Wenger (1991) called the “legitimate peripheral participation” (p. 29). More specifically, people moved from entrance as a newcomer to a point where they become old-timers, thus being situated from the periphery of the community to the core. This process of transformation also led to changes in identities during participation. Educational researchers are presented with a novel examination of learning and identities in learning (Wenger, 1998) that require rethinking learning for individuals, for communities and for organizations. For instance, individuals need to be involved and make contributions to the larger community; the communities, thereby, need to improve the common practices to satisfy their members. Wenger (1998) also pointed out that we need to look into four major areas of social theory: theory of social structure, theory of situated experience, theory of practice and theory of
identity, while learning is placed in the middle as a core belief. Lave and Wenger’s argument may help frame questions about how young writers view themselves as members in a classroom community, and how students adjust their writing practices to fit in a new context or culture. While having limited English proficiency, ELL writers bring with them rich cultural backgrounds. Yet, they engage in legitimate peripheral participation as they try to understand the norms of their new communities.

While Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasized the learning community of professions, Barton and Hamilton (2000), as well as Hymes (1972) paid more attention to the language learning in classrooms. Barton and Hamilton (2000) presented the theory of literacy as social practice with six propositions regarding the nature of literacy. Literacy practice was defined as the “general cultural ways” of using written language in people’s daily lives (p. 7). It is a social process that involves people’s values, norms, and social relations. To extend their definition of literacy practice, they proposed six statements about literacy: 1) literacy is best understood as a set of social practices that are mediated by written texts; 2) different fields of life may contain different literacies; 3) power relations may form the pattern of literacy practices; 4) reading and writing activities are situated in social and cultural practices as well; 5) literacy practice is historically constructed; and 6) literacy practices change and new ones can be learned in either formal or informal education (p. 8). By applying their theories, researchers may find that writing for ELLs is never an isolated action. In order to better comprehend the writing development of ELLs, writing should be considered as a shared and cultural practice that involves relationships among people who are situated in a social context.

Such social contexts exist in classrooms where teachers and students represent themselves through writing. Hymes (1972) stated that the “key to understanding language in
context is to start, not with language, but with context.” (p. 19) In other words, only by documenting the relationships in the context can we perceive how language is taught and learned. Such a theory can be particularly useful to investigate writing development of ELLs. For example, he noted that language had stylistic or social meanings. When a child could not communicate clearly his thought, one critical reason might be that he expressed it in his own style. If children fail to write to a topic, the topic might be presented in one particular community norm rather than in another. Those examples are applicable for ELL writers. As newcomers to a language and a cultural community, ELL writers bring their own backgrounds, identities, and voices, which could be different from the dominant community or the teachers'. Only by looking into the context of the writing process and products can we understand the intended meaning of ELLs’s writing.

To sum up, I introduced three perspectives in the educational field regarding writing development. After reviewing those perspectives, I found that the sociocultural perspective was the most suitable theoretical frame for the current study. The sociocultural perspective recognizes the social dimensions where writing identifies a community of practices that may help students become writers, and proposes shared literacy experiences from which ELLs may benefit. In the following section, I provide a review of literature that focuses on the writing instructions and learning situations of ELLs.

**Review of Literature**

ELLs, also known as non-native English speakers, or second language learners, have become an increasing population in the US public schools, especially from kindergarten to middle school (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). The 2000 census also showed that about one in five people in the United States of 5 years or older were speaking languages other than English
(Bergman, 2003) and 14 million immigrants are expected to arrive. In addition, writing has been gaining more attention in the school curriculum. Thus, it is important for teachers to better understand children’s writing development to provide the most effective writing instruction for ELL writers. A review of the scholarly research is discussed in this section that focuses on the features that ELLs may experience in writing instruction. First, I synthesize different factors in children’s, especially ELLs’ writing development, and examine the effect of response in the writing development by placing writing in a social context. I then look at children’s voices as writers and finally discuss the cross language transfer in children’s composition.

**Writing development of ELLs.** Compared with research on monolingual children’s writing development, research on the development of young ELL writers seems scarce. Research in the field of writing has found that there are similarities in how English-speaking and ELLs progress through the stages of writing development. Dyson (1985) studied young children around 5.5 years old and demonstrated that most young children learn writing from “scribbling” at home. Afterward, they developed understandings of writing forms, such as linearity and orientation. They tended to label objects and connect them with letters. The stages identified by Bissex (1980) also showed that English-speaking children often passed through the following stages:

--- Invented spelling
--- No separation between words
--- Separation between some words
--- Separation between all words
--- More recognizable spelling
--- Short notes
---Short stories
---Long stories.

Gentry's proposal of five strategies in spelling development also demonstrated how children in general progress in spelling. Those five strategies are: deviant, prephonetic, phonetic, transitional, and correct. Though labeled as strategies, each classification seems to represent a certain stage that children experienced in writing.

1. deviant strategy – precommunicative stage
2. prephonetic strategy – semi-phonetic stage
3. phonetic strategy – phonetic stage
4. transitional strategy – transitional stage
5. correct strategy – correct stage

By applying those strategies to Bissex's case of her own son, Gentry (1982) further explained how native English speakers' spelling developed over time. Such classification may shed light on the spelling development of young ELLs. For instance, the deviant strategies covered a time period when writers created “well-marked units and approximations of real letters to true letters ordered randomly, repeated, written from right to left, or interspersed with Arabic numerals”, which indicated that scribbles of children that might lead to formal writing could be regarded as a deviant strategy.

Later, Gentry (2000) solidified those strategies to represent different stages in early spelling development. Those stages were similar to the illustration of Bissex (1980) and Clay (1975). Gentry also mentioned the variation of those stages, such as falling back from transitional stage to phonetic stage occasionally due to spellers' mode in writing, e.g. frustrated, tired or less motivated.

Young ELLs seem to have similar processes in writing development to native language
speakers. Herald-Taylor’s (1986) study illustrated similar writing developmental stages for ELLs. The writings of a first grader showed that she experienced the stages of scribble writing, strings of letters, letters representing whole words, stylized sentence writing, emerging standardized writing and finally standardized writing. In addition, Buckwalter and Gloria’s (2002) study of the writings of a child in both Chinese and English has discovered that he understood the English alphabet and the function of putting letters together. Living in American culture also gave him a learning context where he had access to the phonological information of English. They argued that the child was experiencing the following stages when he was learning English writing.

Stage 1: Scribble writing. Knowing that symbols have meaning.
Stage 2: Combination of letters. Letter and the sound do not correspond.
Stage 3: The early phonemic stage. Word represented by letter or other symbols.
Stage 4: The letter-name stage. Beginning to have vowel sounds in words
Stage 5: The transitional stage. Invented spelling appearing with correct spelling.
Stage 6: The conventional spelling stage.

Such stages look quite similar to some elements in Bissex’s (1980) and Dyson’s (1985) research where native English speaking children were studied and close to the stages that Gentry (2000) proposed; their findings showed similarities between groups of children.

In intermediate grades, research also found some similarities between ELLs and native speaking children in writing development. Hernandez’s (2001) study analyzed the writings of eight fifth graders in California, five of whom were non-native speakers of English, regarding organization, sentence complexity and mechanics. The results showed that ELLs who were regarded as “weak” writers by the teacher could actually produce writings that reflected vivid imagination and complicated conceptualization. Though some aspects of the writing were less
satisfactory such as sentence complexity, the “weak” writers performed similarly to the native speakers in organization. Such a result indicates that ELLs were not necessarily weaker writers; many mistakes can also be found during the development of writing among native speakers.

The similarities in the writing development do not suggest that the writing development of native language speakers and ELLs are identical. In Reynolds’s (2002) study of 5-8 grade writing, he found distinctive challenges in ELLs’ writing development. Two writing prompts were given to both ELLs and native speakers, and their writings were compared regarding the degree of causality through a regularity marker and power marker. Regular markers, such as “and” and “when”, may indicate the flow of succession of events and ideas, whereas power markers, such as “therefore” and “by”, may signify the causes of events. The two groups of students were found to respond to the same prompts differently. While the native speakers were able to differentiate their approaches towards two different topics by using different sets of markers, the ELL group failed to do so. Such differences might be caused by the latter’s inexperience in differentiating approaches in their native language, and suggested ELLs’ greater reliance on narrative modes of addressing different topics.

Samway (2006) asserted that writers’ development was nonlinear, meaning that not all ELLs went through the same stages or all the stages. For instance, some children may use invented spellings even after they have gained a certain amount of knowledge and confidence in writing, a process often regarded by adults as regression. Yet such a process can reflect the real growth of a young writer. However, the uniqueness in the writing development of ELLs still needs more investigation, such as how young writers navigate across the stages.

**Voice in writing.** Voice is a critical feature of writing, and has both a literal meaning and metaphorical meaning. As the voice of a person that is distinctive, the voice in one's writing is
also a way for readers to distinguish this writer from another. Elbow (1981) took voice as a feature that “captures the sound of the individual on the page” (p.287). Yancy (1994) in reviewing the literature on voice concluded that voice is “a means of expression, creation and communication that lives according to the interactions” of a writer, a reader and the text.

While voice was often the topic among poets and literary critics, the research about voice in second language writing, however, is often concentrated on adult second language writers. Ivanic and Camps's (2001) study on the writings of international graduate students showed that students positioned themselves through text. The voices generated within text were multiple, possibly resulting from the difference in genre and the assignment and more importantly from the cultures that students represented and presented in the writing process. Such findings encouraged writing teachers to acknowledge the cultural background of L2 writers and promote voice as a fundamental element in writing.

In Matsuda's (2001) analysis of the online diaries written by a Japanese adult, he noted the unique discursive features that Japanese adult writers bear when writing in Japanese. Such features, due to the uniqueness of Japanese language, cannot be transferred to English. As the author pointed out, the discourse practices in second language writing were both “normative” and “divergent”, demonstrating the variation among writers. Therefore, understanding the cultural and linguistic difference among writers is crucial for them to realize their voice in writing.

Hirvela and Belcher's (2001) research on the voices of three graduate students showed us that L2 writers have different voices in writing, which at the same time demonstrating their widely varying identities in their writing experiences. The authors called the attention of writing instructors to be aware of the repertories of voices embedded in adult second-language writers.
In addition, the findings also showed that voice, as a metaphor, has a broad nature that writing researchers need to address.

Voice not only is a feature in adult writing, but also in children's composition as well. From Lensmire's (2000) point of view, writing workshop, where teacher and students interact based on writing, may help students realize their self-expressing. Moreover, voice emerging from workshops indicated the multiplicity of writing: diverse experiences, languages and conflicts. Lensmire also stressed the importance of the development and transformation of students' voice in the process of writing. He proposed the notion of “voice as project” that emphasized appropriating resources in writing, social struggle and becoming, a notion that calls for teachers to value the development of students' voice in writing.

Although research on voice in children's writing is rare, understanding voice from both social and textual perspectives provide us with more pedagogical implications in children's writing development. Voice could the way that young writers distinguish themselves from one and another by involving their emotions, feelings and connection to the reader. In actual writings, voice could also be expressed through discursive and non-discursive cues, such text, pictures. In Kamberelis and Scott's (1992) research on children's voice in writing, writers' voices were seen as situated, which embody the voices from other people, from the context the writer was in and from the social and political influence. Voice is not simply self-expression, but the appropriation of the writer to the context around him, constructed by the individuals and communities that the writer juxtaposed. As represented by the different relationships--political, social and critical, between the writer and his community, voice is never neutral.

At the same time however, the abstractness of the definition of voice made it a trait that was difficult to identify and evaluate. Culham (2003) listed a number of challenges that teachers
held about teaching voice such as voice being too personal or voice existing in certain genres only. With the increased attention to writing instruction in elementary schools, research is still needed to discover how voice is reflected and transferred by ELLs.

**Cross language transfer in children’s writing.** Some researchers have investigated how ELLs may use their first language and transfer the knowledge into English writing. A majority of the studies were conducted at the adult level. For example, Woodall’s (2002) study of 28 adult L2 writers showed that writers less proficient in second language might switch to their first language more often than proficient learners. Unlike many studies that showed a decrease of L1 use as students’ L2 proficiency increased, Wang (2003) discovered that the adult ELLs did not reduce their cross language transfer when English proficiency developed.

Many studies have examined the cross language transfer among college level students. For example, Wang and Wen (2002) researched the use of Chinese in the English writing process. College students from year one to year four were selected to write two essays, one narrative and the other persuasive. The selection of participants from year 1 to year 4 represented the differences in second language proficiency. By asking students to think aloud their writing process, Wang and Wen (2002) were able to count the number of Chinese words used in composing English writing. Results showed that second language was used less often in text generating activities that are regarded as the most difficult activity in the entire process. In addition, students of lower English proficiency tended to use more first language, while students more proficient in English used less Chinese. Chinese was used throughout the writing process. To be more specific, however, Chinese was often used in writing that involved procedure controlling, idea generating, and idea organizing. Such results indicated that the writing development of those college level writers was a continuum, in which less proficient writers
translate from L1 to L2, but more proficient writers tend to use more L2 than L1. The participants of this study were college students who live in China; therefore, research on the language transfer in the development of ELLs in the US and in K-12 settings is needed to further understand the issue.

In the field of cross language transfer in children’s writing, Durgunoglu (2002) synthesized a group of research studies regarding how and in what aspects children may use cross language transfers in learning literacy. Language transfer can occur in both reading and writing. One important transfer in writing, as Durgunoglu (2002) pointed out, is the knowledge of writing conventions and story grammar. When Spanish-English speaking children from fourth grade were asked to write stories in two languages based on two pictures respectively, children who produced rich coherent storylines were able to do so in both languages. They were able to add details to the characters in the picture as well by giving them names, conversation, and motivation.

The study confirmed the possibility of linguistic transfer among intermediate grade students; yet there is little information about whether younger ELLs are able to do so. The question of how students transfer their voice from one language to the other is also a question that needs examination. Ivanić and Camps (2001) asserted that whenever students enter the classroom, they became part of human activity. In this sense, every person represents him/herself verbally and nonverbally. Spoken language, from their point of view, can “provide semiotic resources for self-representation” (p. 4). Written language, therefore, is a tool for people to represent themselves and convey their voices. Their research of adult second language learners demonstrated the multifaceted voices that writers bore within an academic setting. Every student is different in terms of his/her own voice. The researchers believed that voice can be viewed as
how writers position themselves through a language. The study highlighted a number of ways that writers use text to represent themselves, yet did not identify how writers transfer the voice from glish to Spanish and vice versa. In addition, since the study was focusing on adult ELLs, we are still lacking similar research on young writers to see how they transfer their voices in their writing development.

**Writing instruction.** The uniqueness of the writing development of ELLs urges us to improve writing instruction in public schools. By incorporating the sociocultural perspective, educators might wonder what is needed in order to provide a meaningful and effective environment for writing development. Some research has been conducted from the sociocultural perspective about writing instruction for ELLs. In the this section, I focus on the students of K-8 in public schools and discuss how sociocultural perspectives may inform writing instruction and what educators and writing research could learn from those studies.

**Responses in writing development.** Studies of responses to the writings of ELLs from peers and teachers are presented in this section. As discussed previously, writing occurs in a community of practice. In the process of writing, writers develop their skills through talking and communicating with other people. Hyland and Hyland (2006) stressed that written feedback or response is “effective only if it engages with the writer and gives him or her a sense that it is a response to a person rather than to a script.” They further argued that teacher’s feedback is “mediated by the institutions and cultures in which it occurs” (p. 207). Their ideas concurred with Vygotsky’s notion of ZPD that requires collaboration between the learners and the more knowledgeable others.

First language use stimulates students’ reflection, reconsideration, and restructuring of English during revision. De Guerrero and Villamil (2000), using the theory of ZPD, scrutinized
the paired writing group of two male ESL learners in a US college who spoke Spanish as their native language. They participated in the revision sessions where one was the reader, and the other, the writer. The use of first language in discussing writing helped both sides to comprehend more deeply the intention of each other. In addition, the interaction between the two participants was built upon “intersubjectivity”. That is, both sides were willing to consider the suggestions from the other, and were scaffolding for the partner for better understanding and improvement. Both the reader and the writer tried to negotiate their roles during the conversation by giving suggestions, scaffolding and telling jokes. Although ELLs were not often regarded by their partners as more knowledgeable, the study suggested that using the first language should be supported in peer responses and second language writing processes because of its benefit to developing mutual understanding.

The findings of De Guerrero and Vallamil (2000) are inspiring for K-8 writing instruction. Many teachers still assume that preventing students from using their first language will help them to learn English faster. However, based on her research of Spanish and Hmong students, Reyes (1992) challenged this assumption and three other assumptions that educators had, such as “success comes from the immersion of linguistic minorities in English only class”, “one size fits all” and “error correction in writing process hampering learning”. She noted that only by recognizing and relating to ELLs’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds could teachers authentically improve instruction and help them succeed.

Given more time for small group discussion, students would work more collaboratively than in a teacher-centered writing activity, as discussed in Spence's (2003) investigation of fourth grade ELLs in a Spanish dominant community in the southwestern US. Using discourse analysis, she studied the language her students used in a writing group of 12. When asked to give
comments about a story written by one member of the group, the students were increasingly eager and enthusiastic. They offered constructive and meaningful suggestions to the writer, and helped to make a more organized and detailed story. The entire revision process became student dominated rather than teacher directed. In addition, the students may have received some instruction on the process of reviewing writing. Other researchers have pointed out that explicit writing instruction is necessary for writing development (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). While giving students enough space for discussion by their own, teachers do not disappear, but on the contrary, scaffold at the same time; scaffolding in second language acquisition allows the students to work in the zone of proximal development by challenging them with questions and providing motivation to learn.

Writing conferences have been shown to be an effective way of providing response for students’ writing. Many studies on writing conferences are conducted among college or graduate level ELLs. For example, Patthey-Chavez and Ferris (1997) examined the writing conferences that four teachers had with eight students, six of whom were international students. The researchers aimed to find out 1) the relationship between the conference discourse and students’ revisions; and 2) whether cultural differences may generate differences in instruction and in students’ engagement during the conference. The writing conferences were held in the middle of the writing process. Eight participating students were categorized into “strong” writers and “weak” writers, based on teachers’ judgments. Researchers found that there were qualitative and quantitative differences between the conferences with strong and weak writers. Teachers used different approaches towards each group; conferences lasted longer for strong writers and strong writers produced more substantial changes to their first drafts. The authors did not find significant evidence for their first research question. However, they did find that even within the
same group, such as the weak writer group, there were differences among writers. Patthey-Chavez and Ferris (1997) believed that diverse backgrounds of students might have structuring effects on instruction. Writing conferences also are used in K-8 classes, and studies show that students appropriate the classroom dialogue to meet the constraints of writing purposes or enhance their writers’ voice upon being given the opportunity to write collaboratively (McCarthey, 1994; Schultz, 1997; Sperling, 1995).

Cazden's discussion of traditional lessons and non-traditional lessons revealed that the typical IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) form of interactions between teacher and students may deprive children of opportunities to express ideas and voice. What she noticed was a common phenomenon where teacher initiated the interaction, the students responded and the teacher then gave an evaluation. Such interactions depend on teacher's initiation and the responses that teacher gives are often judgmental, which does not guarantee an effective dialogue between teacher and students and reduces students' freedom of speaking openly in the classroom. In writing conferences, it becomes increasingly important for teachers to give more power and control to students in order for the latter to become more active participants in the conversation.

**Writing in a Social Context.** Researchers have repeatedly emphasized the relationship between writer and the context. ELLs are also involved in the social changes and in the relationship with their learning environment. Moreover, in some K-8 settings, ELLs are pulled out from their regular classes for ESL classes (Rennie, 1993). Wherever major writing instruction or activities takes place, we should be aware that students develop writing skills gradually. In this section, I discuss the research findings that address those relationships. The writing development of ELLs may be affected by many different factors, such as teachers’ perceptions, the school environment and writers’ own perceptions of writing.
Brock, McVee, Shojgreen-Downer and Duenas (1998) focused their study on the learning process of a new comer from Mexico who did not speak English at all and found that the student needed direct communication with the teacher instead of being treated as an object of the discussion. Although helped through the translation from other students, the focal student was unable to understand the writing tasks at the beginning. Her difficulty with being part of the class activities was also caused by the different school literacy styles in Mexico and in the U.S, and the difference between students’ and teachers’ understandings of literacy events. The study suggests that teachers should consider the writing context for ELLs, as well as the co-constructed opportunities that beginning writers may experience.

ELL writers need ample opportunities to practice writing in both English and native language. Manyak’s (2001) research on a first- and second-grade English immersion class provides a different angle on relations among students and teacher. Even though she was under the administrative pressure of “no English” in the classroom, the teacher seized every opportunity to develop students’ biliteracy. They helped each other to produce the Daily News, a writing activity in which all students were encouraged to participate. The researchers paid special attention to three dimensions of the classroom: 1) biliteracy, on how students develop writing and learning in two languages; 2) hybridity, on the mixture of culture, practices, spaces, identities, and powers in classroom; and 3) carnivals, originated from Bakhtin (1984), which involve heightened learning possibilities. They found that students were able to make full use of both languages in their social relations and the playful activity of news writing. The teacher’s endless efforts in creating such a shared practice benefited the writing development of ELLs. Simultaneously, we may attribute the effectiveness of this classroom to students’ initiative in taking responsibility for their writing tasks. In this sense, successful instruction results from the
incorporation of participation, membership, cultures, and responsibility.

The relationship between writer and the context may also be reflected in how ELLs write about society and thus showing their voice. Framed by theories of situatedness and Bakhtin’s notion of “speaking personality,” Maguire and Graves (2001) examined the journal writings of three Muslim children in Canada over a 3-year period. The focal students all came to Canada at 3 or 4 years old and attended the public school from kindergarten. Results showed that each child’s writings indicated her distinct personality and her way of orchestrating different social situations. For example, Heddie showed strong metalinguistic awareness in her writing about learning English in Canada; Sadda expressed her negotiation of the discourses in class and home settings; and Emma used a fictitious character to represent herself when she came to a new country and made friends. Therefore, the three girls’ writings were speaking about their own personalities. On the one hand, they depicted their personal experiences to reveal their distinctive cultures and interesting everyday life. On the other hand, they used writing to reflect who they were and to connect with readers. The authors suggested that research and instruction should pay more attention to the discursive construction of identity among bilingual children or ELLs.

Young writers use language to negotiate with their writing contexts. Moll, Sáez and and Dworin (2001) examined two cases of Spanish speaking writers, 2 kindergarteners and a third grader, respectively. They found that the two kindergarteners were active writers who accomplished writing through social mediation. For example, Krystal interacted with the teacher vigorously and produced some texts that made rich meaning and Aaron used singing and song-writing to socially connect with other children. As for the third grader, writing became a creative means of telling personal stories in a new country. She used quotation marks to differentiate direct speech from indirect speech, and English from Spanish. The powerful stories revealed
students’ perceptions of the conflicts in society and human relations. The researchers additionally stressed that ELLs should be given continuous encouragement, support and instruction to become better writers.

ELLs are active learners given opportunities for writing. In Parks, Huot, Hamers and Lemonnier’s study (2005), they observed an ESL class for over four years with regard to students’ appropriation of writing processes in technology rich contexts. The researchers compared students’ attitudes and behaviors towards writing process in grade 10 and grade 7, and found that after three years of familiarity with the writing process students were more self-regulated, having more ease in implementing the writing process by investing their own capability and other’s responses. Such a change originated from teachers’ organization of the writing instruction that afforded more space for scaffolding. This study also indicated that during writing development, teachers should allow enough time for ELLs to experience process writing if they have not been familiar with this cultural tool in previous schooling.

While positive learning environments enhanced the motivation of ELLs, there were some classrooms that failed to notice the advantage of such a context. For instance, Toohey (1998) documented a grade 1 classroom that had numerous ELLs by incorporating Lave and Wenger’s (1991) “legitimate peripheral participation.” She looked into three aspects of the literacy activities: the location of the students, the management of the materials, and the intellectual resources. In order to get the classroom under control, the teacher positioned students in a way that no conversational opportunities were allowed. However, the students resisted such physical positioning by borrowing materials from one another. Moreover, students were prohibited from helping others in writing ideas unless structured by the teacher explicitly. Toohey (1998) believed that the management of positions and materials in this class deprived ELLs of the
opportunities of legitimate peripheral participation. The teacher became the only audience for writing in this class.

Qian and Pan (2006) investigated the literacy development of Susanna, a Chinese girl from a low-income family. As Chinese immigrants themselves, the researchers were involved in the Head Start Program where Susanna attended in 1997. They found that Head Start was the only place where Susanna could learn English literacy systematically because of her family situation. In school, however, even though the teachers could employ modeling and encouragement, the writing instruction was decontextualized most of the time, and failed to recognize Susanna’s zone of proximal development where Susanna needed situated instruction of writing.

The frequency and quality of writing opportunities provided for students also are vital to writing development, and at the same time affect writers’ identities. In McCarthey and Garcia’s (2005) study, researchers analyzed the writing practices in native languages and English among six Mandarin-speaking and five Spanish-speaking elementary students for 1.5 school years and called for more authentic writing opportunities in both English and native language that were critical to students’ writing attitudes and identity construction. They found that the frequency and quality of opportunities provided for writing practices could have been enhanced to develop their writing abilities. The writing opportunities differed for most students in the study. While some students lost opportunities to write in their native languages, others had more chances to write for specific purposes. Researchers called for more authentic writing opportunities in both English and native language that were critical to students’ writing attitudes and identity construction as writers.
Summary

In the section of literature review, I first outlined my theoretical framework by introducing a number of scholars who share the sociocultural perspective. Their approaches demonstrate that children’s writing takes place in complex social contexts. Only by recognizing and appreciating such contexts can researchers examine more deeply the writing world of children.

Moreover, by reviewing the literature relevant to ELLs’ writing development, their language use in writing, as well as their native language use, I realized that, though there is considerable research on the writing development of ELLs, most of the studies either focus on one single grade or on mediate or higher grade levels. In addition, very few studies have examined the differences and similarities among ESL students of different grade levels. We are still lacking research on how learning English writing may affect the development of native language writing among elementary students, whether students from different grades view writing differently and how they perceive themselves as writers. Therefore, more research is needed about the writing development among different ages or grades.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Research Questions

The current study investigated how primary grade and intermediate grade ESL students developed their writing skills in both English and their native language within a social context. The study focused on the characteristics of writing development of two distinct grade levels. Three key Research questions were raised to reach the above goal:

a) How did kindergarten ESL students develop writing in their native language and in English? To be specific, the study aimed to discover the characteristics of the writing development of primary ESL students and the challenges they faced as they learned to write in two languages within social contexts. I wanted to discover how students perceived themselves as writers in different languages and how such identities shaped their writing development.

b) How did third grade ESL students develop their writing skills in both their native language and English? The study also investigated the characteristics of writing development among third grade ESL students and the challenges they encountered in learning to write in two languages within social settings. Like the first question, students’ identities in two cultural and linguistic worlds were examined.

c) What were the similarities and differences between the two groups? The similarities and differences in the writing development of two grades were compared and discussed. Ultimately I aim to understand how similarities and differences between the groups may inform writing instruction. To be specific, I discovered how ELLs’ writing development in social contexts might guide elementary teachers’ perceptions of ELL writing, as well as how the
similarities and differences could inform the writing instruction of elementary teachers and other teachers with ELLs in their class.

Methods

Qualitative case study method was used in order to answer the questions above. Qualitative studies aim to understand the complex interrelations within the context that exists (Stake, 1995). Qualitative research has “endless possibilities” to learn about people and the complex relationships (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). The review of writing development of ELLs in Chapter Two showed that writing development involves social factors. It is anticipated that such complex social relationships within the classroom and outside school will simultaneously play important roles in different grade levels and may have different effects on children’s writing development. Qualitative methodology provides us with a useful tool to investigate those relations and helps to explain why those relations matter and take effect. Stake (1995) also points out that qualitative case study may look at a wide range of contexts: “temporal and spatial, historical, political, economic, cultural, social, and personal” (p. 43). Since the current study aims to discover the characteristics in the writing development of children from two grade levels, the collective case study method was used. Collective study was the study of a group of cases; each case was instrumental to learning about the features of the context and its participants, while a set of cases offered opportunities for cross-case analysis.

Merriam (1992) also claims the importance of using qualitative case study in educational research. According to Merriam (1992), qualitative studies involve data fieldwork that are obtained by physically approaching people, sites or institutions. More importantly, qualitative research uses an “inductive research strategy”, which means that researchers derive theories from observations and understandings gained in the research site. Such a characteristic helped
the current research to derive the commonalities and differences from various resources, in which observations and interviews were used to understand the features of children’s writing development.

Moreover, discourse analysis methods were used in the current study. Discourse analysis stresses the social dimensions in participants’ conversations, including both verbal and nonverbal features. Discourse analysis provides us with access to an existing methodology that may provide insights into literacy development. A study of writing is a study of language. According to Gee (2005), language not only serves as a communicative tool, but also functions as supporting social activities and identities, as well as the “human affiliation within cultures, social groups and institutions” (p.1). By using discourse analysis, researchers are able to document the social activities and identities or voices of certain cultural groups and further examine the overall picture of the social group. In addition, Gee also points out the intertextuality of language use. He regards both speaking and writing as discourses, which indicates that spoken and written languages are intertwined. For children who are learning to write in two languages at the same time, it becomes a question for both researchers and educators whether there are connections between the two languages.

**Rationale for Site Selection and Site Introduction**

I chose this school as the site of research for two reasons: the multicultural program of the school and my personal experiencing serving there.

First, the multi-lingual program provided in the school was a good match for the study. The school provided multi-cultural and multi-lingual programs that were different from any other schools in the district. In the school year 2007, the school was enrolled with a majority of African American students and around 40% students with limited English proficiency. Besides
its regular language art classes, ESL classes are provided for students who have difficulty in communicative and academic English. ESL classes were offered from kindergarten to fifth grade and taught by qualified and licensed ESL teachers.

Class time allocation varied among different grades. In general, students in primary grades attended ESL classes in the morning and regular language arts classes in the afternoon, while intermediate grade students joined their regular classes in the morning and attended ESL in the afternoon for two hours. Students in ESL classes were pulled out from their language arts class everyday and joined other ESL students of the same grade.

The enrollment of ESL students varied every year; however, since the school is located within a university town children of international students usually select this school for attendance. 4th and 5th grades ESL students usually were put in the same group. With a new ESL teacher coming last year, 4th and 5th grade ESL students were divided into two groups. Kindergarten ESL students were divided into two groups as well due to the increasing number of students.

The ESL classes in the school promoted content-based instruction. Content-based ESL instruction referred to the instructional frame used, in which students not only learned English language arts, but also learned other subjects through English. For instance, the 4th-and-5th-grade ESL class learned science and social science during the fall and spring semesters, respectively. The topic of science ranged from animals to space, from electricity to simple machines; and social science covered a variety of topics, such as social justice, great explorations, etc.; 2nd-3rd graders learned about plants, ancient cultures, etc; and primary graders focused on sun and moon, numbers, etc.

In addition to ESL classes, many students could also join native language classes. An
informal survey conducted by the school showed that there were 23 foreign languages spoken other than English. The school offered native language classes that were facilitated with qualified native language teachers. Five native language classes were often available: Chinese, French, Korean, Russian and Vietnamese. Native language classes lasted from half an hour to forty-five minute per day depending on grade levels. Students from different grades were pulled out by native language teachers from their classes or after lunch, and gathered in the same room. Some grades were combined to take classes together, such as fourth and fifth grades, and second and third grades. While the teacher gave lessons to one grade, the other students remained in the same classroom and engaged in their own Chinese reading and writing activities.

The other reason for selecting this site was my personal experience of volunteering in one of the ESL classes in the school. From 2006 to 2009, I volunteered in the 4th/5th grade ESL class. I went to the class once every week, either Tuesday or Thursday to help the teacher with small group activities. Replacing a former Chinese speaking volunteer in the class, I had enjoyed every moment in that classroom. Upon entering the class from the first time, I began to love the class teacher and her students. Students’ English proficiency varied: some students came to the U.S. with no English at all. Those students usually had great difficulty understanding the instructional language in regular language arts classes. In the ESL classes, however, the teacher used slower speech, multi-modalities in instruction and set different expectations for students of various proficiency levels. With such extra help, students were able to feel more comfortable in studying in such an environment. Some students had learned some English in their native countries and came to the U.S. with their parents who spoke a little or fluent English. Whatever their entry levels were, almost all students were very diligent in learning. They engaged in their reading and writing activities with enthusiasm and questions. Most students were able to cope with the
communicative English skills in a few months, and basic academic English skills by the time they moved to middle school.

As I began to get acquainted with other ESL teachers in the school, I felt that writing played a very important role in ESL setting. Activities in ESL class included but were not limited to group reading and individual reading time, whole class writing and group writing, and writing conferences. Almost every class time that I visited, there was writing involved. During the few years of volunteering, students changed; however, writing was integral to the curriculum. Daily writing included short stories, journals, note taking, etc. Besides, students were engaged in major research projects as well. For example, the year before last, the fourth- and fifth-grade class presented “the great people in the world”, a project in which students researched the great people in human history and presented them in written form and performances to the entire school about their achievements. A year later, the teacher helped her students to organize an insect museum where students demonstrated their research on different kinds of insects. The museum lasted for two days, which attracted everyone in the school including parents. I helped the teacher and the students in preparing both museums and this experience deepened my understanding of how important writing was in ESL classes.

In addition to the class project, the school also held Young Authors Contest every year that attracted students from different grades to participate. Students were allowed to try different genres in the contest, but most participants chose narratives for the competition. A group of teachers were organized as an evaluation committee. In order to meet the deadline of submission, students worked with their classroom teachers or ESL teachers on their contest essays. During the time when I was volunteering, most ESL students participated in the contest each year, and a number of students had won the top prize.
The year before my dissertation research, I conducted a small-scale research on the writing conferences in the fourth grade ESL class. Both teacher and students were very cooperative and supportive for my study, especially the teacher who had always been eager to improve her instruction for ESL children. The study showed that there were four different forms of teacher-student interactions during the writing conferences. The variety of forms deepened my understanding of ESL classes in this school.

To sum up, I believed my familiarity with the school and the teachers in the focal school would help me to be engaged in the current research more quickly; at the same time, focal teachers’ concentration on writing would inform us more about children’s writing development.

Participants

Participants in this study included 7 students from two grade levels. Because of my own language background --I am a native Chinese speaker, I intended to choose those students whose first language was Chinese as well so as to deeply understand their writing development in Chinese.

The school that focal students attended served K-5 grade students from nearby communities. According to the school's report card in 2008, over half of the students were African American and one fourth were Asian students. The school’s unique feature included its multicultural programs. In addition to the regular language arts class, the school also offered English as a Second Language class and native language class in all grades. This feature attracted a large number of students with limited English proficiency. More than one third of the total enrollment consisted of ELLs in 2008.

The school held a unique schedule for ELLs. At the beginning of the school year, each ELL was given a proficiency test to determine if he or she needed to be placed in ESL classes.
For those who were assigned to ESL, students attended three different classes each day: regular language art class (all English class), ESL class and their native language class. For kindergarten students, after gathering in their language art class for a half an hour every morning, ELLs were pulled out by their ESL teacher and led to the ESL class that lasted from 8:30 to 10:30. Afterward, students went back to their own language art class. After a short lunch, many students attended the native language class. For the Chinese-speaking kindergarten students in this study, their Chinese class was half an hour after lunch. At around 12:35, kindergarten students were sent back to their language arts class and stayed there until 2:50pm. Since there were a large number of kindergarten ELLs this year, they were divided into two kindergarten ESL classes that were taught by Mrs. Cane and Mrs. Macy respectively.

The third grade ESL was divided into two classes as well: one was taught by Mrs. Rose and the other, which consist both second and third grade students, was taught by Mrs. Long. Mrs. Rose's class was place in the morning from 8:30am to 11:30am. After lunch, students attended their native language classes from 12:45pm to 1:30pm. For Mrs. Long's third grade students, ESL class started from 9:00am and ended at 11:45am. The Chinese-speaking children in the class joined the Chinese class at the same time as the students from Mrs. Rose's class.

As indicated by the Director of Multilingual Program of the school district, ELLs' literacy development mainly occurred in the ESL classes they attended. Students in the ESL class had different literacy activities including reading, writing, speaking and listening. At the same time, ESL class provided a relaxing environment where students could feel comfortable to learn. Students came to the class with various literacy backgrounds. Some students just came to the US with no English at all. Therefore, ESL class was the only occasion where they could learn the language through several modalities, which helped them to gradually grasp the language. Other
students, although some had an English background from attending preschools or daycare centers in the US, were not as proficient as native English speakers in academic areas. They needed more opportunities to practice reading and writing in English.

For many ESL students, this school is one of the best places where they had access to multicultural and native language instruction. A large number of parents of ESL students were international staff members and graduate students at a university. Many students lived with their parents at the university’s Graduate Students and Family Housing where international graduate students and staff members established their own community. Many ESL students were good friends in and out of school. They often mentioned playing, going to church together and taking the trips that the community organized on weekends. There were also some students who did not live in the community, but attended this elementary school for its unique programs. Even though most parents of the ESL students were well-educated, students’ English proficiency levels varied due to their prior academic background in English, native language, and content knowledge.

With an understanding of the school context, consent forms were given to all the Chinese-speaking children from kindergarten and 2nd - 3rd grades before the formal observations began. Students' language proficiency, writing behaviors, their access to the two languages, etc were considered before I collected the forms. A week later, all the consent forms were recollected. Seven students agreed to be part of the study, as consented by their parents, with the parents participating in the interviews as well. Among those 7 students, 4 came from kindergarten and 3 from 2nd - 3rd grades. Table 1 illustrates the profiles of the students.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Came to the US</th>
<th>ESL teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lingyun</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Mrs. Cane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Born in the US</td>
<td>Mrs. Cane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Mrs. Macy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Mrs. Macy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Mrs. Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Mrs. Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Mrs. Long</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the participating students, five teachers also participated in the study. My rapport with an ESL teacher at this school enabled me to talk to other ESL teachers as well as the Chinese teacher. I had been visiting two kindergarten ESL classes in the past to fulfill my course requirement and thus had some opportunities to get acquainted with those teachers.

After talking to them about my research plan, all the aforementioned ESL teachers agreed to participate, as well as the Chinese teacher who all expressed their interest. The two kindergarten ESL teachers were in their 40s. Both had been teaching ESL for a number of years. In addition, both teachers were Caucasian American and received Master’s Degrees in Education and State’s credentials of teaching ESL. Mrs. Long was in her 50s. As a veteran teacher of ESL, she had been working in this school for many years and was about to retire after this year. Mrs. Rose, the one that I had been working with, was also a veteran teacher who had rich experience teaching ELLs. The Chinese teacher was also included in the study because of my purpose of investigating children's Chinese writing. I had some contact with the Chinese teacher, Mr. Gu in
the past years. Speaking the same language also made our communication easy. Consent forms were distributed to these teachers before the formal observation began and were signed by them a few days later as a confirmation of their participation. The teachers indicated whether they would agree to let me audiotape their class activities as well as my interview with them. Moreover, I contacted the multicultural program director at the school for some information about the ESL program.

**Data Collection**

Data for the current study were obtained from five major sources: classroom observations, interviews with students, interviews with teachers, interviews with parents of focal students, and students’ writing samples.

**Class observations.** The data for the study were collected in a one-year period from October 2008 to May 2009. Such a long term was based on my research questions so as to ensure the continuity of data collection. In order to discover the development of children’s writing, it was important to determine the factors in their development throughout the school year. The long term of observation could also offer a wide picture of students’ writing development. I scheduled my observations based on the timetable of the ESL classes in the school. I visited each ESL class once every week for about 30 weeks, 15 weeks every semester. At least one hour was spent each time in the class. The Chinese class was observed twice every week in the first semester with kindergarten class and 3rd grade class in a row. At the beginning of the observations, the kindergarten Chinese class lasted for 30 minutes and the 2-3 grades had 45 minutes of Chinese. Later in the first semester, the Chinese for 2nd and 3rd graders was separated into two classes: one in the morning for Joy and Nora, lasting for 30 minutes and the other at the regular time for Jay and other 2nd -3rd graders, thus making the three focal students differ for the Chinese class.
For each class, classroom activities were audiotaped. At the same time, I jotted down field notes in addition to audiotaping. I paid special attention to the discourses between teacher and students as well as among students during class time. Gee (2005) states that discourses may reflect the social dimensions of the activities. In this case, by observing the interaction between the teacher and students and the interactions among students, I was able to discover how social interactions affected writing development and to what degree. Moreover, classroom observations helped me to understand the opportunities that students had to develop their writing skills cognitively and socially (McCarthey, 1991).

**Student interview.** Student interviews were intended to offer first hand data about students’ own perceptions of their writing and development in composition. Interviews with focal students occurred in the middle of the semester and informal conversations with students were spread throughout the school year. Those interviews aimed to discover the characteristics of writing development from the perspective of children. A list of questions were prepared before the interview such as their thoughts about ESL class, about writing in two languages, their favorite piece of writing, their explanation of certain entries, etc. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes. Some interviews occurred during the Chinese class time with Mr. Gu's permission, while others were conducted at children's home under parents' supervision. Interview questions are attached in Appendix. Almost all interviews were conducted in Chinese, except in some occasions where children used some English to explain their writing. The interviews with students at home were accompanied by parents, which brought more information about the child's home literacy experience. Although interview questions were prepared, I did not strictly ask them in order. Instead, I followed the children's ideas that emerged from the conversation and let them be the major part of the dialogue. Such a method helped me to understand how
children perceived their own writing.

**Teacher interview.** Teacher interviews were intended to provide information about teachers’ philosophies of writing, their goals in writing instruction, and their perceptions of children’s writing development in general and of individual young writers. One formal interview was conducted in the middle of the school year before the state test was taken. A list of questions, attached in Appendix, was prepared before the interview. Similar to the students’ interviews, I followed the teachers' thread and inserted my questions within the flow of conversations. Many interesting ideas emerged in this process. During our conversations, we also looked at children's writings as a way to facilitate the topic. I would ask the teacher to explain a particular assignment, the way she/he organized the writing activities, the feedback from students regarding this assignment and the teacher's response. By connecting the teacher-interviews with the ones with the students, I began to form a better understanding of the writing samples, which helped later in analysis.

**Parent interview.** I also interviewed the parents of focal students. Sulzby (1986), after examining the emergent literacy of 9 children, claims that literacy grows in sociocultural contexts through interaction with adults, particularly parents. Different from other types of interviews, I talked to the parents in many locations: their work place, home, over the phone and even on the street. Those conversations offered me valuable opportunities to obtain information about students’ home literacy experiences and how parents at home assisted children’s writing development at school. I also prepared questions for parents during the interview, which focused on their perspectives of writing, their own writing experiences, strategies for helping children in writing at home, as well as parents’ involvement in school literacy activities.

**Writing samples.** One of the most effective ways of investigating children’s writing
development is by looking at their writing samples. Students’ writing samples in both English and the native language were collected for the analysis of the writing development of focal children. The samples were chosen with the help from ESL teachers and native language teachers. Since the writing samples demonstrated the progress of writing skills, not only the final products, but also drafts and revisions were collected, reflecting students’ writing processes. All the participating teachers were very supportive: showing me students' previous and most recent entries and identifying the characteristics that they thought valuable. I used a digital camera to take photos of students' writings and created a folder for each student for their writing samples. Because I took pictures after each observation, I was able to update students’ writing folder on my computer on a regular basis. The samples, a total of around 960 pieces, included their journal entries, class project writings, free writings, letters, exercise pages, etc.

Data Analysis

All observations and interviews were taken as field notes and audiotaped at the same time. The audiotaped data, recording the verbal behaviors of participants, were partially transcribed and analyzed. Using a digital recorder, I was able to capture the classroom activities with clear indicators of minutes and seconds. In addition to recording, I also used fieldnotes to describe the activities and marked the time for each activity, and the nonverbal behaviors of participants were also recorded in my fieldnotes. When analyzing the data, I was looking for the moments when students were interacting with each other, with the teacher and with the text. Whenever I noticed such moments, I would mark them in my fieldnotes and later referred to the audio recording multiple times for any additional information. Those moments were transcribed or described and then analyzed in this paper.

Each student's writings were put into his/her writing folder after collection. I divided the
sample collection into four periods based on the time when the writing was gathered: September to November, December to January, February to March, and April to May. By dividing the school year into these four periods, I was able to tally the samples and identify the progress that each student made from one period to another. I paid special attention to the topic that students chose, the complexity of vocabulary, sentence structure, the voice that writers expressed through writing, the rhetorical style, etc.

Samples from 3rd grade were analyzed by drawing from the protocols in McCarthey, Guo & Cummins’s (2005) study, in which elementary Mandarin students’ changes in writing were investigated. To be specific, I looked at the writings of each student and identified the characteristics related to the topic, genre, vocabulary and sentence complexity, expression of voice and writing strategies. I did not put grammar as the major aspect of analysis although it was considered.

For kindergarten students’ English writing samples, three aspects of writing were investigated: spelling, vocabulary and storytelling. Analysis of spelling was made from a developmentalist perspective. Clay (1975) lists a number of principles that young writers use when they start to learn writing. There are eight major principles that Clay (1975) found fascinating in young children’s writing development. Though she does not regard those principles as different stages in writing, she does portray a process of development that young children have experienced from 4:10 to 7:00 years old. The following aspects (Table 2) provided me with some reference in the analysis. I paid special attention to the following aspects when I was analyzing each writing sample and highlighted the aspect(s) that the sample demonstrated for the discussion of the case and comparison of cases.
Table 2

*Principles of Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>What to look for in writings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recurring</td>
<td>Repetition of the same symbols</td>
<td>Pattern of repetition and varying forms of repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directional</td>
<td>Various directions, single line of print</td>
<td>Directions in writing and starting point of a piece.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Children might alter directional pattern to experiment</td>
<td>Work, letters, etc of opposite directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating</td>
<td>The ability to construct many words out of 16 letters, sentences out of limited vocabulary. It becomes important in sentence making and story writing. Can be used to fill a gap when memory for detail fails.</td>
<td>Drawings and words that children created. Words created in which some part was learned while others were generated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventory</td>
<td>Not from copying, but from children’s own creation and knowledge of letters or words.</td>
<td>A group of words that show some knowledge of letters or direction. Equivalent in codes (capital and small letters), pair a letter with a word which uses it initially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrastive</td>
<td>Mirror image of words, semantic contrast, dimensions of differences that children can control</td>
<td>Children’s free listing of words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Deliberate attempt to use one symbol implying a full word which a child can fill out or get help in filling out</td>
<td>Abbreviations (e.g. SOS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page arrangement</td>
<td>Different from directional principle</td>
<td>Left over words in the work of competent children after they master the directional schema.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vocabulary and storytelling/narration were also examined to document the changes and progress that kindergarten students experienced during the course of the study. Specifically, I looked at how students developed the complexity of vocabulary. Graham and Harris (1989) provide us with a guideline on what elements in narrative writings students may incorporate such
as the questions shown below. Additionally, in my analysis, I wanted to understand what story elements students might use, how they created their stories, how they enriched their description, and what they thought were important in storytelling.

Elements in Narrative Writing

1. Who is the main character?
2. When did the story happen?
3. Where did the story happen?
4. What did the main character do?
5. What happened then?
6. How did the story end?

Writing samples in native languages were collected as well. The analysis of students’ Chinese writing concentrated on length, character quality, sentence complexity, and rhetorical style (McCarthey, Guo & Cummins, 2005). For older students, I looked at all the above four categories; while for primary graders, due to their limited experience in Chinese learning, I was focusing on character (pinyin) quality, length and sentence complexity. The following table illustrated the detailed aspects on which I was focusing. However, instead of giving scores for each category, I used description as a way of evaluating students' work.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>1. Student is able to produce complete stories, report, or other genres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Student is able to produce partial entries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Students are unable to produce any entries by him/herself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Chinese Writing Analysis*
Table 3 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length</strong></td>
<td>1. Student is able to produce complete stories, report, or other genres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Student is able to produce partial entries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Students are unable to produce any entries by him/herself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Character quality and pinyin quality</strong></td>
<td>1. Majority of the characters or pinyin in student’s writing are correct and complex vocabulary is used correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Student’s writing has some characters or pinyin incorrectly used and written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Student’s writing has most characters and pinyin incorrectly used and written, or student is unable to produce most characters and pinyin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sentence complexity</strong></td>
<td>1. Student is mostly able to use both compound and simple sentences, as well as appropriate conjunctions when needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Student is able to use some compound sentences, and some conjunctions are used incorrectly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Student is unable to use compound sentences and most conjunctions are incorrectly used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rhetorical style</strong></td>
<td>1. Student mostly is able to use idioms, vocabulary, and organizational markers appropriately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Student is able to use some idioms, vocabulary and organizational markers correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Student is unable to use most idioms, vocabulary and organizational markers correctly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the formal observations and interviews, I had numerous conversations and chats with students and teachers during and after class to gather as much information as possible. Moreover, I sometimes talked with the teachers after transcription to ensure the credibility of data. Both formal interviews and informal conversations were considered as legitimate data in the current study.
A general procedure of analyzing the data for this study was demonstrated in the table as below.

Table 4

*Procedure of Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of data</th>
<th>Purpose for analysis</th>
<th>Analysis methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Classroom observations  | Writing process, writing activities and interactions during writing | 1. Transcribe the audiotapes using discourse analysis to organize the fieldnotes and combine the two sources together.  
2. Settle focal students and establish cases for each student.  
3. Compare the cases |
| Student interviews      | Perspectives on writing and being a writer                | 1. Transcribe audiotapes  
2. Seek characteristics of children’s writing development and discover children’s own voices in writing  
3. Compare cases |
| Parent interviews       | Perspectives of supporting writing and home literacy practices | 1. Transcribe the audiotapes  
2. Examine parents’ role in writing development and their perspectives of writing |
| Teacher interviews      | Perspectives and philosophy of teaching writing           | 1. Transcribe the audiotapes  
2. Obtain teachers’ opinion of their students’ writing  
3. Compare children’s writing |
| Writing samples         | Writing process and features of development               | 1. Identify different characteristics in writing by using protocols.  
2. Combine samples with the interviews with students, parents and teachers. |
My Role in the Classroom

As a frequent visitor to the focal school, I was familiar with many teachers and students. However, such familiarity does not mean that I was a full participant. Ethnographers need to embed themselves into the research site, but still keep acute awareness as an outsider. When I was volunteering in the past years, I had always been a participant. Yet the current research required me to be a participant observer. Being an observer meant that I was an outsider to the class, trying to view and understand students from an objective perspective; at the same time, I tried my best to get closer to the focal students through conversations, asking about their opinions and sensing their likes and dislikes in writing. Therefore, I positioned myself as a friend, a teacher as well as an adult helper in their classes.
Chapter 4

The Cases of Kindergarten ELLs

Lingyun’s Case

Lingyun is a boy in the kindergarten ESL class. He was about 6 years old when the study started. He was born in Shanghai where both his parents worked as researchers. Though born in this city, all his grandparents were living in two towns in Shandong Province in China.

He attended preschool in Shanghai when he was four years old, and learned many Chinese characters and some English in that school. He came to the US in 2008 with his father after his mother was granted a post-doctorate position at the university a few months earlier. Before kindergarten, he joined the preschools in the University Housing Community and a nearby preschool center.

Both parents worked at the university level. Lingyun loved reading at home. He would have a large pile of books and read alone when the parents were busy. He also enjoyed reading in the library. He played Chinese chess with his father at home and was able to differentiate the Chinese characters in the game.

**Cultural values and language learning at home.** Lingyun loved reading stories in English at home. The parents were very attentive to his reading abilities. At the time of the interview, Lingyun liked listening to chapter books. Instead of reading something about kindergarteners' life, he enjoyed listening to the stories that portrayed students in higher grades. The mother also downloaded some children’s books from the Internet and printed them out. They visited the local library and checked out books for Lingyun who, most of the time, chose books himself.

Since the parents were visiting scholars at the university, they planned to return to China
after their work was over; therefore they were quite committed to the maintenance of the Chinese language. At home, Lingyun spoke Chinese with his parents. My conversation with him showed that he was quite mature for his age and could understand many words and idioms that his peers did not know. Lingyun also loved listening to his father reading him the Chinese encyclopedia, one of the two books that the father brought from China. Both parents believed that Lingyun should gain enough knowledge and practice so as to catch up with children of the same age in China.

Lingyun's parents paid much attention to his Chinese literacy development. The home literacy in Chinese mainly focused on identifying the Chinese characters. The mother told me that they often wrote down some Chinese characters for Lingyun to practice. When they first came here, they helped Lingyun with English. However, from fall 2008, they started to help him more with Chinese. They taught him to identify characters in addition to learning pinyin at school. Lingyun also said that he had been practicing Chinese at home for a number of days: “I have finished about 100 (pages), it will be done about 120 or 140 (pages).” The practice of Chinese allowed Lingyun to become one of the best students in Chinese class. He was able to recognize many characters that other students did not know. When learning pinyin, he was able to recognize almost all the pinyin in class.

Even though the parents were concerned about Lingyun's learning Chinese, they both believed that he was not able to write Chinese at this stage. They maintained that only after learning strokes can Chinese children begin to learn writing. The father also emphasized the importance of strokes in the process of learning to write in Chinese. He felt that a mistake in writing strokes in childhood would be life-long mistake. However, due to their busy schedule, the parents were not able to monitor his practice all the time, but only check on his copying when
Lingyun had some questions.

The literacy habits of the parents were not directly affecting Lingyun. Both parents were very busy with their own work. Only after Lingyun went to bed would they begin their work: reading papers, writing emails, etc. The mother said that both of them would take care of Lingyun in turn before bed, such as playing with him or reading to him. In addition, they admitted that Lingyun seldom studied together with the parents.

Like the parents of some children in the study, Lingyun's parents did not seem to take much time having him read and write. The only literacy activity they consistently did together with Lingyun was having him maintain as much Chinese as possible because they were going back to China at the end of the school year. Most of the time, it was Lingyun who voluntarily read and copied English and Chinese words at home. Therefore, unlike many other Chinese parents in this study, Lingyun had more freedom to choose his literacy. Practices. Even though the parents were worried that Lingyun might not be able to catch up with other children, they did not put much pressure on their child.

With regard to English, the parents were surprised to find Lingyun writing in English. The mother told me that she was glad that Lingyun was learning English in the US where he could speak and use the language. Even the computer games could become a resource for learning English. At the same time, the father also felt that he and his wife could hardly help him due to their limited proficiency in English. Therefore, they wished that Lingyun could continue to learn English after returning to their home country. They wished that they could send him to bilingual school or schools with foreign teachers since he would probably forget about English once he stopped being immersed in the language. The mother also said that she would check the available online resources such as English cartoons and bring some English books back when
they returned to China.

**Writing development in school.**

*Chinese writing.* Lingyun's Chinese writing development was based on his previous Chinese background. Before joining the kindergarten class, Lingyun had already about 1000 characters in his home country. Therefore he had a more solid Chinese background than most of the focal students. He was the only focal child who still held his Chinese name in all classes while the rest of the focal students all used English names in school. In addition, he was the only focal child who could write his full name in Chinese. He had been writing his Chinese name in many occasions in Chinese class and ESL class.

Lingyun's ability to write his name in Chinese suggested that he held Chinese in high esteem. Compared with other focal Chinese students, Lingyun had very profound understanding of the writing system of Chinese. Interestingly such understanding was reflected in his activities in the ESL class. In one class period in November 2008, Lingyun and his classmates were singing with the teacher. The song was about beats—counting syllables in a word. In order for students to get familiar with syllables, the teacher had them count the beats in their own names. Once students grasped the rules, the teacher asked them to practice at home by using the names in their family. Lingyun could not wait any longer to try the names. While the teacher was preparing for the next activity, Lingyun clapped his hands and said his mother’s and father’s name in Chinese with surname first and first name after and also said in Chinese: “laolao laoyie (grandma, grandpa)”. Then he immediately spoke out the names of his grandparents in Chinese with beats as well. Such a spontaneous application of Chinese demonstrated that Lingyun not only knew all those names in Chinese, but understood how the syllabus in English could be applied to Chinese names as well.
Lingyun also had his own understanding of the similarities and difference between Chinese and English. In another class period, students were practicing identifying the English alphabet. Students had their own way of identifying the letters. The LetterLand book the teacher read to them helped them to remember the letters through fictional characters. After a few months of learning, many students were already able to recognize the alphabet and some students could write all the letters. Therefore, in this class period, the teacher asked her students to complete an alphabet sheet by revisiting those letters: they were going to either write the letters or the words that contained the 26 letters. They could look at the walls where letters and the corresponding characters were portrayed, or they could sing the alphabet song that had been joyfully sung many times. Before the actual writing began, the teacher asked her students if they could remember all the letters they learned so far. Some students raised their hands to indicate yes. Lingyun said that he had remembered all the letters in his head so that he needed no reminder from the walls or from the song. The short dialogue below illustrated Lingyun's understanding of the two language systems:

Teacher: That's great, Lingyun. (To all students) I think Lingyun knows both English alphabet and Chinese alphabet.

Lingyun: There is no Chinese alphabet, just it is the same.

Teacher: It is the same?

Lingyun: It is all the same.

Mrs. Cane was not a Chinese speaker, therefore she had no idea if Chinese language has an alphabet or not. However, this conversation with Lingyun showed us how Lingyun was perceiving his native language: it had the same alphabet (or letters) as in English. This perception was based on many factors: his previous background of spoken Chinese, learning of Chinese
pinyin and the learning of English in the ESL class. “It is all the same”---Lingyun was not only learning the language, but also using his meta-cognition to analyze what he learned. For a six-year-old ELL, such a statement seemed very mature.

The Chinese-speaking children in the school had Chinese class for half an hour everyday. As primary students in China, they were required to memorize the pronunciation of many characters, so copying the characters and understanding their meanings became the most important tasks. However, in Chinese class, students spent most of the time learning about pinyin, following strokes and copying the characters; therefore there were rarely any opportunities for students to conduct free writing. According to Mr. Gu, the teacher, free writing was not a component of the kindergarten Chinese class. He believed that those children needed to maintain their native language first before they could actually write in Chinese. This perception was shared by many Chinese parents in the study as well. They were very surprised to learn that their child could *write* in ESL class while they were only able to scribble some letters.

The only free writing pieces that Lingyun created were the ones he wrote right before he left for China. Lingyun and his family were going back to China before the school year ended. Mr. Gu used this opportunity and asked Lingyun to use pinyin to write letters to him in class. The teacher asked Lingyun to write whatever he wanted to tell the teacher about his leaving.

Figure 1 was written as a conversation between Lingyun and Mr. Gu. Lingyun, instead of writing the letter seriously, composed it in a very playful way. He jokingly told Mr. Gu, the Chinese teacher that he will never come back to the US and if Mr. Gu was going to Shanghai to see him, he will come to the US so that he can escape from the teacher.
Figure Lingyun-1. Chinese writing.

Translation:

Lingyun: I will miss you, Mr. Gu. Come to my home someday. You can take a look at our home.

Mr. Gu: I will miss you. You are a lovely good child. Be a good student after you are back to China. Don’t forget English.

Lingyun: I will not forget it.

Mr. Gu: Good boy. When are you coming back?

Lingyun: Never.

Mr. Gu: Can I come to Shanghai to see you?

Lingyun: Then, I will come to the U.S.

This piece was not completely free writing, but guided writing led by the teacher. However, there were still some interesting features in it. For instance, Lingyun was trying to use
pinyin to compose sentences, yet there was no punctuation in any of those sentences. The only punctuation was the period the teacher added to the end of the first sentence. It should be noted that Lingyun was able to put punctuation in most of his English writings, yet such ability was not transferred to his letter writing in Chinese. Probably in his mind, using pinyin was not a way of writing at all, or letter writing which involved short sentences or daily dialogue was not a genre that needed punctuation. Second, Lingyun used pinyin to play jokes with the Chinese teacher. To Lingyun, dialogue with Mr. Gu was not a formal letter, but a joyful way of spending the time in Chinese class. Therefore, instead of writing presumably with words such as “I will come back to the US”, he expressed the meaning of: “I will never come back to the US”, and instead of “I will see you in Shanghai”, he had “Then I will come to the US (if you are going to Shanghai)”. Finally, I could not help but notice that Lingyun was using English structure to write Chinese. For the first sentence, he was trying to write: “I will miss you come to my home some day”. However, in Chinese, the time preposition “na tian (some day)” is usually not put at the end of the sentence; therefore, the sentence Lingyun had was very awkward in written Chinese. The position of “na tian” might suggest that he was transferring his knowledge in English to Chinese writing. However, such a transfer was a negative transfer. Young ELLs like Lingyun were at a stage where transfer was often seen, yet what elements could be transferred and when to transfer them still remained a mystery to them, which resulted in the erroneous transfer like “na tian” and the non-transfer of punctuation.
**English writing.** In order to understand the Lingyun's development in English writing, the year long observation in his ESL class was divided into four major periods: September-November, December-January, February-March, April-May. Through a year’s learning in English, Lingyun became a distinctive boy writer in ESL class.

**September to November.** September to November was the first period of observation when Lingyun started writing in ESL class. The pieces he created at this time were mostly pictures with his name or following the sentence structure. For instance, students copied the structure of “I am”, “I can”, “I see” etc. While students were still learning the alphabet, the teacher wrote the words on the board and students copied them into their own sentences. From those writings, it was noted that Lingyun was able to copy the words correctly and put them into the corresponding position in a sentence.

However, at the beginning stage, Lingyun did not quite understand the conventions in English writing including capitalization and punctuation. He understood that “I” needed to be capitalized due to its importance, yet he used lower case in other words to begin his sentences at this point. Take the following entry for example (Figure Lingyun-2).

![Figure Lingyun-2. We Need Sun. We Need Slid.](image)

The entire entry contained two sentences by using the beginning structure of “we need”.
Each word was capitalized. At the same time, the letter “e” in the entire entry was taking two lines instead of one. Punctuation was used correctly at the end of each sentence. The word “slide”, though spelled incorrectly, suggested that he was using the phonic character of letter “i” in word spelling.

The following example (Figure Lingyun-3) was also created at this time. Instead of writing a sentence, he used both pictures and phrases to express his thought. In the picture, he drew four friends and put the names of three of them beside the figure. Due to the confidentiality of students’ identity, all the names were erased in this example, yet the original picture showed that all the names were written correctly. Interestingly, the lines under the picture did not seem to function: His words covered the middle line. To Lingyun, writing in the middle looked more beautiful and normal. There was no capitalization for “me” and there was no punctuation at the end.

*Figure Lingyun-3. me and my frands.*

*Figure Lingyun-4. I can Jump I can Play I can cook I can read.*
The way he positioned the letters changed even within the same month. The entry he wrote about “I can” in Figure Lingyun-4 showed that he was able to put most of the words in between lines. At this stage of writing development, Lingyun was trying a variety of ways of positioning letters and words, but due to his age, he still was not able to internalize the rules of positioning. In Bissex's (1981) study of her own son's writing development, she discussed the different formats of writing that her son experienced in school and at home: free style at home and more structured format at school. She noted that the format of school writing might restrict students' writing development. In Lingyun's case at his early stage of writing, spacing in writing did matter to the writing development of a child. While Lingyun was exploring the conventions of English writing, he was also trying to go beyond the conventions and had his own style. It was also interesting to note that at the same time in his Chinese class, he was learning simple Chinese characters, which required him to write within a framed boundary (Figure Lingyun-5). In contrast to the various positioning of letters, he never had any similar issues in Chinese character writing.

Figure Lingyun-5. Chinese characters practice.

December to January. Similar to other focal children, Lingyun had very limited entries during this period of time. The month-long state tests in late January and early February stopped all the ESL classes in the school. Many primary grade ESL teachers were asked to monitor the test or help students with extra work. Even though there was not much production, Lingyun's
writing in these two months was very impressive. Not only was he able to use his own words instead of copying the teacher's, but also his story became more complex and complete.

Lingyun's writing became more sophisticated during this period. The following piece (Figure Lingyun-6) was created in early December. The entry had many outstanding perspectives. He used one speech bubble to indicate what he wanted to announce. The other bubble was to identify his whereabouts when he was telling the story. The picture also portrayed his mom with vivid facial expressions. In his writing, he became a storyteller who was telling the incident to his teacher. He first introduced the character of the story and the cause of the incident. Then he portrayed the reaction of the character to the event and finally the solution of the event. In each part, he also used as many details as possible to make the story attractive, such as 2, sad and clean up.

Figure Lingyun-6. Ms Cane. my mom droppd 2 eggs. She feels sad. She klend it ap. (My mom dropped 2 eggs. she feels sad. She cleaned it up.)

With the help from his ESL teacher, Mrs. Cane who was sitting next to him, Lingyun completed this piece with excitement. Mrs. Cane was continuously encouraging him to write more about what he experienced and felt. She elicited Lingyun to continue his story after he stopped after one sentence. She asked him what happened in the middle and what happened in the end. Instead of forcing him to write, she showed her curiosity of learning more about the
story. After the journal time was over, all the students were gathered on the rug. Mrs. Cane was holding Lingyun's journal in her hand. In a soft tone, she explained Lingyun's story. She started describing the picture and then read the text. She then explained why the story was chosen today as a sample story: "it has beginning, middle and ending". Mrs. Cane was using this example to demonstrate the method of writing. She finally encouraged all of them to create their own stories for the writing contest within the school building.

Similar sophistication could also be found in another journal entry (Figure Lingyun-7) about Lingyun going sledding with his father. He used both pictures and words to depict this event. In the picture, he drew a hill from the top of which he was riding a sled. In addition, he drew the two trees at the foot of the hill. To make his readers understand, he labeled the trees on the side. In his writing, he put a series of actions to describe this exciting event in his life. What made this entry outstanding was Lingyun's ability to write actions. Like the previous entry, he was a great storyteller who emphasized details. In this story, he first introduced the beginning of the plot: falling off the sled. Then a turning point of the story happened: he saw the sled hitting a bump. The most engrossing part was the last sentence: And the sled flew in to the ski.
Figure Lingyun-7. I fel off the slad. the slad hit a bamp And the slad flw in to the ski. (I fell off the sled. The sled hit a bump. And the sled flew into the sky.)

The punctuation in this piece was also interesting in a way that it did not quite reflect what he used to write. In the period of September—November, although he had put periods at the end of some sentences, many entries still did not have any punctuation. Therefore he might be at a stage where he was still learning the conventions. In this piece, instead of putting punctuation at the end of sentences, he put periods in the middle. At the same time, he added “And” for the last sentence, which showed his awareness of the order of actions.

Many words in this period of time were written according to their sounds, and Lingyun had errors that mainly associated with vowels, such as a in slad, a in bamp, a in ap. Although in an incorrect form, he sensed that there was something after the consonant that does not necessarily mean a vowel. Yet putting w after fl to indicate the past tense showed that Lingyun was aware of some rules of verb tense, which he may have inferred from the sight words or from reading. In addition, he was still mixing lower cases and capital letters in the middle of the
sentence during this period of time, which also showed his process of learning.

*February to March.* February and March were the two months when students in this ESL class produced the most writing. After a long time devoted to state tests, kindergarten ESL students were able to come back to their ESL class and practice writing again in mid February. During these two months, Lingyun's writing developed quickly and showed great variety. Writings in this period included journal writing, word writing and writing in content areas.

Many writings in his journals were the recordings of Lingyun's daily life. Writing about his everyday life was one of the best ways to express his writing ability. He wrote several times about where the family went during weekends, what they saw, and what they did. He used the opportunity of journal writing to tell readers or express his own feelings about his life in the U.S. Many times, he used “me” to refer to “I” in writing. For example, the following piece was composed at the end of February (Figure Lingyun-8).

*Figure Lingyun-8.* Tuscola is a fun place me and my familei. we go to tuscola.

The family came back from their trip to a small town shopping for goods that they could
take back to China in April. Like he normally did, he used both pictures and words to tell the story. In his writing, he put: “Tuscola is a fun place. me and my famlei. we go to tuscola”. In this piece, he first expressed his emotion for this trip. Then he introduced the characters involved and finally what they did. He also wrote about the plan of his family members. In another journal, he added: “Me and my famlei went back to chitr” (Figure Lingyun-9). He also used present progressive tense to indicate the plan, such as the example in Figure Lingyun-10. In those writings, he used both past tense and present tense to describe the events, which suggested that he was still developing his ability of storytelling.

Figure Lingyun-9: Me and my famlei went back to chinr. (Me and my family went back to China)

Figure Lingyun-10. Me and my family are going to chicago and buy
Moreover, Lingyun was using new strategies in writing stories. One of the strategies was “combination”. Based on what he experienced rather than simply recording a single event, he was combining multiple events to create a unified story. For instance, in the following entry (Figure Lingyun-11) he composed in mid March, he described what he did over the weekend: going to different stores and playing with his friend. When I asked him about the story, he told me that he did not go to Walmart the day after the trip to Meijer. “It was in February when I went to Meijer and, Walmart, it was this weekend. I made it up. Ant is the name of my friend and I was playing with him when I was at Walmart.” “Making it up” made the two distinct events take place in the same story. He was intentionally thinking about the topic and collecting the memories so that he could use them later in his journal.

*Figure Lingyun-11.* I leave meijer at 7:30. and go home and sleep. at the next day, I went to walmart. Ant my frnd was there and. I played with ant.
Figure Lingyun-12. I drink orange juice. the owner was mad and before the owner could kick me I kicked him.

The other strategy he used was initiating imagination. Unlike many other focal children, Lingyun did not often write about the stories that he was not familiar with. However, in one piece (Figure Lingyun-12), he used pure imagination and created a very dramatic story. In the journal, he described the conflict between a juice-stand owner and himself. He set up the beginning of the story by a simple sentence. Then the story made a dramatic turn: the owner was mad. Instead of explaining why, he vividly described the scene as we might see in a movie: the kicking. Lingyun was a very mild-tempered boy who was always eager to help others. I was surprised to read a story like this in his journal. When I asked him if the story really happened to him, he smiled and said: “No, I made it up.” He also said that the teacher helped him with some spelling when he was writing this story, such as owner and kick, but the rest of the story was entirely his own work. This piece demonstrated his new strategy of writing. To Lingyun, stories can be untrue and imaginative; they did not have to really happen to the storyteller. As a kindergarten child, he was not quite able to articulate explicitly his perspectives of story telling, yet this piece indirectly showed us his developing perception of writing.
In addition to the journals, word writing was equally important for Lingyun and his classmates during this period of observation. The alphabet book they had been learning since the beginning of the school year was equipped with a spelling book. Each letter had its own page with a picture on the top and blank space on the bottom. The pictures represented the words that began with the letter on that page. Students could also write whatever words they knew other than the pictures. Each time before the word writing activity, Mrs. Cane would review the letter with her students and get them more familiar with what they had learned previously. Then she gave some sample words that students could write. They wrote together on the board by helping the teacher spell the words: Helicopter, hands, hook, etc. Instead of voluntarily giving the spelling to students, Mrs. Cane asked the students to help her spell and did not intentionally correct the wrong spelling. She spelled the words together with the students first and then asked them to complete the rest of the page on their own. She also asked her students to think beyond the pictures and look for the words around that might contain the letter of that day.

Lingyun loved word writing very much. He always tried to get as many resources as possible and write the most words he could. The following example (Figure Lingyun-13) listed all the words that Lingyun wrote for letter H in less than ten minutes. In the class, Lingyun was sitting at the same table with Mohamed and Chengyi. Mohamed came from Middle east and Chengyi just came from China two months ago. A student teacher came to the class today and was helping Chengyi with the spelling. Lingyun heard that they were writing the word “hiccup” and wanted to write the same word as well. He murmured the sound to himself and wrote down “hicp”. However, to him, such a spelling did not “look” right. He took a quick look over at Chengyi’s book and asked: “c-u-p?” He looked at his own spelling book and thought for a second. Then he erased p and put up after letter c. “He is cheating!” Mahomet said. “Why?” Lingyun was
not taken away by Mahomet's challenge, “We can help each other in spelling!” Lingyun wrote fifteen words in today's activity and was ready to write more if time permitted.

Figure Lingyun-13. Word writing for letter H.

Figure Lingyun-14. Word writing for letter D.

In another word writing exercise (Figure Lingyun-14), Lingyun was using letter \( d \). Among all the words that Lingyun listed on the paper, not only nouns such as dog, duck, day, etc. were included, but also prepositions and verbs. Word spelling became an equally important part of writing practice as journal writing. In this practice, not only was Lingyun able to learn new words such as deer, but also able to revisit the words he was already familiar with. To accompany the free journal writing, word writing became a process where children reviewed the knowledge of word construction and spelling. In addition, there was a great amount of self-correction in the word writing pieces. It seemed that at this stage of writing development, the correctness of spelling was important to Lingyun. Many times when I was standing next to him, he would ask me if some words were spelled correctly. Such awareness seemed to come from a
large amount of reading and writing practice, as well as his own understanding of the English language.

Writing in science and social science was also introduced in February and March. Students were able to use the scientific or social science vocabulary to create writings in different genres. For instance, in early spring, students were introduced to weather words. Lingyun produced the piece like this (Figure Lingyun-15): One time I tried to eat the tomatos, got blown away by the tornado.” The vocabulary was given, but students might choose their own topics. Lingyun used two words that had the similar sounds, but at the same time created a dramatic turn of story. Moreover, students were introduced to the science unit of “liquid, gas and solid”. In order for students to understand the scientific concept, students conducted experiments and used charts to record the results. One day, Lingyun and Chengyi were put at the same table doing the experiment of “Float & Sink”. The experiment required them to put objects in the water and observed the phenomenon. Lingyun and Chengyi were given a sheet where they could record the experiment results (Figure Lingyun-16). Lingyun was very enthusiastic about this activity and commented that “you can just draw it and remember it”. Drawing and remembering pinpointed the purpose of science writing in Lingyun's view. To Lingyun, drawing the results of those experiments was a new form of writing.

*Figure Lingyun-15. One time I tried to eat the tomatos, got blown away by the tornado.*
April. April of 2009 was the last month when Lingyun was observed. He went back to China at the end of April. Compared with other periods of the year, his writing did not develop very much, but regressed to some extent. The amount of writing was considerably less than other periods. There were only three pieces of word writing and five pieces of short journal writings.

The length and depth of the journal writings were not comparable to the pieces he created in December of 2008. Previously, he was already able to depict very sophisticated plots and characters; in this period, however, I saw repetition of topics and simplified sentence structures. For instance, he wrote about going to the super market again with his family (Figure Lingyun-17).
I was standing next to him when he was writing this piece. He put down “mij” in the picture area first, and then asked Chengyi how to write “Meijer”. With Chengyi's help, he wrote down “meijer” next to the first word. Then he moved to the lower part of the page where lines were printed for writing, and wrote:

I went to meijer. and.

He erased the period, realizing that it did seem correct. Then he wrote “I got to eestr eegs”. He looked at me asking if his “eestr” is correct. He said he knew it might not be correct. I told him that it was not, but we did have this word in the classroom. He went to the front of the class and asked the student teacher to remove the date of last Sunday and saw how Easter was written. He knelt down on the rug and wrote down “Easter”. After that, he came back to his seat and asked me again if eegs was correct. Noticing that I did not say anything, he smiled and said that it must be wrong. I told him that he wrote the same word a long time ago when he was
writing about “his mom dropping two eggs”. He suddenly remembered and changed “eegs” to “eggs”. He also told me that the they were free eggs when he was visiting the store. He took a quick look at his journal and wanted to put his journal back to his box since he thought that it was completed. I asked him then if he wanted to tell me more about the free eggs. Hearing, he quickly added another sentence to the journal: “it is free”. I asked him if he wanted to write more about this. He shook his head.

This writing piece had the similar topic that Lingyun wrote before and the sentence structure remained the same. In other pieces he created during this period of time, writings were all shorter and simpler than before and a majority of the writings were not finished, such as the two pieces in Figure Lingyun-18 and Figure Lingyun-19.

*Figure Lingyun-18.* when I got shokt by the luitling

*Figure Lingyun-19.* I got hurt by the
In contrast to the apparent regression in journal writing, Lingyun showed great improvement in word writing. Two of the three pieces of word writing showed that he was able to write as much as twenty words for certain letters. The increased amount of words in the Letterland book suggested that he was at a stage when more vocabulary was building. Lingyun put down twenty-five words for letter N. He asked me for a bit help in spelling some words such as nails. He put down “nal” first and asked me if it was correct. “Sort of,” I said. He looked very upset and immediately asked me what was missing. I said that there was a “i” in the middle, so he asked again if it was “ai” or “ia”, and finally we settled on nails. He often asked for spelling from the teacher too, and told other kids that there was letter u instead of a in in the middle of word “number”. He also looked around the room to get the words that he was about to write. In this way, he wrote as many as twenty-five words. In another word writing practice, Lingyun also wrote about twenty words to his best knowledge.

To summarize, in this period of time, Lingyun's journal writing failed to develop as it did in previous months, but his word writing progressed enormously. On the one hand, he was able to use available resources for word spelling; on the other hand, he was not using the words in his journals. Since he was going back to China at the end of April, his English writing practice in ESL class came to an end. Probably due to his plan to return to China, he did not seem to pay as much attention to writing as before, which could be seen from the writing of the “Easter egg” (Figure Lingyun-17) where he refused to write more details. The writing strategies he acquired from last two months were not extended to April either. The occasions of writing conferences with the teacher were also reduced.

**General Features.** Lingyun’s writing development over four periods in a year demonstrated some general features. He was a bright boy writer with unique characterisits. Over
a year's time, I observed that Lingyun developed from a student who could only copy words from the board to a writer who created his own stories. His writing development excelled in the aspects of description, narration and understanding of writing systems.

Like other focal kindergarten ELLs, Lingyun's writing development also was a non-linear process. For Lingyun, such non-linearity was reflected in his narrative ability. His writing developed quickly in the first three quarters of the school year; from late November to December, he was able to produce complete stories with beginning, middle and ending; Unfortunately, those story elements were absent in the pieces in March and April: in the last month of the year, I did not see those aspects being well maintained or extended. The reasons for the disappearance of those elements later might be partially explained by his family's plan of returning to China at the end of April. Realizing that he would not use English any more, he might not have been as attentive to writing as before. At the same time, however, I noticed that his vocabulary progressed extensively overtime. Therefore, his disregard of free writing was compensated by the development in word building, which showed that Lingyun was an inconsistent writer of English in his first year of formal English writing.

In addition, Lingyun's writing development was affected by the writing instructions in his ESL class. Lingyun's ESL teacher focused on the interactions and purpose of composition; therefore, students had many opportunities to share their entries with each other. The teacher also wrote a letter to students everyday in the morning on the blackboard so that students could read the letter the first thing in the morning once they stepped into the classroom. Those letters helped students learn the purpose of writing: a way of communication between writers and readers. Moreover, Mrs. Cane often elicited students' thoughts about writing before they wrote and provided a great deal of support during writing to help them elaborate. After writing, she had
students share their work and discuss details of their writing. Lingyun's stories from November to February were the results of those positive instructional methods. He showed great interest in articulating his ideas and sharing his stories with the class.

As I discussed earlier, the writing conferences between Lingyun and his ESL teacher played important roles in Lingyun's writing development in the first three quarters of the year. The number of conferences was reduced in the last month out of unknown reasons. However, retrospectively, if Lingyun continued to keep as much communication with the teacher as before, readers might see a greater amount of excellent writings from this young writer.

Lingyun also had keen awareness of the differences and similarities between English and Chinese. He had the highest Chinese proficiency among all the focal kindergarten children and the only child who maintained his Chinese name in school instead of changing it to a more “pronounceable” English name. In class, he often write his name in Chinese in accompany to the English spelling and spoke Chinese with his Chinese friend Mia and Chengyi. At the same time, his parents at home realized the importance of maintaining his Chinese due to their plan of returning to China at the end of the school year. Therefore, they paid great attention to Chinese speaking, reading and Chinese character writing. Those strategies helped him to gain firmer knowledge of Chinese language than all other focal children in this study. Lingyun's writing in Chinese and English showed some degree of cross-language transfer, such as his comparative understandings of the two language systems, yet simultaneously, some writing conventions, especially punctuation, were not transferred in Lingyun's case and some Chinese language loss was observed in Lingyun's “semi” free Chinese writing. Even though Lingyun's understandings of the two language systems were not entirely correct, they did suggested that children as young as 5/6 year old, or children whose native language was not English were able to acquire such
perceptions through learning and constant use of both languages.
Mia’s Case

Mia was born in 2003 in the US and was 5.5 years old at the beginning of the study. She lived with her parents at the Graduate Students Housing of the University where many children of similar age attended the elementary school nearby. In the school, she attended ESL class, Chinese class and her all English class as well.

Both her parents came from the northeastern part of China. Mia’s father was a graduate student in Chemistry at the university. He came to his current program in 2006 with his advisor. He was very busy in his study and often came home late at night. The mother stayed at home and took care of Mia most of the time. She was an art major in China and liked oil painting very much. She also had some people learning painting with her at home. At Mia’s home, there were many oil paintings hanging on the wall that demonstrated the skills of the mother as a great painter.

Cultural values and language use. In school, Mia spoke English most of the time in ESL, especially the first 2/3 of the school year. She would speak Chinese with her Chinese classmates in ESL and Chinese classes. Lingyun, who was in the same ESL class with her often spoke Chinese to her voluntarily; and she would in turn respond in Chinese. In the spring of 2009, Guangzhao and Eric joined the same kindergarten class. Both boys were born in China and had attended preschool there before coming to the US. Their spoken Chinese proficiency was quite high. After they came, Mia began to speak more Chinese than before in ESL class. She often chose to sit with the other Chinese speakers in ESL class. During their interactions, they often used Chinese because Guangzhao and Eric were not proficient in oral English. In class, Mia often listened to other children talk and then gave them feedback. In Chinese class, Mia was somewhat quiet as compared with her high activity level in ESL.
Both parents spoke Mandarin to Mia at home with a bit of a northeastern accent. The mother spoke Mandarin to Mia who would respond in Chinese; however, as the mother pointed out, the father sometimes spoke English with Mia. Mia's mother was concerned about her daughter's current Chinese proficiency: “She sometimes talked to Lingyun or Eric, but does not seem to understand what they were saying. They have been living in China until recently, so there are some words that Mia does not understand.”

According to the mother, Mia's spoken Chinese might affect her performance in Chinese class where she was not as confident in speaking as in ESL or all-English classes. However, to the mother, being able to speak Chinese was more important than reading and writing. She expressed in the interview that she would not put much pressure on Mia in Chinese speaking: “As long as she can speak, “she said, “I am okay with that”.

**Literacy activities at home.** Before attending elementary school, Mia joined with many children in the Graduate Housing Daycare Center and the Linwood Daycare where she learned some simple English, such as the alphabet. The mother said that Mia was a very shy before kindergarten and “was very quiet in the daycare centers”. The teacher in the Graduate Housing Daycare Center was strict with the children, the mother said. Mia often came back home crying and refused to go back to the center again. The mother, therefore, had to change to another center. Linwood was the second center that Mia went before attending kindergarten. She loved that place very much because “she had never cried about that place”.

In her free time, Mia learned to play piano and loved watching DVDs about princess and princes. For instance, the mother stated that Mia had been watching Cinderella many times, but never got tired. Besides watching DVDs, Mia also liked playing computer games. At the same time, when the mother was reading stories online, she pointed to some words and asked the
mother for the meanings.

Mia loved reading at home as well. She would ask her mother to read to her two books at night; and according to the mother, Mia would cry if she were not read to at bedtime. With regard to writing at home, the mother told me that Mia had many scribbles when she was very little. However, since there were so many papers, the mother jokingly said that she had to throw away all of them to keep the home neat and tidy.

**Writing attitudes, practices, and development in school.** Mia was in kindergarten when the study was conducted. She was in Mrs. Cane's ESL class for two hours from 8:30 am and attended Chinese class at noon with five other kindergarten students for 25 minutes.

**Chinese writing.** Mia's Chinese writing mostly focused on the practices of Chinese characters and Chinese pinyin in school. In the fall of 2008, students were learning simple characters such as 人大小口 etc. Those characters do not have many strokes and were comparatively easy to start with. In Chinese class, Mia learned about 4-5 characters in each class period. They followed the example that Mr. Gu gave and practiced writing those characters on their own exercise sheets.

Mia was often very careful in writing those characters. The teacher emphasized writing with correct order of strokes; therefore, he often walked around the room to check if students were writing in that order. Mia, though careful in writing, did not always follow the correct order. For instance, in one of the lessons, students were writing word 来 (come). She often played with the stroke orders as well when writing Chinese. Instead of the correct stroke order, Mia put the character in this way: \( \backslash ] \|--\|--\|-- \). In many occasions, she wrote the parts according to her understanding. In November, students were learning the character 石 (rock). For the last part of this character口, Instead of the normal order: 1—1—1, she wrote the strokes in a reverse order.
In the spring of 2009, students started to learn Chinese pinyin. Mia told me that she had learned some pinyin before school. She had already learned something that was related to her last name, An. For instance, when the Chinese teacher was teaching an, Mia often mentioned in the class some similar sounds such as pan, fan, lan. The basic knowledge of pinyin helped her to learn Chinese gradually in class.

Mia practiced pronouncing some pinyin at home occasionally. In class, she was able to understand the pinyin that teacher said and complete the dictation almost all by herself. In addition, she was able to handle the pencil and write Chinese characters nicely. However, she had some difficulty differentiating rising tone and falling tone. According to Mr. Gu, such difficulty might come from too few opportunities hearing Chinese at home. Mia's mother said in the interview that she had never taught Mia any pinyin before and she was expecting Mr. Gu to teach children pinyin in school; therefore, unlike many parents in China, the mother felt that she and the father did not want to pressure Mia in learning Chinese.

Mia's Chinese writing was maintained normally as required by the teacher. There was no obvious loss in her Chinese writing according to Mr. Gu. The Chinese teacher believed that as long as she could recognize all the elements in the pinyin table and wrote down dictation sentences with pinyin, Mia was a at a normal level.

In Chinese class, students rarely had any opportunities to practice free writing. Both teacher and parents believed that students had to learn the basics in order to write. Mia's mom mentioned that learning pinyin was the start of learning Chinese. She would help Mia with pinyin until she had grasped some basic knowledge. To the mother, only by learning pinyin can children start “real writing”.

**English writing.** Mia's English achieved a high level of development during the course of
the study. In this section, I discuss Mia's writing development in English by dividing the development into four major periods of time for the convenience of analysis: October to November, December to January, February to March, and April to May.

October to November. In the earlier part of fall, she had already been able to write her name. In many pieces, she wrote her name in a very neat and precise way. For example, in the earliest sample collected, Mia wrote her name on the top of the page with her friends' names above it. In her name writing, she was able to capitalize the first letter in her name and use lower letter for the rest of the name. Her name writing was mostly consistent except for one case where she capitalized the letter within the name. She also was able to write the names of other children in the class. Name writing became one of the topics that she constantly constructed during the early stage of writing development.

The beginning of writing often consisted of copying words and sentences, which prepared students to produce longer sentences in the future. Mia was able to follow teacher's words on the board or find sight words. In the first half of fall, the teacher sometimes had students copy the sentence structure. Mia was able to copy those sentence structures and put in her new information:

- I am ...
- I can ...
- I see ...
- I need...

In ESL class, students produced a book of ink. Students followed another sentence structure: I think it is in ___. Mia put her idea at the end of the sentence: my bedroom, and then put her name on the top of the page.
Since November 2008, Mia had already been able to produce sentences of her own. Most of her writing ability was reflected on her journal writing. In the pieces she created, she described the events happened in her life. Friendship was one of the topics that she often wrote about. For instance, before Thanksgiving, Mia wrote that “I am thankful for my friends.” Above the writing, she drew a picture of six friends standing together and wrote the names of each girl on the top. Some friends came from other classes or grade levels. She was familiar with those names because they were written on the wall or on the name tags that students wore. Mia obviously had absorbed all these names and remembered them in her mind. By transferring names to print, Mia started to write more in her journals about her life.

December to January. Into December, Mia continued to be able to use phonics features in word spelling and free writing, the two types of writing she conducted in this period of time. In an exercise of word writing, students were asked to write words starting with each letter in the alphabet. Mia completed the entire exercise by filling out every blank box with the words she knew. Among them, she wrote the names of her friends, as well as the characters from the LetterLand book. The following words reflected her ability to use phonics features to figure out spellings:

fiyr: fire
Poorpetr: Poor Peter
ubrlll: umbrella
Zebr: Zebra

My interview with Mia demonstrated that she had keen awareness of how to use phonics in spelling. When I asked her what she would do if she did not know how to write some words, she said firmly that: “I sound it out. Cat, k-æ-t, cat. I can already write cat. If I don't know, I will
just sound it.” By saying this, Mia had already grasped the basic use of phonics and the idea that using this feature could help with her writing.

In addition to word writing, Mia had numerous free writing in her journals. At the beginning of this period, she wrote sentences in her journals that contained relations. For instance, she wrote: “I love my friend. Because she is very kind”. The two sentences here were separated by a period. Though they were related, Mia had not been able to connect them in one sentence at this point of time.”

While there was great advancement in her entries, there were some problems. To begin with, in Clay's (1981) discussion of young children's writing development, young writers tend to use the directional principle. Directional principle is a phenomenon where children vary the starting points of writing. It can appear in signs, letters and single words. Normally, the correct directional behavior, such as the top-left starting position in English is necessary; however, children may start from the top right. In Mia's writings, examples of such a principle were commonly seen. After writing for a few months, Mia had already moved to a stage where no obvious “wrong” direction was detected. Yet in her word practice in December, she still wrote the letter t in a reversed form. This retrieved way of writing demonstrated that Mia's writing development was not linear as people might have expected.

*February to March.* Mia's writing showed prolific production in these two months. The entries she produced included ESL journals, Valentine's Day cards writing and word writing.

Mia's ESL writing reflected much improvement during this period of time. Compared with the last two months, Mia began to use more words and longer sentences in her journals. More importantly, she had more negotiation with her own writings. First, her writing had more topics than before including friendship, family, princess and science. At the end of January until mid
February, ELLs in this class had to take the required state test. In order to prepare for the test, all ESL classes in the school were canceled. Though restricted to time, the teacher and the student teacher of the class created different activities for students to practice writing in limited number of class periods. In some journal entries, she used “because” to write about why she loved her family, friends and princess stories. Compared with last two months, she began to put information and explanation about the reasons within one sentence. For instance, in one piece, she wrote: “I Love my mommy because She is Pretty. I Love my Daddy to because he is cool. The end.” In this piece, she provided the reasons why she loved her parents. The spelling of “because” was correct and punctuation was also correctly used.

In addition, she started to use relative sentences in her journal. For instance, she wrote “this is my hose and I have a toy I got” in February. In this piece, Mia used “I got” after “I have toy”. Even though the grammar was not entirely correct, the use of “I got” indicated her intention of building on existing information.

Her entries were also longer in this period of time. Among seven journals she produced in these two months, there was only one where she wrote one simple sentence. The rest of the journals contained either compound sentences or complex sentences. The following examples might demonstrate how she used compound sentences to express her ideas. Instead of saying “I go to a party”, she wrote: “I go to a partle with My fried Angla”. By adding “with my fried Angla, Mia was able to provide more details than before to depict the events in her life. The added details made Mia's writings more readable and accessible to readers.

Word writing was another type of writing that Mia practiced during these two months. Students in the class continued writing on the LetterLand practice book. She had words written for letters a, h, s and I. A very distinctive feature among Mia's journal writing during this period
of time is her self-correction. In many pieces, she originally wrote something; yet immediately after writing, she would erase what she wrote and put some new writings on the top. One reason that she self-corrected the spelling was to find a better way of writing. For instance, in our interview, I asked her to write down her name. She started with a horizontal line and then wanted to continue from the right side. After a second of hesitation, she decided to go from the left side and completed the first letter in her last name with a straight line down and a horizontal line. After she finished writing, she erased the letter n in her last name and put it in a lower but broader way, and said that “the original n was not good enough”, but “the new n is better” (translated from Chinese). Such examples could also be found in many places in the LetterLand book. For instance, the two words below were rewritten (Figure Mia-1), exactly the same as the original writing. The reason for writing was to “make them look better”.

*Figure Mia-1. Word practice.*

Another reason for self-correction might be the awareness of writing styles. In many samples of word writing, there were traces of erasing on the page. She was changing the lower case of the first letter in a word into capital letters. According to her, the beginning of the word needed to be capitalized.

*Figure Mia-2. Word practice.*

In this example (Figure Mia-2), she erased the lower letter a and then put capital A to both *apples* and *astronaut* (astronaut). She believed that the first letter of each sentences needed to be capitalized and that the same was true for the first word in the word list on her LetterLand
book.

Finally, she had some writings in greeting cards. The Valentine cards were created in February, right before the Valentine's Day. The class were creating the cards in groups and students could give their heart-shaped cards to anyone they wanted. Card writing reflected her voice in appropriating words. Before actual writing, she murmured: “I love Adel”. However, after thinking for a second, she wanted to change it to “I love you Adel”. On the card, she put “I Love You M”, and suddenly realized that this was not what she wanted to write. She quickly changed M to Adel. On the bottom of the heart, she wrote down

*From Mia*

*To Adel*

On the second heart, she carefully drew a pair of arms. On the back, she started writing: “Be my Valentine Becase You are kied”. The word “kied” (kind) was placed on the left side of “You are”, obviously showing that Mia was using the available space to write her words. Such a usage of space was mentioned by Clay (1981) as the page arrangement which meant that children may use left-over space to fill in their information. The example here clearly demonstrated how this principle can be applied among ELLs.

*April to May*. The last period of observation comes from the end of the school year when Mia was getting ready for first grade. In April and May, Mia's writings were not only prolific, but also rich in content. There were two major features of her writing development during these two months: more details and more voice.

First, Mia began to compose with more details. Looking through her writings, it was noted that she was writing with more details to describe her life. For instance, in one piece after Easter, she wrote the following piece (Figure Mia-3):
In this piece, she wrote in detail what gifts the two friends exchanged. Though she did not seem to fully understand the correct place of exclamation and question marks, she did want to express her intention of recording this event in her life and to display how important the event was to her.

In the following piece (Figure Mia-4), she was using modifiers to describe the dwelling place of animals in her dream world.

In the above example (Figure Mia-4), Mia listed three places that the animals in her dream world would live. To describe those places, she used flower and green to modify the houses. Such vivid expressions were not seen in her previous writings.

In addition to details, Mia also expressed more of her own voice in the writings during these two months. Her voice was reflected in the words she played with, as well as in the way in
which she wrote. The following example was written after a short conference with the teacher who encouraged her to write down how she liked pistachios (Figure Mia-5).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{example.png}
\caption{Figure Mia-5. I Love, Love, Love, Love, Love, Love pistachios.}
\end{figure}

In the example (Figure Mia-5), Mia multiplies the word “love”. Though the teacher said that she could write: “I love pistachios”, Mia insisted writing more “love”s.

Her voice was also demonstrated in the following pieces (Figure Mia-6 & Figure Mia-7), two papers given to the teacher as a “gift”.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{example2.png}
\caption{Figure Mia-6. peezzza (pizza)}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{example3.png}
\caption{Figure Mia-7. Letter to Mrs. Cane}
\end{figure}

The first piece (Figure Mia-6) used repetition to emphasize her excitement of giving a pizza to the teacher, while the second one (Figure Mia-7) used a speech bubble to illustrate her
sincere wish for the teacher who was accepting her gift.

Mia used phrases to express her voice as well. At the end of the year, Mia started to use phrases to expose her voice as a way to talk to the reader. For instance, she wrote in the journals: “I live in the heart room, she lived in the room. Buy, have a nice weekend” (Bye, have a nice weekend). In another piece, she wrote: “I am going to see a snak in sumr camp. I am going to see lot's of animal's. Good night. good-buy. Buy-buy.” (I am going to see a snake in summer camp. I am going to see lots of animals. Good nigh. Good bye. Bye-bye. ) In the second example, quite a few imperative sentences were used to speak to the reader and to tell us what she was feeling at the moment of writing.

General features in Mia's English writings.

**Topics in writing:** Topics in Mia's writing were closely related to her life. To begin with, Mia was able to use the words she saw everyday in class to enlarge her vocabulary. LetterLand was a book that introduced letters to kindergarten children by personalizing the letters as characters with fusion of letters and animated characters. By listening to the stories and practicing the letters in the book, students were able to learn letter writing and story writing. In Mia's writings, many examples incorporated the content of the book. In a previous example of word writing exercise (See writing development in December-January), Mia had the majority of words from the book such as golden girl, poor Peter, (Impy) ink, lady (lamp Lucy), (yellow) YoYo (man), and (zig zag) Zebra. Those characters were seen in her other writings as well. In her early writing entries, she imagined that she could help others by putting many characters' names after “I im help (I am helping)”.

The topics in her free writings are also closely related to her after school life. From the start of writing practice, Mia had been showing great interest in composition. When asked
whether she liked writing in ESL or not, she said that she liked writing “readings (and) stories” Princess, according to her, was what she loved to write most in those stories. She had mentioned and written the names of princes and princesses in numerous pieces.

**Name writing.** Name writing of Mia also included imagined or created names. Mia had created two other names for herself and wrote them in her entries. Early January, Mia named herself “Subrina”. This name was used even on the exercise sheet where identification was required. The other created name was “Gussela” that appeared in May. She used this name on the top of her little book as a symbol to identify herself. She also had another name that was not quite recognizable: SGlyuv. Neither of these names was used in free writing; however, those names showed that Mia was trying to use her own imagination in name writing. In addition to her own name(s), she also created names for the imagined characters in her life. For instance, in some writings, she mentioned Samuel as her brother. The only child at home, Samuel became a name for her imagined brother. In the Valentine card writing, when I asked her who she wanted to give the second valentine to, she whispered: “Lingyun”. Lingyun is a Chinese boy, the other Chinese ELL in the class in Fall, 2008. Lingyun overheard his name and asked her what happened. A little bit embarrassed, Mia suddenly said loudly that this new card was for Samuel, her brother. Moreover, in her journal writing, she also mentioned Samuel in one piece, in which she wrote about who could live in a castle. Samuel (written as Simul) was one of the six names she wrote down, which showed the importance of this name.

If Subrina and Gussela had been the names of princesses, then SGlyuv was entirely her own creation. This type of invented spelling is similar to the one that Clay (1981) discussed among monolingual children. Samuel might be a name that she heard in life. Since no family member was named Samuel in reality, this name became a vivid example of how she was
incorporating everyday words into writing.

**Writing and pictures.** Pictures have been a great part of Mia's writing. In almost every entry of free journal writing or word writing, there were pictures accompanying her words. There are some interesting features regarding the relationship between writing and picture in Mia's case.

Throughout the year-long observation of Mia in ESL class, it was noticeable that she always started with the picture first and then went to write, except one time at the end of the year. During the entire fall of 2008 and the majority of spring in 2009, she had always been using this strategy in writing journals. For instance, in one of the classes, Mia and three other students were assigned to the group of journal writing. Mia was sitting next to Arzu. Mia drew a very pretty princess on Arzu's page and said that she “could draw the most beautiful princess ever”. She also told Arzu in a very serious voice that: “There was no princess in real world. It was all in the story.” Then she went back to her own journal. On the top, she drew a castle and a girl on the page. When I asked her what she wanted to say, she thought for a little while, and said: “this is my friends' castle”. Here were the words she put: *dis is my frands cassle*. Then she put five names after this sentence, all of which were her good friends, and an *s* at the end of each name to indicate that the castle also belonged to those people. She filled out the entire three lines, which was praised by the teacher afterwards.

The order of “picture-->writing” was maintained until the end of the year. Each observation of her journal writing had shown this pattern. However, one piece of writing at the end of May reversed this order--Mia started with words and then went to pictures. When producing the piece of “seeing a snake in summer camp”, Mia started for the first time with words. After writing the entire piece, she moved to drawing. A short conference with the teacher reminded her of some missing elements in writing, so she went back to the words and revised a
little. The final piece is as follows (Figure Mia-8). A week later, during the last observation, she returned back to the original order of “picture—writing” in journal writing. Though no further data was obtained after that, it seemed that “writing-->picture” was not as well maintained as “picture-->writing”.

![Figure Mia-8](image)

*Figure Mia-8. Summer camp (I am going to see snake in summer camp. I am going to see lots of animals. Good night. Good-bye. Bye-bye.)*

In summary, from my yearlong observation, I have seen Mia quickly developed as a writer in English. She started from a young girl who understood the concept of print and wrote a few separate words, and later turned into a writer who could describe the events in her life with details, emotions and voices. According to the teacher, Mia was getting ready for first grade next
year. Her writings shared many similarities that monolingual children bear in their early years of
learning to write. The readings and DVDs at home seemed to enrich the topics in her entries and
at the same time helped her in constructing sentences.

Her Chinese, on the other hand, was developed gradually as she learned to write some
simple characters and to use pinyin to record teacher’s speech. Though there was no opportunity
for creative writing in Chinese class and there seemed to be no extra help from the parents, the
basic knowledge of Chinese should enable her to learn more complex characters in the future.
Tina's Case

Tina was the oldest kindergarten participant in this study, almost 6 and half years old when the study started. Tina was born in Beijing, China, the city where her father used to work as a university professor. Like many focal students, she and her parents lived in the University’s family housing. During this research, she was attending ESL class, all English class and Chinese class in the elementary school.

Tina's father was a postdoctoral researcher in computer science at the university. The family came to the United States in 2006 and joined with many graduate and postgraduate staff in the Family Housing. The mother was a stay-at-home mom who took care of Tina most of the time. She used to work in the medical field. After coming to the US, she attended a community college in town and learned medicine there in her spare time. The family returned to Beijing the summer of 2008 and stayed there for three months right before Tina attended kindergarten. She played piano in her spare time.

Cultural values and language learning at home. Both Tina's parents spoke Mandarin Chinese at home. Tina spoke Chinese most of the time at home. However, as the parents told me, she would use some English words once she started learning English. The mother was somewhat surprised and more concerned to hear her daughter mixing English and Chinese in her speech. She said: “I don't like her to do that. I will correct her sometimes, but not every sentence.”

To the parents, both English and Chinese were very important. They expected that Tina could excel in both languages. They wanted her not to be someone like ABC (American Born Chinese) who are able to speak but unable to write or read. The mother also added: “we want her to write.” They understood that writing would take more time. As for learning English, the parents expected that she would have no problem learning to read and write.
Parents played a very important role in Tina's literacy study. Both Tina's parents were very attentive to her literacy development in school and at home. The parents intentionally kept some records of Tina's writing experiences. The mother also maintained “Mommy journal” to jot down the exciting moments that Tina experienced after birth. They also kept some writings that Tina produced after school as a way to remember her childhood. The father was very busy at work, but sometimes took his work back home to complete. With the influence from parents, Tina started composing very early. The mother said that Tina created a poem on her own when she was only three years old. The poem was about a banana and was orally recited to the mother. Tina would pretend to be writing and created her own list of “things to do”, which turned out to be scribbles.

They also tried to provide as rich literacy environment as possible. At home, they had many books checked out from the library. They also took Tina to book stores and allowed her to choose books she liked. They bought many audio books for Tina as well. They played the audio when they were driving. One of her favorite tapes was “Winnie the Pooh” which she could chime in before the sentences come out. They also had many tapes in Chinese as well. When the mother was cooking, Tina sat at her own table listening to those tapes carefully.

Parents' literacy habits at home affected Tina's behaviors. She loved reading and being read to very much. She had many books at home and she loved all different kinds of books. Tina. The mother read the stories to her when she was about one year old. She could understand the content of the books and even cried when she heard some sad stories, such as the “The Little Match Girl” by Hans Christian Andersen. Tina started writing when she was around four years old and scribbled on different papers at home. At the beginning, she used whatever she could
grab to make lines on notebooks. Later on, she started writing by copying from books or the exercise sheets that her mother created for her in both Chinese and in English.

The mother also mentioned that Tina would sometimes come to her when she was cooking and ask her about the spelling of words, such as *like* or *love*. By using those words, she was able to produce several pieces at home. At the same time, the mother noted: “we also read Bible stories to her”. Therefore, in many home writings, Tina wrote in Chinese about *I love god*, or *God is good*.

Tina's home literacy also benefited from the knowledge she learned before kindergarten. She joined the community’s Preschool for three hours every weekday, during which, Tina learned to recognize the English alphabet, wrote letters and obtained some science knowledge. The mother also taught her some simple Chinese characters at home.

While the parents paid special attention to Tina's literacy development, they also expressed their deep concern over their daughter's native language. The mother said:

Like many mothers in the neighborhood, I have always had the concern about her Chinese. If we went back to China when she in 3rd grade, I don't think she can catch up with others without our extra effort. In grade 3, they are supposed to be able to write some long compositions. We thought about spending more time, but time is so limited after her school.

To sum up, Tina's parents tried their best to create a friendly and supportive environment for her to develop as a reader, a writer and a child who could enjoy childhood. Compared with Mia's parents, Tina's parents had more explicit expectations for their daughter, more direct instruction on literacy, and they expressed more concerns for the maintenance of her native language.
Writing attitudes, practices, and development in school. Like Mia, Tina also attended three types of classes: Mrs. Macy's ESL class for two hours from 8:30 am, Chinese class at noon with five other kindergarten students for 25 minutes, and her all English class for the rest of the day.

Chinese writing. Tina's Chinese writing focused on the practice of writing simple characters and writing with pinyin. Among all the entries that Tina produced in Chinese class, one piece was a creative writing example. At home, Tina had known some characters, so in class, she was one of the most advanced students who could write a few characters. In her Chinese writing samples, there were many places that she was playing with the words she knew. For instance, at the top of some pieces (Figure Tina-1), she put her own memory of some words while she was practicing. In this above example, Tina wrote the words: 儿, 儿子, 女儿, etc. Those words were mentioned by the teacher yet not taught in class.

Figure Tina-1. Chinese writing

The practice of character writing continued for one semester. Students followed the words that the teacher modeled on the board and tried to write on their own. Since students did not have any Chinese homework, this was the only opportunity they had to practice the words.

In class, students also recited ancient Chinese poems, which at the same time reminded students of their oral Chinese ability. Sometimes they practiced writing those poems using pinyin.
Tina was able to record the sentences that the teacher dictated and marked with the correct tone, which indicated her reservoir of Chinese tone and vocabulary.

The only creative writing that Tina produced was the dialogue with the teacher. One of the Chinese students was going back to China and the teacher used this opportunity to lead kindergarten students to use pinyin to express their ideas. The teacher gave some suggestions for the topic, for instance, talking about her family. Tina wrote the following piece (Figure Tina-2):

Figure Tina-2. Chinese writing. (Literary translation: I live in China in Beijing's house my family has mother, father and myself)

In this piece (Figure Tina-2), Tina introduced the location of her family and her family members. Unlike most of the pieces she produced in English, there was no punctuation throughout the sentence. Although the entry introduced layers of meanings, there was no comma in between them to indicate the transition between ideas. Another factor that needed our attention here was the way she put the location. She wrote “wo zhu zai zhong guo” (I live in China). It was a very awkward expression in Chinese to say “I live in China”. The detailed location after “zhong guo” (China): “Bei jing de fang zi li” was also an odd expression in Chinese. A more appropriate way to express the same meaning might be: Bei jing de yi zuo fang zi li (a house in Beijing). Beijing, in pinyin does not need any space in between either. This short sentence
seemed to reflect the influence of English on Tina's Chinese writing.

*English writing development.* Tina's writing development is divided into four periods: October to November, December 2008 to January 2009, February to March, and April to May.

*October to November.* October to November is the first period of observation when kindergarten students started learning to write. Tina's writing was mostly conducted in the ESL class. Her ESL teacher was Mrs. Macy who had many years of experience teaching primary ESL. According to the teacher, Tina was among the most advanced students in her kindergarten ESL class. The teacher believed that Tina had already learned more English than many students in the class. In this period of time, Tina's writing was focused on telling the teacher her ideas for some pieces and writing simple sentences with words such as love and like.

At the beginning of these two months, the ESL teacher asked students to keep writing in class. Their writing task consisted of two major parts: journal writing and letter of the day. Students could write freely in journal writing; and for letter of the day, students practiced the letter first and then wrote an entry with the letter. When they were starting to learn letters, the teacher asked students to tell her the idea that they wanted to express for their pictures. For instance, the first piece Tina created in her journal was about a young girl watching TV (Figure Tina-3).

*Figure Tina-3.* A girl is watching the T.V
In this piece (Figure Tina-3), the sentence was written by the teacher, but the idea was from Tina herself. The dots on the bottom of the picture indicated the pattern of a couch. According to Tina, the girl was sitting on the couch watching TV. Three words: Book, Cook and Look were written on a pillow. Those words were written by Tina because she had “already known how to write them”.

Figure Tina-4. I like the rainbow

Figure Tina-5: I love you Mom.

Like Mia, the most used verbs for Tina in this period of time were “love” and “like”. Tina's experience of writing those words at home was transferred to her writing in class. For instance, she told the teacher for the picture in Figure Tina-4: I like the rainbow, she also produced her own piece (Figure Tina-5): I love you Mom. In most cases, she would put nouns or pronouns after like, such as I like you and I like icecream. Later she began to put modifiers before nouns or verb to further extend the meaning, such as I like to play. I like my pumpkin, and
i like my mom and dad. However, after a few days writing sentences with modifiers, she went back to the simple versions and produced entries like I like nine and king in a castle. The existence of “simple” sentences after her skillful writing of more “complex” ones might be evidence that her writing development during this period of time was not a linear process.

Although there was only one sentence, in Tina's mind, there were many things that she wanted to tell. Like many other kindergarten children, Tina's writing was full of imagination, but the writer was unable to fully express herself in writing. Many times, Tina often choose to write about her imagined world and put those ideas into pictures, behind which were more ideas and information. “Fairy world” was her favorite topic at this time. Interviews with Tina revealed much information about the pictures. The following pieces showed that pictures and writings had much discrepancy during this period.

Figure Tina-6. I like you.

Figure Tina-6 portrayed a large tree and a little girl floating in a circle of hearts. The writing below said: I like you. Superficially, you might be understood as anyone and I represent the author. However, in the interview, Tina told me that there was a story behind this simple sentence and the picture. The girl was actually a fairy. The words I like you were uttered by the fairy to her friends who were not in this picture. Instead of stealing the apples, the girl was trying to pick apples for the children because she liked them. The apples were hiding in the tree, a scene
that she wanted her readers to guess.

The same character could be found in her other journals. For instance, the following piece (Figure Tina-7), the same fairy appeared and was conjured to a pumpkin. She changed herself to the color yellow to match the lantern. The pumpkin said I like my pumpkin.

![Figure Tina-7. I like My pumpkin.](image)

In the next piece (Figure Tina-8), though there was no fairy's image, Tina imagined that the whole family were conjured by the fairy to float high in the sky. She said that she could see people on the ground as tiny ants.

![Figure Tina-8. I like My MoM and dad.](image)

The following piece (Figure Tina-9) was also full of imagination. The fairy who changed many times in the past changed her own doll into the same size as she was, “just like a robot”, Tina said. The two shining objects are the bulbs. The fairy and her doll were performing a dance on the stage. The fairy loved her doll so much that she expressed her emotion: I like my doll. I was fascinated by the story, yet when I asked Tina why she did not have the rest of the story on the journal, she said that she did not want to tell other people. She added that it was her own
To sum up, this period of time, Tina's writing focused on telling the teacher what she wanted to express for certain pictures. She could also write simple sentences by using words such as like or love to utter her affection for her parents and for life. Examples above also showed that she mixed capital letters and lower letters in this period of time. In almost all the pieces about mother, letter m is capitalized, which might suggested her thought that mom was a special term, just like people’s names. In addition, she was able to use punctuation at the end of the sentence.

**December to January.** Due to the holidays, there were not many entries produced by Tina. Compared with last period, there was not much progress regarding the verbs she used. In many pieces, she was still using the same sentence structures in her journals. For instance, among ten pieces of journals, she often wrote “I like___”. The object of the sentence was changed constantly from mom and dad to snowman and magic.

Another feature was her self-correction of her writing. Similar to Mia, Tina also liked erasing her writings, either part of a sentence or an entire sentence, and changed them to something else. Figures 10 and 11 demonstrated how part of sentence was self-corrected.
Figure Tina-10. I was so bad (Originally written as I am so bad.)

Figure Tina-11. I go to Disne world (I go to Disney world.)

Figure Tina-10 was originally written as I am so bad. The writer changed the tense into past and this piece became the first one she wrote using past tense. Figure Tina-11, on the other hand, was changed in a very interesting way. She originally wrote Disney; yet, she changed it to Disne, probably due to her understanding of the phonetic feature of letter e.

In addition to the change to words, the entire sentence was sometimes changed, such as the following example (Figure Tina-12):

Figure Tina-12. I like snowmens.

This entry was originally written as I see no sun at winter. However, the whole sentence was changed to a different idea by using the most common structure she had been using before.

Besides self-correction, she also began to use imperative sentences and long entries in this period, such as Look at that! Look at that! She was also able to use words to express her voice, such as these two entries (Figure Tina-13 & Figure Tina-14). She used speech bubbles
(Figure Tina-13) to suggest the feelings of those characters. The words ya and hi were the sounds they were making to show their excitement. Figure Tina-14, on the other hand, used ha to express the hilariousness of the “bad guy”, the character she was writing about.

*Figure Tina-13.*

*Figure Tina-14.*

*February to March.* Due to the state test at the end of January 2009, the school canceled ESL class in all grades for almost three weeks. After the tests, ESL classes were resumed and Tina started writing again in her ESL class. Two important features needed our attention during this period of time of her writing development.

One of the most prominent indicators of progress in this period of time was the length of her entries. Compared with last period when she only wrote one sentence in journals, she started writing two sentences and using demonstrative pronouns in those sentences. For instance, in the following piece (Figure Tina-15), she used He in a new sentence to refer to my Dad.
Figure Tina-15. I like my Dad. He is good.

In another piece (Figure Tina-16) she was writing about mom, she used she to indicate my mommy.

Figure Tina-16. I like my mommy. and she is good.

Similar examples could be found in other entries as well. The emergence of demonstrative pronouns suggested a big step in Tina's writing development, because she was able to avoid the repetition of some words and refer to previous information by incorporating writing techniques.

At the end of March, she was also able to produce entries with as long as three complete sentences. For example, when describing a picture with her standing high in the sky, she wrote: Look at me! Look at me! I am up. Under a picture in her journal with a little girl and a huge man standing next to each other, she wrote: I love my big doll. My doll is mom. I like dad too. Those entries demonstrated that she was trying to put more ideas into her journal to express her feelings.

The second feature during these two months was the existence of writer's block. During these two months, there were a number of times when I observed Tina not knowing what to write and wondering about a topic. Right before Valentine's Day, students were learning some words about Valentines. Teacher put Valentine's Day on the board and then asked students to give her
some words related to this holiday. Students immediately contributed words such as love, flowers, gifts, present, candy, kiss, hug, etc. After each word, Mrs. Macy drew a very simple picture to show the meaning. Students were then asked to start their journal by using any word from the list. While everybody was busy working on the journal, Tina seemed to have little interest. She put a big cross on the back of a previous page and struggled for a long time for that day’s journal. When I asked her what happened, she said that she did not know what to write. She laid her upper body on the table and frowned. She stayed at her table until everybody else was finished. The teacher was sitting at her own table when students were writing. Some children could not pronounce words, so they came to the teacher's table for help. At the end, there was no entry for Tina that day. She gave her journal to the teacher who accepted it.

A week later, I returned to the class and noticed that Tina had not produced any writings since last week. That day students were asked to write the daily journal again. Unlike other students who were busy drawing, Tina was at her table looking around. She put a big X on the back of the previous page and covered it so that others would not be able to see. She thought for a long time and put down something on the paper. She gave the paper to the teacher and went to the carpet for reading. The following piece (Figure Tina-17) was her creation.

Figure Tina-17. Look at the sun. The sun is big.

She wrote: “Look at the sun. The sun is big”. She also seemed to have written something on the bottom, but erased it before turning it in to the teacher. Although she produced a piece of
writing today, the same topic and sentence structure were used before. Her behaviors before
writing suggested that she was having a difficult time searching for topics. Although she had no
problem using the sentence structure and vocabulary, the search for topic, or as she called: “what
to write”, became a very important stage in her writing process. The frustration of not being able
to find a topic to write about haunted this young writer for more than two weeks until she was
able to resume her progress in writing.

This period of time also reflected other features in her writing development. First, she
was having more entries about her family and real life, as compared with last two months when
she focused more on imagination and the fairy world. For instance, she wrote *My mom is good.*
*My dad is good too and I love my mom. My mom love me too.* In addition, she seldom had any
mistakes in spelling. As the parents said, Tina often asked them for spelling and confirmed with
them if words were spelled correctly. Therefore, she was intentionally trying to get the “right”
spelling as part of good writing.

*April to May.* April and May are the two months when Tina produced the largest number
of entries. At the same time, she was progressing quickly and including details and variety in her
writings.

For these two months, she created over 20 journals and one piece of writing for a science
project. All these writings were completed in ESL class. Among those writings, she was able to
use more details to enrich her writings. For instance, she wrote the following sentences to
describe her cat, a cat that was actually imaginary: *I like my cat. She is good. She can play yo yo.*
A few days later, she drew a picture with two unicorns, and wrote: *I like two unicorns. one has a
umbrella. And one has a underwear.* She also wrote about playing: *I like to play on the roof. It is
fun. it is cool and good.* All these examples demonstrated that she was able to use her words to
write about subjects in detail. For her cat, “playing yo yo” was a distinctive characteristic that no other cat could match; the two unicorns were also different from each other in the way they dressed; and being “cool and good” was the fun part in playing on the roof. All these details displayed the development in Tina’s writing from simply recording subjects in her imagination to portraying those subjects.

Sentence structures in Tina’s entries became more complex in these two months. The following entries (Figure Tina-18 and Figure Tina-19) were written at the end of the year when she was ready for first grade.

Figure Tina-18. If you want to sleep cout sheeps. one sheep and two sheeps. And three sheeps.

Figure Tina-19. I saw a boy. He was very long. But he was only one. But I think he was baby

Figure Tina-18 showed that she used conditional sentences to set up a scenario and then showed readers what to do within this scenario. Stories in Figure Tina-19, on the other hand,
showed a sharp contrast in information: she first described the character, and suddenly changed the tone to something drastically different by using the word “but”. The transition used suggested her witty way of thinking.

**General features.** After examining the concrete development of Tina's writing, I now come to understand some general features that went across the four major periods in this study.

**Spelling.** The first feature focused on her spelling all across the entries. Unlike many young writers who had invented spelling in their writings, Tina rarely had any invented spellings. One of the reasons, as Tina's mother noted, was Tina's constant confirmation with the parents about the spelling of words. In addition, she often copied words and sentences at home. During my interview with the parents, they showed me the writings that Tina did at home. Many writings consisted of copying sentences from books very carefully into her notebook without any mistakes.

Although she constantly asked for help in spelling at home, she rarely did so in ESL class. In the examples cited in this chapter, there were only a few spelling mistakes, such as snowmans and sheeps. Those “misspellings”, though wrongly used, were mainly the problem of plural forms, an issue that many monolingual children would have when they were learning to write. Except for a few places, Tina was able to write the majority of words correctly.

This behavior might make her intentionally choose to write with the words she had already known rather than inventing the spellings in her writings. Therefore, even though she frequently used imagination in her entries, she very cautiously spelled words in writing. This might be a strategy that she used in composition: write with the words known because misspellings might indicate bad writings.

Her cautious use of words also might be the result of the style of writing conference in
this class. She usually sat at her table writing on her own. The teacher often sat at her own table to help with students who had questions in writing and came to her for assistance. Children in the class were very familiar with this class routine. I saw the same group of students coming to the teacher's side and asked for the spelling of certain words. They lined up beside the teacher who helped one by one. For those students who were willing to raise questions, this was a great opportunity to have interactions with the teacher. However, for those students who were comparatively quiet and who were less willing to ask questions, they would be less likely to stand in the line and ask for more assistance.

Tina was a quiet student. She rarely raised her hand to answer questions in class even though she knew most of the answers to the questions. When the teacher was organizing whole class activities, Tina would be sitting on the carpet quietly and watch what the teacher asked them to do. She would answer the questions when the teacher called her name. Moreover, during free time, she remained very quiet. The boys in the class often choose to play computer games during the free time. They clicked, pointed and chatted about the game while playing. Tina, always chose to stand beside them, but never talked to the boys when she was watching. The above example showed that Tina was not a girl who was eager to express herself unless called upon.

Tina's personal character suggested that she might need the teacher to initiate the conference with her instead of her voluntarily asking the teacher for help. Without asking questions, the writer became more likely to rely on her own repertoire and use the words she knew the best in writing. The aforementioned examples also showed this feature. For instance, in the entries prior to April, she regularly used love, like, dad, mom, good, bad, sun, etc in numerous journals. Though those words were used in both simple and compound sentence
structures, there was not much progress in vocabulary for almost three quarters of the year when I was observing in ESL class. Many of those words were learned at home with the mother. Other words she used at the time were copied from the list of words that teacher wrote on the board either as “word of the day” or the words related to “word of the day”.

Even during the last period of observation, though she began to use many more complex words, such as leprechaun, helicopter, unicorn, underwear, hiding, etc, she still showed no obvious sign of inventing any spellings. Such a phenomenon might suggest that invented spelling was not a stage that every child has to experience in their writing development. A child like Tina might be an exception because of her conscious use of correct spelling. For an ELL, invented spelling can be a way of exploring writing; however it was not reflected in this case.

*Pictures and writings.* The aforementioned entries also exemplified how Tina used her imagination to express the world inside her mind. At the beginning stage, her actual writings were often part of the stories she was telling. In those writings, she pulled one piece of information from the drawings and kept most of the stories in her mind. To the young writer, at the early stage of learning to write, writing was a way to deliver part of the information within a larger context. The rest of the story needed readers' guesses. The writer believed that there was no need to tell the entire story because pictures could explain most of the information she wanted to deliver. Therefore, pictures seemed to be more important than words in terms of story telling at this stage.

When her writing abilities improved, pictures and writings began to show a different relationship, especially at the end of the school year. Compared with the beginning stage, the writer spent less time on drawing pictures and used less color in those pictures. Instead, she spent more time on thinking about writing. At the same time, she used different ways to add details to
the story as discussed previously. Such a change might suggest that the writer's understanding of
the role of words subtly shifted: from something that could label part of the story to something
that can portray the story. I see this shift as progress in her writing development in terms of
understanding the purpose and role of writing in story telling. She gained awareness, through
practicing and creating numerous entries, that she could use words to tell the stories instead of
relying on the pictures she drew or even on readers’ imagination.

**Understanding of the audience of journal writing.** Tina's understanding of the audience
of journal writing was quite different from Mia's. Mia, a kindergarten in the other ESL class
often chose to share her journals and invite others to be in her stories. However, Tina often
refused to share her journal by covering her page so that others would not be able to see. Many
times I saw that she used one hand to cover the page and used the other hand to write. Starting
from February, when she was writing, especially when there were other adults in the classroom,
she would be covering her page to avoid other people seeing what she was writing about. Even
when there were not other adults around, she would also do the same so that her classmates at the
same table were unable to see her writing.

The only audience she accepted for her journal was the ESL teacher. The procedure in
this class showed that the teacher was the only audience for students' journals. After stepping
into ESL class in the morning, students often did some regular activities such as reviewing dates,
days and numbers for about ten minutes. Then students went straight to journal writing. During
writing, the teacher often sat at her table and helped with the children who had questions or
difficulty spelling. For Tina, after her writing was done, she brought her journal to the teacher's
table. The teacher, while still helping some children, asked Tina to just put the journal down.
After most children were done writing, the teacher asked the writer to come to her side and
provided some oral feedback to the writing, such as “good job” or “nice work”. From February, the teacher started to leave written comments at the bottom of students' writings. Therefore, before writing, children barely had any chance to talk about what they were about to write. Moreover, after writing, oral comments or written comments, there were very few opportunities for sharing their writing. In this sense, the teacher became the only audience of students' journals.

Tina's understanding of the audience of journal writing might be affected by the teacher's perception of journals. The teacher told me that she always believed that the journal was a personal property and journal writing was a private action. Therefore in her class, she did not allow students to read other children's journals. One time, Hyeyoung, a Korean student, was trying to see another student's writing, yet was scolded by the teacher who immediately found out. The teacher said to Hyeyoung in front of 4 other students: “We don't look at others' writings!” Students in this class must have known their teacher's perception of journal writing in many similar occasions, and their perspectives of journal writing might be affected as well. Therefore, it was not surprising to see Tina covering her page, intentionally not letting other people see her writing and regarding the teacher as the only audience for her journal.

Summary. To summarize, Tina was a very creative writer in the kindergarten ESL class. She was the oldest kindergarten participant. Compared with other focal kindergarteners, she had more English and Chinese knowledge when she entered school. In Chinese class, she was able to recognize and write many simple characters in the Fall of 2008 and later, pinyin, in Spring of 2009. Her parents taught her Chinese before she attended elementary school and kept supporting her language while she was learning at school. Most of her Chinese writing was copying characters and pinyin or recording Chinese teacher's dictation. The only creative writing she produced was the one where she introduced her family. There were a few places that sounded
awkward, but she was still able to convey the information in general.

In English, Tina developed as a young writer. The reading and writing she experienced at home helped her with writing in ESL class. Her writing was creative and imaginative. She often wrote about topics that were not happening in her real life. By the end of the school year, she was able to complete stories with many details. In addition, her understanding of the purpose of writing also altered as shown through her entries.

However, her writing development was by no means a linear process. While she liked to use imagination, there was a long time when she was unable to find a topic to elaborate or a topic at all. For many adult writers, such a phenomenon can be regarded as writers' block. Many children have the same problem when given a topic that they cannot write about. In this case, however, Tina had this problem when she was asked to have free writing on her journal. Though it might be a stage in her writing development, it is noted that the classroom context failed to recognize this fluctuation in her writing. If the teacher had had more contact with her instead of taking it for granted, Tina might have produced more writings in February and March, which would probably affect her writing later on.
Ned: A Reluctant and Slowly Developing Writer

Ned was the youngest participant in the study and the only Taiwanese student in the kindergarten class. He was born in Taipei in 2003 where his mother worked in the government. After the mother joined the doctoral program at the university, the father took Ned to the US to visit his mother. Ned then stayed with his mother while attending the school site of this study. His father sometimes visited them for brief times due to his teaching job in Taiwan.

Ned was a very bright child. He loved playing chess very much. In his spare time, he often studied the chess strategies from computers or his games with other children. In school, he had won a number of prizes in chess games in which he played mostly with children older than he. He had also won the kindergarten championship in the city. His enthusiasm for chess was also reflected in his journal writing.

Besides a chess lover, he also enjoyed watching cartoons, such as Pokemon. He had different kinds of Pokemon cards collected at home. The Pokemon characters were also written about in his journals.

Cultural values and language use. At home, Ned spoke Mandarin with his mother and father even when they were in the U.S. The mother said that he started speaking a bit later than many children, but when he was able to speak, he immediately became an eloquent boy. He liked expressing himself very much in preschool in Taiwan. In many activities in the preschool, Ned was the most capable child in class to speak in front of a large group of children and parents.

Nonetheless, after coming to the United States, English speaking became a problem the mother worried most for Ned. After some contacts with the ESL teacher, the mother learned that Ned did not speak English at all in ESL class. She expressed her concern in our interview in February:
The situation is so different here from Taiwan. After three months of school in Taiwan, the teacher there told me that he was very capable and willing to talk, and especially liked talking with adults.

He is such an eloquent child in Taiwan. Someone told me that he is so young to come here, so he should be able to talk in English in half a year. I knew that he could understand in listening. If you force him to speak, he would only say it in a very low voice “thank you”. (Interview with Ned’s mother)

The mother thought that Ned would get use to school immediately just like what he did in Taiwan. However, Ned expressed to her a number of times that he did not want to go to school.

However, the mother cared about the educational system that Ned was situated in. The mother wanted Ned to be able to receive the best public education. She intentionally wanted to communicate with the teacher to get information about Ned's learning. The mother used the opportunities of parent-teacher conferences to get to know the teachers and their styles of teaching. The mother consulted the ESL teacher for the solution to this problem. The mother noted the major reason for her communication with the teachers as following:

My friend often told me that I need to worry about him not speaking Chinese, but I know that if he continues his education in this country, he would not have problem speaking English. However, it is his English that might affect his social life. (Interview with Ned’s mother)

The teacher told the mother that Ned should be able to speak English by Christmas. However, by the end of the year, Ned still remained silent. He was able to follow all the class activities and complete most of the literacy tasks, but he did not speak to anyone, either teacher or his classmates.
The mother assumed that Ned's quiet behaviors in class would prevent him from communicating with other children. She said that she had seen other children showing curiosity and amazement when they saw that Ned was talking with the mother when she was visiting the school, “they thought that Ned could not speak at all!” the mother said.

Ned's mother also expressed her thoughts about the two different schooling systems in Taiwan and in the US. She felt that she was more informed about the activities in students' classes in Taiwan. Ned's preschool teacher in Taiwan sent information about the class every week to the parents; however, the current school that Ned was attending did not have this type of service. The mother said: “The ESL teacher updates us every two or three weeks about what they are learning, but the information does not seem to be very specific.” She repeatedly mentioned in our interview that the communication between parents was needed so that she could better help Ned in his English learning. In addition, she felt that she was not able to talk with the teacher extensively about Ned during the parent-teacher conferences.

Every parent is given 15 minutes, very fixed time, and I feel a lot of pressure since I don't want to take the time of the next person. In Taiwan, we used to have parent conference as well, but we were forming a small group. The teacher had different topics each time. The parents of kids can communicate and exchange ideas in conversations. That is in both public and private schools. In here, however, you can not see other parents since the time is already assigned. You can not ask many questions either since the next person is coming. (Interview with Ned’s mother)

The mother felt that she needed advice on how to help with Ned's literacy learning in class. She noticed that Tina, another Chinese speaking student, was very good at the new language; therefore, she wanted to know what strategies that Tina's parents undertook to make it
happen.

Compared with the quiet Ned in ESL class, he was one of the most talkative students in Chinese class. Ned spoke Chinese all the time to the Chinese teacher and sometimes to other children. The mother said that Ned was very proud of his Chinese. He told his mother that he and another boy in the Chinese class were the best students there. His spoken Chinese was very clear and he was able to deliver more complex meanings in Chinese than many other children in the same Chinese class. The mother sometimes talked with the Chinese teacher about Ned's Chinese learning. She also agreed that Ned could learn Chinese Pinyin instead of Zhuyin fuhao, the phonetic system used in Taiwan.

The parents at home intended to provide as much home literacy as possible. Before coming to America, Ned read a large number of books at home where he had his own bookshelf. At home in the U.S., Ned was read to before bed. The mother checked out many English books from the local library and read to him at bedtime. When the father was here with them, he would read the bible stories. The father translated the English version to Chinese and read it to Ned.

The father was mostly responsible for Ned's math and Chinese. Before coming here, Ned had learned some written Chinese. After attending the kindergarten, Ned had Chinese class for about 30 minutes everyday. When the father came to the U.S., he brought with him a Chinese dictionary. Ned liked learning the words from that dictionary very much and asked the father to teach him the most complex Chinese characters from the dictionary. In my interview with Ned, he wrote a traditional Chinese character he learned from the dictionary. He happily told me that he had been practicing this character, which had 32 strokes, for a long time, and he was also learning the one with 33 strokes at home. In Ned's ESL writings, some characters were written to accompany the English words. Those characters were not learned in school but from using the
Chinese dictionary at home.

**Writing development in school.**

*Chinese writing.* Ned's interest in character writing was mainly focused on character writing rather than meaning making. As discussed in the previous section, Ned loved practicing complex characters in Chinese. In Taiwan, people are still using traditional Chinese instead of simplified Chinese that is widely used in Mainland China. The majority of the words that Ned practiced were traditional Chinese that usually had more strokes than simplified Chinese.

In Chinese class, he had partially differentiated instruction. Mr. Gu, the Chinese teacher, was very careful when he was teaching characters--he would check the dictionary to see if they had a different way of writing in traditional Chinese. Then, after teaching other students simplified Chinese, he would show Ned the strokes for traditional Chinese. Other students often playfully wrote the traditional version as well on their notebooks.

As I introduced in other chapters, Chinese-speaking children in the native language class did not have many opportunities to practice free writing. Practicing characters and pinyin was the major task that students experienced in Chinese class. Ned copied words from the board and carefully put those words onto his own books. Mr. Gu emphasized the order of strokes in each character because it was one of the most emphasized aspects of learning for students in China. Ned, however, often played with the order and invented his own way of writing, but at the same time, he was able to identify the different order and self-correct.

For instance, one day, they were learning the character: 春 (chun1, meaning *spring*). The writing of this character starts with 一. After 三, there were 丿, 亅 and then 丿. When Ned was writing, however, he started with 丿 and then 丿, which was entirely different from the order the teacher taught. He wrote this way for a few times, and suddenly recognized his error. He raised
his head with a giggle and self-corrected immediately for the rest of the practice. In the lesson learning character 里 (li3, meaning miles), the teacher also showed the order of strokes. Ned did not follow the teacher’s instruction, but wrote the character in his own way. When he realized his mistake, he immediately told me with a smile that it was wrong.

The aforementioned examples suggested that to Ned, character writing was a very important part of Chinese learning. He chose to write the most difficult characters in the language even though the mother told him that those characters would never be used or people use computers to type them. To Ned, writing those characters did not involve much usage. Writing was only for practicing, which had nothing to do with how to use them in real life. It seems that, at this stage, Ned had not developed the perception that regarded writing as a way of communicating and expressing.

The only narrative writing Ned created was his letter to his father. After learning pinyin for a few months, students began to use pinyin to write a few sentences of their own. For many students, free writing in Chinese class was not very common; therefore, some students came to the teacher’s side to ask what to write. When the teacher asked him to write a letter to his father, Ned seemed somewhat confused by asking “you shen me hao shuo de (what shall I say)”? The teacher reminded him that he could write anything he wanted, such as missing the father or what he was doing in school. Ned still looked confused, so the teacher gave some sample sentences to him. Ned went back to his seat and produced the following piece (Figure Ned-1).
Figure Ned-1. Dear Dad I don't miss you do you miss me? I miss you I wonder if you are still playing chess I still...

In the process writing of this piece, the teacher used dialogue to support Ned to write. After Ned wrote one sentence, the teacher wrote back. The red ink in the example was written by the teacher. The example showed that Ned was using pinyin in a playful way to express his thought. When the teacher asked him to write “wo xiang ni” (I miss you), Ned did not follow the exact same sentence, but instead put a negative marker in the sentence: “bù” (not), which totally reversed the meaning of the entire sentence and the intention of the teacher. At the same time, Ned was probably using the negative marker intentionally to hide his true feeling of missing his father. His father was a college lecturer and only came to visit Ned and his mother for a few weeks. Ned loved learning chess from and playing chess with his dad. He also loved looking for the most difficult Chinese character in the dictionary. The enjoyment that the father brought to him in those weeks was beyond expression-- his father meant a great deal to him, and he missed the father very much. In writing, however, Ned chose to hide his feelings. Perhaps he considered this writing activity as a public action where he could not indicate his true feelings.

*English writing.* Ned's writing developed slowly in the ESL class over the year-long period. In order to demonstrate his writing development, I will divide the observations into four periods: October-November, December-January, February-March, and April-May.

*October-November.* Most entries produced in this period of time consisted of single
words or separate words except for one piece that used a sentence. Most of these words were copied from the board or written by the teacher. At this stage, Ned was not able to internalize the rule of spelling. Some words were spelled several times in his journals, such as *checker* and *chess*. The teacher wrote these two words for Ned when he was not able to compose. However, when Ned himself was writing, he was not using the available words the teacher wrote for him. For instance, the teacher wrote the word “*checker*” twice in Ned's journals. Yet, in Ned's own writing, this word became “*chacs*”.

In addition, at the beginning of the semester, Ned did not produce any writing of his own. Most of the writings at the time were written by the teacher. Students in this class told the teacher what they wanted to say in the journals and then the teacher wrote the words for them. For Ned, however, this simple task became more complicated because of his silence in class. Therefore, the teacher could only guess the meaning that Ned wanted to express for each entry. As a result, many writings at this period of time turned out to be the guess of the teacher rather than the original idea that Ned wanted to express. Take the following entry as an example (Figure Ned-2):

![Figure Ned-2](image)

*Figure Ned-2. It is*

The picture portrayed Taiwan Island. The teacher wrote: “It is” under the picture, which indicated that the teacher was trying to guess what Ned was thinking. Since no object was
written down, the teacher must have not figured the meaning out. In the middle of the picture, there was a spot, which, according to Ned, was Taipei, the city where he lived before coming to the U.S. Ned missed his home very much, so he drew the picture to express his emotion. Ned also noted in our interview that the teacher did not know what he wanted to say at all for that picture. “Did the teacher ask you what you want to write?” I asked him. “I would not say because I don't know how to say that!” Ned said.

The following entry was created at the end of November (Figure Ned-3). On the picture, Ned drew several squares and put many symbols in the squares. Most symbols were Chinese characters, but some were not. The teacher wrote “Chinese” under the picture as a guess of the idea of the picture. In the interview with Ned, the child told me that he was not trying to say “Chinese”, but something about the computer game that he used at home to learn chess. The circled characters were the soldiers. The character was taught by his father. Ned did not know how to pronounce it or what the meaning was. However, he put the character here to show us what he had learned from his home life.

*Figure Ned-3. Chinese*

*December to January.* In the period of December-January, due to the state tests, ESL classes in the school were canceled to prepare for the test. Ned, although not very productive,
began to have more complex delivery in his journals, yet he still used simple words or phrases to express his thoughts. In addition, he began to write more about the popular culture he experienced after school. Ned continued to use pictures to make meaning. In many pieces, he drew about Po, the character in cartoon film KungFu Panda. The film was produced in 2008 and became very popular among children. Ned loved the film very much and watched it repeatedly at home. He brought the story into his journal writings and created new events for the main character. The following example (Figure Ned-4) was created in December after Ned had watched this film many times.

![Figure Ned-4](image)

*Figure Ned-4. Kung fupanda*

The picture portrayed the character in a vivid cartoon way. Under the picture, Ned wrote *Kung fupanda*. The writing only showed the title of the film, yet when I was interviewing him, Ned told me a very complex story: Po was fighting Kung fu. The sky was full of lightening. The snake on the right side of the picture was helping Po in fighting. The little triangle at the lower right corner was a trap that Po almost stepped into. This story was a lot more than the two words that accompanied the picture.

What also were striking were the two Chinese characters he put on the top of the picture: 天上 (in the sky). Since he was thinking about a night where there was lightening, the two
Chinese characters indicated the position of the lightening and the fight between Po and his opponent.

There were two topics he wrote most in his journals: Kungfu Panda and chess. Ned loved watching the film very much. Besides the aforementioned piece about panda, he also produced two other pieces with the same panda character. In those pieces, he used simple phrases to label the picture and put more effort into drawing. In one of the pieces (Figure Ned-5), he used \textit{anb} (and) to connect \textit{betl} (beetle) and \textit{cauFu panba} (kung fu panda); and in the other piece (Figure Ned-6), he simply wrote \textit{kung fu panda} to indicate the story.

\textit{Figure Ned-5. Betl anb cauFu Panba (beetle and Kungfu Panda )}
For Ned, the story could be told through the picture, rather than print. For instance, in the writing about “beetle and panda”, he put thunder at the margin to show that there was a tiger who was about to attack the panda. Ned wanted his picture to tell part of the story and leave some space for imagination. Ned, in the interview, also noted that he wanted his audience to guess what happened in the rest of the story.

In his interview, he also mentioned that he could draw one of the tigers, the good tiger. When I asked him if he needed to write the names of the tiger in the entry, he said that everyone already knew the name, therefore there was no need to actually write it. This speech might indicate his approach to writing: writing can be shared information. The audience, knowing part of the information, can be involved in his stories, mostly his drawings and get some new information.

Figure Ned-6 was a simple phrase, however, Ned told me the entire story behind the picture: the panda was having a dream.

“What happened in the story?” I asked.

“I was drawing a dream that Panda had”, said Ned, “The panda jumped out while the rest of the team were out. He does not know any kungfu at all, but he was brave enough to jump out
and play with the sword.”

All these complex plots were hidden within the simple words Ned wrote. On the one hand, due to Ned's limited ability in English writing, he could only use two words to represent the complicated ideas. Ned was still using picture as a major form of meaning making. At the stage, Ned still regarded pictures as the best way to deliver stories. Note that he was using the word “drawing” in his speech rather than “writing”. When I asked him what he wanted to say for that story, he referred to the picture of Po. On the other hand, from his delivery of the story during our interview, I could see that he had many good ideas in his mind. He used both drawing and the writing of Chinese characters to set the stage of the story.

Those entries of panda not only showed his love for the cartoon, but also his different trials of spelling the title “Kungfu Panda”. Three different versions appeared in his journals for the same title: Kung fu panda, cauFu Panba and Kungfu Panda. The space between Kungfu and panda were positioned differently as well. In addition, like many other young children, he wrote some words in a reversed form, such as u in cauFu (Kungfu), b in Panba (Panda). Yet, the spellings were changed back to the correct form, which suggested that the directional principle that Clay (1980) found among monolingual children's writings can also be applied to kindergarteners who are learning English as their second language.

February to March. After almost a whole month without ESL class, Ned and his classmates went back to the ESL class and started writing again in February. Compared with the last two months, Ned's writing showed great development in length.

The most prominent progress Ned had during these two months was the depth and the length of his journal entries. There were no longer any single word entries. Instead, he began to use verbs such as be, like, love, fight, fly, play, etc. Present progressive tense was also used in
some pieces, which indicated his new mastery of verb usage. Those verbs usually were written incorrectly, however by using them, Ned began to have more sense of what writing meant to him.

The following piece (Figure Ned-7) was created in early February. After a long period of silence, Ned produced an entry of a sentence.

![Figure Ned-7](image)

*Figure Ned-7. FangFu Panda is fat.*

In this example, Ned continued his trial of spelling “Kungfu Panda”, and more importantly used adjectives to describe the panda he drew. He also added punctuation at the end of the sentence. Compared with the writing samples he produced earlier, such an entry showed enormous development not only in vocabulary but also in writing conventions.

The following piece (Figure Ned-8) created the day after used a similar picture and showed similar development: various means of spelling the words he did not know. For instance, Ned had been spelling “Kungfu Panda” repeatedly in his journals, yet only twice did he spell it correctly. Even though he had been watching the cartoon many times and written the words for numerous times as well, the spelling of the film title still did not seem to be internalized by Ned. At the same time, however, he began to spell by incorporating the phonic features of letters. He used those features in the spelling of the verbs he never tried before. For instance, he used *ets* (eats) to tell us what panda was doing, and *pla* (play) to indicate what he was doing on with the
chess. At the same time, he was trying with new sentence structures. For example, the following sample (Figure Ned-9) was created in late February. Instead of simply using a subject-verb-object sentence structure, he added more information at the end of the sentence to extend the meaning. In another example (Figure Ned-10), he added *wts msf* (with myself)” to further our understanding of his experience playing chess.

*Figure Ned-8.* Kam fu Panda ets kakes (Kungfu Panda eats cakes.)

*Figure Ned-9.* I go to chess klub to pl chess (I go to the chess club to play chess.)
Another important feature in this period of time was Ned's intentional incorporation of available literacy resources. In the classroom, there were many labels and signs that could be used as literacy clues. As an observant boy, Ned noticed many clues that he could use in his journal writing. For instance, the following piece (Figure Ned-11) was created with the help from those resources.

Ned was drawing a Pikachu with thunder when I was stepping into the class. When I asked him what he wanted to say for the picture, he said: “Pikachu is fighting dinosaur”. Yet he insisted that he did not know how to write. He repeated the sentence to himself, listened to the sound of each word and put down “fidt” first. He asked me if his writing was correct. Pikachu, the name of the Pokemon monster also failed him. He thought for a second and suddenly left the table to get a pencil holder. When he was back, I noticed that the outside of the pencil holder was
covered with pictures from Pokemon and the name “Pikachu” was printed right there. Ned copied the name down onto his journal.

For “dinosaur”, after hearing the sound, he put down “dinsr” and asked me again if it was right. He seemed to want to write it in a more correct way. When I came back to him five minutes later, he had already erased the original writing and written “dinosaur” on the paper. He said that he looked at the words on the book, which was put right beside the carpet. He seemed quite satisfied with his writing this time.

Ned was also able to incorporate what he had learned into writing. Although he was not able to internalize the spelling of many words, he was able to make the knowledge he learned a part of his own, a strategy he used constantly in ESL class. For example, one day in March, students sat on the rug to read a poem that the teacher posted on the board. It was a poem about traffic and words such as stop and go were read many times. Students were asked to look for go in this poem and pointed out the position of the word by raising their hands. Ned quickly found seven places. After the poem activity, students were given a little book that needed to fill in with opposite words. Each page was covered with a picture for clues, but the last page of the little book was for students to draw and write a pair of opposites by themselves. Unlike other students who choose a pair from previous pages, Ned thought a second and quickly put down slop (stop) and go (Figure Ned-12). Those words were repeated in the poem he had just read with his classmates.
The next day students had free journal writing in ESL class. Ned's journal fully reflected the strategies he had the day before and produced the following entry (Figure Ned-13).

**Figure Ned-13. stop and go is opposite**

The two words, *stop* and *go*, were used in the journal. The meaning of the sentence reflected what he had learned the day before. The pictures also were similar to the ones he had created. Those examples demonstrated that Ned was using the resources available to him in the classroom to help him in writing. The resources not only included signs and sight words, but also the new literacy knowledge and strategies.

Ned's writing development might be partially affected by his ability in spoken English. Ned began to speak English in class beginning in February. After over six months of silence, Ned began to speak in ESL class and never stopped talking. The teacher one day told me with excitement: “Ned speaks!” February was also a month when Ned's writing showed the greatest improvement. The two events seemed arbitrary, but it should be noted that Ned was building his knowledge of print and writing in the past months. Obviously he had accumulated much knowledge and brought it out in February when he felt confident enough to speak out.
April and May. April and May were the last two months in kindergarten ESL class. Compared with other periods in this study, Ned produced more writings and began to show his voice in journals. His writing also reflected more of the popular culture he experienced after school. However, his attitude towards writing was quite negative during this period of time.

First, his writings were longer and more complicated. For instance, he was using more details to describe the event in his stories. The following piece (Figure Ned-14) was created in early April. It was noted that he added a prepositional phrase within the sentence. In the piece created a few days later, he used the same strategy by putting a prepositional phrase and at the same time added another verb to make a compound sentence (Figure Ned-15). This was the first compound sentence he had ever created in his journals.

*Figure Ned-14.* I an jumping on the snoman's sheb. (I am jumping on the snowman's sled).
In addition, he began to use comparative structure in journal writing. For instance, he made comparison between the two Pokemons by using the word *than*. In order to make the sentence convey his meaning, he tried the comparative degree in several pieces. The following examples demonstrated those trials. The first example (Figure Ned-16) was written with the help from the teacher. The ESL teacher not only helped him with the sentence structure, but also tried to guess what Ned really meant by giving her that sentence. She wrote three versions for the Pokemon's name and obviously asked Ned to choose one and write down by himself. The real name of the Pokemon was Mewtwo.
Figure Ned-16. NEW Tuo is better than all pokéMoN.:  

The other two pieces seemed more like Ned’s own creation. Compared with the first one where he put down correct sentence form, the second (Figure Ned-17) and the third pieces (Figure Ned-18) seemed more like Ned’s trial of comparative structure. For Figure Ned-17, he used “better” to indicate the degree, but did not put the comparative sentence marker “than”.

Figure Ned-17. NEW TUO is better pokémon in the world.
Ned stood there, not saying anything. He jokingly pretended to give a strong explosion by waving his arms in front of the teacher. Ned seemed to want to show the teacher that is how powerful Mewtwo was in his journal. However, she immediately scolded him and asked him not to do so in class any more. Ned went silently to the carpet for some free reading.

The most notable feature was the development of Ned’s voice in writing. Unlike previous months, Ned began to show much of his voice in his journal writing, especially to show his disinterest in writing. Part of his voice was not only reflected in the pieces that had verbs *like* or *love*. For example, the following piece (Figure Ned-19) contained the word *play* and was based...
on his real experience playing outside. Or the journal about Mewtwo (Figure Ned-20) showed his choice in watching and playing Pokemon. Sometimes however, he showed his voice in a more imaginative way: the piece about a dinosaur (Figure Ned-15) showed the objects he really enjoyed outside school: Watching and reading about dinosaurs.

*Figure Ned-19.* I like play with bee.

*Figure Ned-20.* I like NEW TUO better.

Even though there were pieces where he expressed his excitement and enthusiasm for life, he also conveyed his dislike for writing and school. Many times in ESL class, he wrote about writing. For instance, the following example (Figure Ned-21) was created in April. Instead of
using words *like* or *love*, he used a question in his journal to articulate his hesitation in writing journals. In kindergarten ESL class, students had routine activities after they came to the class, such as counting, reciting months, observing weather, etc. Students were asked to write free journals or “word of the day” after all these small activities. In previous months, whenever asked to write journals, Ned would be sitting on his chair quietly and quickly started drawing. However, in April and May, he seemed to have much more difficulty starting the journal. The previously vivid and colorful pictures became simpler and he often spent more time thinking about what to draw. After drawing, he would sit there wondering what to write. The writing in Figure Ned-21 showed such confusion and doubt in writing.

*Figure Ned-21. Wat can i do?*

*Figure Ned-22. I do not kno how to draw in my jrnol (I do not know how to draw in my journal).*

In other pieces, he expressed the disinterest more obviously. At first, he wrote about not
knowing what to draw in the journal (Figure Ned-22). As previously discussed, drawing had always been the most important part in Ned’s journal writing. He liked to rely more on the pictures to tell the stories than on words. Therefore, when he was writing “I do not know how to draw in my journal”, he was actually speaking out his inner voice that he did not know or what to write in his journal.

A few days later, he produced another piece (Figure Ned-23) that communicated his feelings about writing and school. In journal time, Ned did not write anything for about 5 minutes and looked around while other students were busy writing. He dragged the pencil box to his side and looked at me as if saying that the girl sitting opposite him would steal the pencils from him. He was drawing a picture of a building and himself with a two-pointed arrow. I asked him what he wanted to write, and he kept telling me that he did not know. He flipped to the previous page and flipped back, but still did not write. Then he murmured that he did not like to go to school. In his journal, he wrote down: “i don't like to go to school”. I asked him why he thought so and if wanted to write the reason in his book. He hesitated for a second and told me in Chinese: “wu liao a (it is so boring).” Later in his journal I saw the complete sentence with the reason added, “because it is so long”. However, during the entire process of writing this piece, the teacher did not approach Ned at all.

Figure Ned-23. I don’t like to go to school b’cos the klass is so long (I don’t like to go to school)
because the class is so long)

By the end of May, Ned had already been able to produce complete sentences with subject, verb and object. He was also able to add prepositional phrases and compound sentences.

**Summary.** Ned was a reluctant writer in the kindergarten ESL class. He started from telling the teacher his idea for the story and slowly developed his writing ability in kindergarten. He gradually found his writer's voice but failed to accumulate any real interest in composition. The writing instruction in class and his prior knowledge in English may be the factors that affected his writing development.

Ned's writing development was critically affected by the writing instruction in his ESL class. In his ESL class, writing seemed to be a solitary action. The teacher perceived journal entries as private property. Therefore, between students, very few opportunities were observed where children could exchange their thoughts about writing or share their entries. In the first half year, he was not speaking with any child at all in ESL class. Even though there were two other Chinese speaking children in the same class, he remained silent to them as well. In the second half of the year, Ned began to speak in ESL class. Sometimes he was assigned at the same table with Chinese speaking children; however, whenever it was journal time, students would focus on their own writings and Ned was not seen interacting with other children about writing.

The interactions between teacher and students were during the writing process were often brief. Students usually had very short writing conferences with the teacher at the teacher's table. The teacher waited for students to come to the table to tell her what they wanted to write. She often provided the spelling of certain words or helped students in spelling. For Ned, this practice indirectly prevented him from asking for help. Ned told me that the reason that he did not speak for the first half year was because he did not have any questions. Although he did speak in the
Spring of 2009, he only had a few conferences with his teacher, all of which were very short. Each conference was initiated by Ned after he brought his journal to the teacher's table. The conferences were mostly focused on spelling and rarely did both sides talk about the content.

Moreover, Ned's voice in writing was a prominent step in his writing development. However, the teacher did not seem to pay close attention to such a change. Although Ned wrote a number of pieces about his negative attitudes towards writing and going to school, the teacher did not show any specific strategies to deal with this situation. The only response she wrote for pieces like those was a written remark saying “I'm sorry”. During the research, I did not see the teacher having any conversations with Ned to talk about this issue. On the contrary, when the teacher saw that Ned was writing something violent, such as “I like fighting”, she showed great concern. She not only left a written comment, but also told Ned face to face that he should not write this topic any more. Journal writing was a very important part of the class. The teacher told me that she liked writing as well, and also encouraged her students to write. She had her students write daily in their journals, either about “word of the day” or free writing. There were many opportunities for writing in class. However, the prolific production of journals did correspond to Ned's interest. Until the end of the school year, while other focal students were able to create writings with complicated plots, Ned was only writing at the sentence level. My conversation with Ned also showed that with more scaffolding, Ned was able to write more details. However, he did not get such chances with the ESL teacher. If the teacher had taken this opportunity to gain more understanding of why Ned did not like writing, Ned would have produced writings with more amount and depth.

Finally, Ned's prior knowledge of English before schooling might have influenced his writing development, especially his understanding of writing in kindergarten. Among all the
kindergarten focal students, Ned was the only one who did not have much English background. He learned a few letters when he was in Taiwan but had few opportunities to use those letters. After coming to the US, he showed more interest in learning Chinese than in English. During the second half of the school year when he began to speak English in ESL class, he began to have more writings in his journal; yet his development was slow. His understanding of written language was also developing slowly. As a native Mandarin speaker, he did not see Chinese written language as a tool in communication or expression. The purpose of his practice of Chinese was to be able to copy the characters correctly and to know as many complex characters as possible. He did not quite care if he would use the characters or not. As for English, his journal writing at the beginning of the year was mainly focused on drawing. He believed that pictures could tell the stories more effectively. Readers could understand his story by looking at the picture and imagining the plots behind the drawing. Later in the school year, even though he started to have more writings, he seemed not to find any real interest in composition.

Comparatively, most of other focal students established their background in English earlier than Ned. They used their writings to tell stories, communicate with their teacher and expressed their thoughts. Therefore, it is understandable that prior knowledge of English might have affected Ned's writing development in English.

In summary, many factors played a role in Ned's writing development. His prior knowledge in English might have affected the beginning stage of his writing; yet the writing instruction in ESL class did not compensate for this weakness.
Cross Case Analysis

**Introduction.** After examining the individual development of each student, I now turn to the analysis across the four cases of kindergarten ELLs to discover the similarities and differences within their writing development in Chinese and English. Since their Chinese writing activities were considerably less than those of English composition, I will put more emphasis on the English writing development in this section. The observations of the young children lasted for almost an entire school year. I observed their classroom writing activities, talked informally with them and their parents and collected as many writing samples as possible. These four cases demonstrated a number of interesting features that reflect the writing development of ELLs at kindergarten level.

**Chinese Writing.** Chinese writing was not a major focus in the Chinese class that focal students attended each day for thirty minutes. Compared with English writing, Chinese class emphasized the maintenance of oral Chinese language. Therefore, there were very few opportunities for students to practice writing in Chinese. In their after school life, only Ned and Lingyun were seen writing, or more precisely, copying Chinese characters. Lingyun was asked by the parents to copy characters and words due to their plan of returning to China, and Ned was the one who voluntarily took copying as a personal interest.

For all the parents of the focal students, “writing” in Chinese was perceived as a task impossible at the age of 5-6. They believed that only with certain mastery of Chinese characters and Pinyin could students start writing. Hence, they were all very surprised to learn that their children wrote in ESL class. Probably due to such a perception of writing, none of the parents asked their children to practice free writing in Chinese at home. The Chinese teacher also noted that the main task of those children in the Chinese class was to maintain the language. He would
prefer them to have more solid background of oral Mandarin before they started writing. Therefore, no specific writing curriculum had been designed for kindergarten children in the school. Both teacher's and parents' definition of Chinese writing might have affected their assistance to the children interested in composition. In addition to class instruction, writing samples of focal students also showed that although some awkward structures appeared in the writing samples, no obvious language loss was observed in students' Chinese writing.

**English Writing.**

*Similarities.* There were some features that the majority of the young writers experienced in their overall English writing development. At the beginning of the school year, all students were given the opportunity to copy words from the board. Students copied either separate words or simple sentence structures. The writing samples of the four children illustrated that all students were able to follow the instructions for this activity. Such ability might be built on their prior knowledge of print that came from the preschool attended before kindergarten or from their homes where literate environments were created. Lingyun, Tina and Mia attended preschool in the US where they learned letters and some simple English words. Ned never had any preschool in America, but learned a bit of the English alphabet and some Chinese characters in his preschool in Taiwan. All their prior experiences in preschool paved the way for their understanding of print later in kindergarten. Their understanding of print was well reflected in their ESL writing activities. Although some students found writing a challenging task, none of them felt that print was something strange. They accepted writing as a carrier of meaning in their life.

*Pictures and Writing.* Writing to those students did not only mean using words: They also used pictures as a way of meaning making. Both interviews and writing samples showed that all
young ELL writers used drawing as a means of narration at the beginning stage. Tina used wild imagination in her drawings to depict different fairy characters; Mia used pictures to accompany the name writing that she liked most; Lingyun's favorite part in his after school life was drawing and Ned's' stories were mostly based on the pictures he drew every time in the class. All these phenomena suggested that pictures were an inseparable part of their journal entries and free writings at the beginning stage. This situation might be the result of their limited English proficiency which did not allow them to write as many English words as they planned. In order for them to tell their stories, they used means other than words in composition. Therefore, to the focal student, writing included drawing or using pictures to tell stories.

Use of pictures also may highlight students' perspectives of story telling as revealed through pictures and writing. At the beginning stage of writing development, all the writers were using pictures as a means of meaning making. Pictures sometimes were the most important part of their journal. Whenever they were asked about the content of the story, writers first referred to the pictures they drew. For instance, Mia and Tina told me that “this is the story”, while Lingyun and Ned always showed me the pictures they drew for further explanation. In addition, at this stage, they often used simple words or sentences to represent the sophisticated meanings of their stories. Even though most of the time there was only one word or a few words in the entry, they could always tell a more compelling story hidden in the picture. For instance, the complex plot that Ned orally narrated to me when he was showing me the picture demonstrated that he had a complex story in his mind.

The format of the journal books also played a role in students' understanding of pictures and writing. Since the young ELL writers lacked the vocabulary and knowledge of complex sentence structures, they often used pictures to deliver the meaning. The kindergarten children in
this study used the same type of journal book in ESL class. The book had a large square space for children to draw pictures and three lines to write their sentences. The same format was maintained for first graders as well. There were more lines and less drawing space in the notebooks provided for higher graders. For kindergarteners, whenever they opened the book, they saw the large picture space first. The design of journal books might encourage students to understand pictures as the most important part in storytelling. Therefore, it is possible that the format of the journal book had some effect in shaping students' perception of the relationship between drawing and writing.

In addition, some young writers showed unique understandings of the relationship between pictures and writings. Even in the same entry, children's pictures and writings seemed to show different meanings. The beginning stage became a period when students put more emphasis on the pictures, and thereby the content of their writing often either turned out to be different from the drawing or became part of a story. Young writers used words and sentences to label the content of some plots. This feature was the most prominent in Ned and Tina's writings where the written work represented only part of the meaning that children wanted to express.

This feature also lead us to understand how young writers were perceiving audience for their creative work. For some writers, using labels or using a few words to represent the more complex meaning was a strategy in writing. Such a strategy was used so that audiences were able to guess the meaning and become involved in the story. Those writers wanted readers to guess the meaning that was beyond the picture and further beyond the print. Writers, such as Tina and Ned, both expressed in our conversations that they wished that readers guess the characters and plots in the story from its picture. Ned's interview also demonstrated that he wanted readers to have some background information of the story before they could understand the plot. Tina, on
the other hand, wanted readers to sense the continuity of the series of stories she created about “little fairy”.

In the studies previously conducted among young writers, scholars found that at the beginning stage of their writing development, children tended to scribble on paper as a way of expressing their thoughts (Clay, 1981). The only child that was observed to have scribbles was Tina who drew lines on the notebook her mother bought. However, most of the focal children in this study were not observed experiencing this stage or at least the parents did not remember this stage. Since I did not intend to discover the family literacy practices that students experienced, there might be some behaviors overlooked such as scribbling at home. Yet it should be noted that no scribbles were found in ESL class. The nonexistence of scribbling in school for these focal students might suggest how they perceived school writing: school, or ESL class, is a place where only stories or formal writing is permitted. Even though their class environments looked friendly, their understanding of school writing turned out to be very similar to each other.

**Confirmation of Spellings.** Another important commonality among all writers was their constant confirmation with adults about the correctness of spelling. All focal children asked for the correctness of spelling at different times during the observations, yet this feature appeared most obviously in the middle of the semester, especially when students went back to ESL class after winter holidays. For instance, Lingyun and Mia, the two Chinese students in Mrs. Cane's class often asked if their spellings were correct when they were doing word writing. They also requested confirmation during journal time when many news words were tried. At this stage, none of them were satisfied when being told that invented spellings were acceptable. When I was observing their behaviors in this activity, their facial expression told me that they sometimes thought certain spellings did not “look right”. “Not looking right” suggested that they were
activating their repertoire of vocabulary and applying whatever they had accumulated in writing. In their knowledge base, some understanding of what the word should look like had been established. Therefore, when a word did not “look right”, they immediately sensed the difference. However, due to their challenges with spelling, they turned to adults for help. Some students, such as Lingyun and Ned, also referred to the resources in the classroom. They searched the artifacts in the class that contained literacy hints and transferred what they found into writings. Tina, however, did not voluntarily seek help in spelling in class; instead, she consulted with her parents at home about the spelling of many words as revealed in the parent interviews. Mia, not only checked with her teacher about the spelling, but also helped other children to spell, a way to check her own spelling.

At the end of the school year, most focal children had already established interest in writing. Although some still used letter name strategy to spell words, most of them were able to write their stories, which showed a great deal of their writing development. Lingyun's stories contained sophisticated narrative elements; Tina's writing was filled with imagination; Mia's stories gradually demonstrated her voice as a storyteller; and Ned, even though a slowly developing writer, composed simple sentences with his unique inner voice. They all started from copying the sentence structures that the teacher provided to composing with their own knowledge and ability.

*Non-linear Spelling Development.* Observations, interviews and writing samples all showed that those children's spelling development was a non-linear process. The ability to spell for all students was increasing over the year, yet the process of internalizing and assimilating the rules of spelling was non-stable. The spelling in the journals created by Mia, Lingyun and Ned all showed that they used letter-sound correspondence at the beginning of the school year. For
instance, they used a to represent all the sounds that contain /ei/. Sometimes, they failed to
differentiate vowel sounds, such as a in *frands* (friends). Other times, they used r to represent the
/ɔr/ sound, such as *disnewrld* (Disney World). The direction of writing the letters also seemed
interesting. For those children who had already grasped the English alphabet, they still used the
reversed format sometimes in their writings. The reversed order of writing a letter was seen in
almost every month until March. Reversed format also appeared at word level where letters were
not positioned according to sound, such as *wnat* (went) in Mia's journal and *lkie* (like) in Ned's
entry.

Overall, those features in spelling development corresponded to the strategies in spelling
development that other scholars have researched among young native English speakers. For
instance, Clay's (1984) description of young writers approached a number of principles in their
writing that looked very similar to the products of these focal children, such as reversing
directions of letters and signs, adopting easier solutions in page arrangement, etc. Using Gentry's
(1978) discussion of early spelling, children utilized five strategies during the progression of
their spelling. The scribbles of Tina at home was a different strategy; Ned's early trial of one
letter to represent the entire meaning of a piece seemed more like a prephonetic strategy; the
implementation of letter-sound correspondence reflected in all cases indicated the phonetic
strategy that focal children were applying during the middle part of the study; the transitional
strategy was mainly used by Tina, Lingyun and Mia in the last few months of the school year
when they were making progress towards conventional spellings. Comparatively, Tina was the
only one who strove to create as many correct spellings as possible, while the rest of the ELLs
were still at the phonetic-transitional stage.

1. deviant strategy – precommunicative stage
2. prephonetic strategy – semi-phonetic stage
3. phonetic strategy – phonetic stage
4. transitional strategy – transitional stage
5. correct strategy – correct stage

The applicability of Gentry's stage theory (see Chapter 2) in those cases suggested that ELLs in kindergarten had very similar developmental features in spelling from native English speaking children. It is also noted that Gentry mentioned the variation of those stages, such as falling back from transitional stage to phonetic stage occasionally due to spellers' mode in writing, e.g. frustrated, tired or less motivated. However, in this study, no obvious mode changes were observed when focal students occasionally reverted to a prior stage. In this sense, the non-linear process in spelling seemed quite natural among those ELLs.

This study found common characteristics that ELLs share in their writing development. Some features coincided with the characteristics in the writing development of young native English speakers, such as progressive but non-linear development in spelling as previous research has noted. Such a feature delineated a general phenomenon among all the kindergarten ELLs in the study. The non-linear process also occurred in the development of word use, sentence structures and narration among some student, a finding that will be discussed in later sections.

Differences. Despite the similarities in their writing development, I also noticed some differences in their experience of learning to write in the following aspects: writing instruction, the effect of prior background in English and individual differences.

Effect of writing instruction. English writing development of these students was critically affected by the writing instruction in their ESL class. The four students in the study came from
two ESL classes. Even though they were of the same grade, the two classes have very different styles in writing instruction. In Mrs. Cane's class, writing instruction focused on interactions and purposes of composition. One of the literacy activities for students to experience when they came to the class was the letter from Mrs. Cane who left a “letter to kinders” on the board almost everyday. In those letters, the teacher either introduced the major content that they were going to learn that day, or the feelings that the teacher wanted to express to the children. She often chose to use the words that students just learned or the ones that they were about to learn. By reading those letters, children were able to gain an understanding of the purpose of writing as a means of learning and sharing. Writing became a way of communication with the teacher. In addition, students had many opportunities to share their entries with each other as well. Lingyun's writings were read a number of times as model journals in front of the class; and Mia often showed her writing to her classmates and taught them how to draw the symbols in their journals. The teacher also encouraged them to share writings with class visitors and verbalize their thoughts during their composing processes. The interaction between children and between students and teacher during those writing activities helped young ELLs to realize that writing was not only for their own pleasure, but also for communication among individuals. As a result, both focal students in this class enjoyed writing and talking about writing. At the same time, they used both English and Chinese to articulate their thoughts about writing. The writing samples of those two students also demonstrated that they tended to incorporate their friends in their stories, especially Mia who often mentioned the names of her friends.

Compared with Mrs. Cane's class, writing in Mrs. Macy's class seemed to be more of a solitary action. Mrs. Macy perceived making a journal entry as a private act. Students in the class were asked to write in their own seats without moving back and forth. Students were not allowed
to see others' writing either. When some students were about to see the journals that other children wrote, the teacher would stop them. The teacher often sat at her own table and helped those children who needed help in spelling; therefore, she was not usually seen walking among tables helping with students during writing. Those behaviors might indirectly send a message to students that writing was private and not for sharing. Even though there were whole class writing activities, the opportunities for students to engage in groups or to interact with one another seemed very scarce.

Moreover, how teachers scaffolded writing were different, which had different effects on students' writing behaviors and their perceptions of writing. Mrs. Cane emphasized the importance of writing process. She elicited students' thoughts about writing before they wrote and provided a great deal of support during writing to help them elaborate. After writing, she had students share their work and discuss details of their stories. Writing conferences became one of the most effective approaches Mrs. Cane used during her writing instruction. The scaffolding she provided helped students including Lingyun and Mia to understand that writing was an interactive process. Both focal students in this class showed extensive interest in articulating their ideas and sharing their work with other children. The enormous improvement in their writing also suggested that the teacher's scaffolding was very helpful, especially during the first half year. The decreased amount of interactions between Mrs. Cane and her students at the end of the school year also seemed to correlate with the static situation of Lingyun's writing at the time.

Compared with Mrs. Cane's class, Mrs. Macy's scaffolding focused less on the content of the writing or the writing process. Mrs. Macy often used poems and small books in class to teach vocabulary. By approaching those literacy resources, students were more likely to internalize the vocabulary. Ned and Tina both had the experience of implementing the words learned in poems
and small books in their journal writing. Mrs. Macy also conducted writing conferences with her students. As previously discussed, the conferences usually took place at the teacher's table with students approaching her. During the conference, the teacher often focused on spelling not on the content of writing. It was usually at the end of the conference that she made some comments about the content such as leaving a written remark with one simple sentence or telling students her feelings about the story. Yet, no changes to the content were observed after her comments were made. Moreover, students rarely had opportunities to exchange their thoughts about writing or share their entries, and the teacher did not initiate such sharing either. Consequently, Tina often intentionally hid her writing from others and Ned constantly articulated his dislike for writing in his journals. For Tina, whenever other children were peeking at her pictures, she quickly covered her journal book. Ned had repeatedly expressed in his journal that he did not like writing or know what to write. The teacher wrote, “I am sorry” on some of the papers, but most of the entries had no comments. What's more, both focal students in this class did not talk very much during the conferences. Tina's silence might be explained by her quiet personality, while Ned, although very eloquent in Chinese, remained silent in ESL until February, 2009. Even though Ned started talking in ESL class since then, he maintained his silence in writing conferences even when the teacher asked him questions regarding the content.

*Prior knowledge in English.* Students' prior knowledge of English also seemed to make a difference in their English writing development in the kindergarten ESL class. Among all five kindergarteners in the study, three were raised in the United States: Mia, Tina and Emma (a girl participant not discussed in this paper). Maybe not include her then. All of them started learning English from the daycare centers supported by the university’s housing community. Not only were they able to communicate well in English, they also formed some background in literacy,
e.g. reading and alphabet. Lingyun, although not born in the US, came to the US when he was about four and joined the day care center and preschool the girls attended. Like the girls, he also learned English alphabet in those centers and developed a solid background of oral English. Ned was the only child who attended kindergarten without much prior education in English. The result of the study showed that all children except Ned had gained much interest in English writing. However, Ned had repeatedly mentioned in his journal about his dislike of writing and school. At the same time, however, Ned had a very strong background in Chinese. Such preparation enabled him to speak confidently in Chinese class with the Chinese teacher and his classmates, while other children were not as articulate as Ned in Chinese class. Ned also enjoyed writing Chinese characters and tried the most complicated words in Chinese. Those facts might suggest that students' prior background in a language was critical to learn and develop writing skills in a given language. The background in a certain language added more confidence to the students. Those who did not have the corresponding background might find it hard to engage in the activities that other students were enjoying.

**Individual Differences.** While there was difference between the two classes, the differences among students should be acknowledged as equally prominent. Although different teachers taught writing differently, even in the same class, students' response to the instruction also varied.

Henderson (1985) pointed out the importance of spelling in learning and writing while simultaneously highlighting the significance of “learning to think clearly and write what is intended” in children's writing (p. 185). Such a statement relates to the cases here with regard to vocabulary and narration. In this sense, word use was found to show non-linear development as well, and Tina was the most representative of all children in this regard. While other children
varied their vocabulary in journal writing gradually, Tina's writings showed that words such as love and like were used frequently in her earlier stage of writing. Vocabulary, especially variation in words, did not seem to be developed at the same rate as her overall writing ability in the middle of the school year. She used the certain words repeatedly, writing about some similar objects in her journals and maintaining the same sentence structure (e.g. I like... She is...) for a long time. At the end of the school year, however, there was a spurt of writing, in which she not only varied her vocabulary, but adapted many new and complex sentence structures to help her make meaning.

The non-linear feature form of narration was mainly reflected in the case of Lingyun. Lingyun was the first among all focal students who could write a complete story with beginning, climax and ending. His story also depicted different characters. There were many climactic turns in his stories that attracted readers. However, those elements only appeared in the middle of the school year. After students returned from the winter holidays and after state testing, no such story elements were ever seen in Lingyun's stories. The disappearance of those elements could be explained by a number of reasons. One was that Lingyun's family planned to go back to their home country before the end of the school year. Therefore, the whole family was busy preparing for the return. Lingyun might have been affected by his parents' busy schedule and therefore failed to put as much effort in class writing as before.

A more important reason, however, lay in the interaction between Lingyun and his teacher in the ESL class. The time when Lingyun created the most successful entries was at the end of the first semester. He had many direct interactions with the ESL teacher about writing. In those conferences the teacher talked with Lingyun about his stories and, at the same time, she encouraged him to add more details and complete the story with necessary story elements.
Therefore, in those weeks, Lingyun was able to create stories with vivid characters and compelling plots. However, in the weeks and even months after those interactions, the amount of teacher-student writing conferences was greatly reduced. Students spent more time on spelling. After a semester of learning the English alphabet, students began to pull all their knowledge of print and letters and apply them to writing. With more time spent on writing individual words, Lingyun did not seem to have as many opportunities to confer with the teacher as before. The number of journal entries also decreased with time. Without as much direct interaction with the teacher, Lingyun's stories became shorter, simpler and lacked the complex plots and characters he used to portray. At the end of the school year, journals with only one sentence were constantly produced. Lingyun's narration ability developed fast at first, reached its peak in the middle of the year, but declined thereafter. The bell shape of his ability demonstrated that writing development, especially the development in story telling and narration, of young ELLs was a non-linear process.

In general, Lingyun's writing development was critically affected by the writing conference he had with the teacher. At the same time, however, Mia's writing developed steadily. The time that teacher spent on the conference with Mia was similar to that with Lingyun in the second half of school year; however, there was not any apparent regression in her writing development in the second half year. On the contrary, all the English writings of Mia have shown great progress. The writings she created included journal writing, word writing and letters to Mrs. Cane. She developed not only in length and vocabulary but also in her “voice”. Lingyun, on the other hand, did not produce as many entries as Mia did in April. The complexity and length of his entries were also considerably reduced. Unlike Lingyun who planned to go back to China at the end of the year, Mia's parents did not have any specific plan of returning. Therefore, different
from Lingyun who might have been affected by trip preparation, Mia's writing stayed intact.

Those examples of Tina and Lingyun, in particular, showed that even in the same class or same grade, individual difference still pervaded; these may play a role in the development of students' English writing. Although different writers represented different aspects of non-linearity, their development in writing lead us to the conclusion that non-linearity of children's writing development was a versatile phenomenon. In addition, among different factors affecting their writing development, parents' plan of staying in the US or not, e.g. students' after-school life, might be the reason for students' interest and attention during writing in the ESL class. Those differences as well as the similarities needed our special attention in writing instruction.
Chapter 5

The Cases of Third Grade ELLs

Joy-A Writer Needing More Than Motivation

Joy was one of the 3rd grade participating students in this study. She was eight when the study was conducted and had her nine year-old birthday in the spring of 2009. She was a student in Mrs. Rose's ESL class every morning and attended Chinese class either before ESL or at noon.

Joy was born in Beijing China where her mother was working as a scientist in an academic institute. When she was eight months old, the family came to the US after the mother found a research scientist position overseas. Joy had a little sister who was born in the US. The two girls had quite distinctive personalities. Joy was a very energetic girl who could never settle down for a long time, while the sister, according to her mother, was quiet and calm. In school, Joy appeared to be a troublemaker: she did not listen to the teacher carefully during class time, often was reprimanded because of bothering other students and often failed to submit homework on time.

There were a number of hobbies that Joy enjoyed after school. The parents told me, “sleep, watch TV and play” were three things that Joy liked most. Although jokingly said, they showed worries about Joy who did not seem to like reading and writing.

Family literacy. Joy's parents were very concerned about her studying at school and tried their best to help her at home with literacy. Different methods had been tried. The mother and the father divided their responsibilities: the mother helping with English and the father, with Chinese and math. They also checked Joy's homework everyday, a common practice common among Chinese parents. In order to encourage Joy to read or write, the mother checked Joy's homework from ESL class and talked with her about writing. Mrs. Zhao wrote academic papers in her office
and was well aware of many expectations in writing. She told me that she mainly went over four major steps in writing each time she worked with Joy. The first step was Joy's first draft writing. Then, the mother marked the sentences that were unclear. The mother asked questions such as whether an idea was important, why it was placed in certain places, as well as the relations between sentences. Joy put notes on the writing simultaneously. Sometimes the mother would find other problems when reading again such as that some sentences could be combined or language should be more precise. The last time step focused on minor issues such as grammatical mistakes. As Joy's mom said: “It is like revision step by step. Let her improve herself.” This writing process demonstrated the mother's determination in improving Joy's writing abilities. Her own academic background was utilized in the family literacy that Joy received. The mother and the daughter started working together like this since the first quarter of the year when the mother learned from the teacher that Joy did not complete homework.

At the same time, the parents also expected that Joy could improve in reading. The mother told me that in the middle of the school year, when they were informed that Joy was not behaving well in school, they started to worry about her study; therefore, they told Joy that she could earn fifty cents for each chapter book she read. Yet soon they found that Joy was reading too fast “without understanding the story, only wanting to earn the pocket money.” Therefore, rather than having her read the book alone, the mother began to ask Joy to either write a book report or find ten words that she did not know and create sentences with them. As a result, Joy began to read fewer books and came less often to her mother for the money even though the mother wanted her to write a summary about the book. The change in Joy's attitude made the parents wonder what else they could do to “get Joy to study”. To them, all the methods they had tried did not succeed in making Joy read or write more. More importantly, Joy did not behave
very well in school even after those measures. She still missed much homework and had to remain after school to make it up.

Although their methods did not turn into big success, the parents still expected that Joy could improve literacy skills. They had different expectations for Chinese and English. The mother said:

In English, I expect that she can reach the level for 3rd grade. I also expect that she can improve her writing. I think as a 3rd grader, she should be able to have some sense of logic, order (what to write first and next), clear. You can't have a writing that nobody knows what you are talking about. This is frustrating. In Chinese, the same problem, but at least reach the level of 2nd grade. The expectation is not as high as English.

The mother's writing habit seemed to slightly affect Joy's attitude towards writing. As a science researcher, the mother was very busy at work. She said that she had a heavy load of writing work in her laboratory. At home, she often wrote emails and blogs of her own. The mother mentioned in our interview that Joy often saw her writing online. “She once asked about what I was writing and it was so long, and wondered if she could write so much,” the mother remembered. However, Joy was not allowed to observe this writing practice, instead, she was told to “go out of the room instead of bothering” the mother.

The father, a mechanic who was also busy, was said to have a contrasting approach to teach Joy at home. Sometimes, he would let Joy play without interrupting, but other times, he became very strict to an extreme extent. The mother, who was worried that such changes in attitudes might not have positive effects, was busy with her own work at school.

The lack of attention to teachable moments, the changing approaches of disciplining, as well as Joy's unsettling personality, made the parents’ effort to promote family literacy less
successful. As a result, Joy began to formulate a mixed feeling towards learning. On the one hand, she could never sit quietly for more than ten minutes and often seemed to bother other students; on the other, she enjoyed the quiet bed time reading time that she never missed in her third grade.

**Writing development in school**

**Writing in Chinese.** Joy's writing in Chinese experienced great improvement with the help from her mother even though there were not as many opportunities to write in Chinese as in English. Students from the 2nd/3rd-grade Chinese class met everyday for forty five minutes. The class consisted of two groups: four or five students from 2nd grade ESL class and three students from 3rd grade ESL. Since the Chinese class was shorter than students' ESL or language arts classes, Mr. Gu, the Chinese teacher, adjusted the class time according to the schedule of the main classes. He originally had students from both 2nd and 3rd grades attending class at the same time after lunch because most of the Chinese students in 2nd grade ESL class had already learned 2nd grade Chinese in their home country. However, since 3rd graders were scheduled to take math after lunch, he rearranged the Chinese class for Joy and two other 3rd grade girls to 8:30 in the morning, prior to their ESL class, which meant that these three girls only had half an hour for Chinese.

The most important writings for 2nd/3rd-grade Chinese students were weekly journals in their notebooks. They completed the journal during the weekends and brought the notebooks back to Chinese class for a quick check from Mr. Gu. Children also wrote one article about the seasons each semester: one about Fall and one about Spring. Students wrote drafts, revised them and then gave the final copies to Mr. Gu for his records. In addition to the above longer writings, students practiced writing Chinese characters in each class period.
Joy's writing in Chinese developed gradually. At the beginning of the school year, Joy was not able to compose complete stories with her knowledge in Chinese. Sometimes she simply placed the irrelevant sentences together to make a story; however, those sentences were not able to convey coherent meaning to readers. For instance, in her first entry of Chinese journal, she wrote about having Chinese class:

我很喜欢中文课, 因为我学东西, 我也学中文字, 我一学中文字我会当一个中文老师。

(I like Chinese class, because I learn, I learn Chinese characters too, I can become a Chinese teacher once I learn Chinese characters)

In this example, she was trying to explain why she liked the Chinese class. However, the short sentence in the middle 我也学中文字 (I learn Chinese characters too) was not able to explain the reason of loving to learn Chinese, which seemed to be another layer of meaning she wanted to convey. In addition, the idea that I can become a Chinese teacher once I learn Chinese characters was not well supported by any sentences nearby. She also seemed to get confused about the use of commas in the middle of the sentences.

Her entries at the beginning also showed lack of understanding of Chinese sentence structures. For instance in the same entry she wrote:

\[\text{顾老师很好对咱们啊。} \underline{(Mr. \ Gu \ is \ very \ nice \ to \ us.)}\]

The translation into English was easy to understand. However, in Chinese, the complement 对咱们 is usually put in front of the adjective or adverb; therefore, the literal translation of the correct Chinese sentence structure would be Mr. Gu to us is very nice. The way that Joy wrote showed that she was highly influenced by English structure in writing.

In most of the writings at the beginning of 3rd grade, Joy used pinyin to represent the characters, which showed that her knowledge of Chinese was quite limited at the time.
Turning into the middle of the year, Joy had more fluent and coherent sentences than before and the topics of the journals often were selected from the events in her life. However, instead of focusing on one event in each journal, she tended to use a strategy that covered a series of happenings. For example, in a journal in December of 2008, she wrote

星期天我去了两个公园，我玩的很开心！我和妹妹拿了好多树叶, 我们打了红色的和黄色的，妈妈也帮咱们。妈妈说十二月我们会去 Florida 玩。我的妹妹也上学。我会去妹的学校看她在学校听不听话。

In this entry, she described a number of events that happened or would happen to her: she went to two parks with her family and they picked up leaves there; the mother told them that they were going to Florida in December; Her sister went to school where Joy would check on her sometime. Three different leads were mentioned in the same entry without any transitions. Similar features could be found in almost every journal Joy wrote in December.

Coming to the new semester, the mother began to pay more attention to Joy's writing. Learning from the teacher that Joy was not completing writing homework on time, the mother was extremely worried that Joy would be left behind in writing. The four steps she went through with Joy regarding her writing were one of the strategies that aimed at helping Joy to improve writing. With the help from the mother, Joy's Chinese journal entries began to focus more on the books she read. Joy usually summarized the content of the story she was reading. Instead of simply listing all the events happening in her life on certain day as she did before, she often chose to introduce the book first and then ended the journal with some recording of an event.

In addition to journal writing, the students also wrote two essays about seasons each semester. The essay about fall that Joy wrote was comparatively shorter than the one she wrote in spring. This writing also consisted of incoherent sentences. Even though she was describing
the scenes in fall, she was not quite composing it in a correct order. Therefore, readers might feel that she was writing about leaves, then children and back to leaves again. She also had some sentences literally translated from English. In contrast, the spring article was much more organized. She wrote about the scene in spring time and then turned to her own experience in spring through her own voice. The spring writing was much improved in organization, sentence structure and voice expression.

In general, Joy's Chinese writing showed great improvement since the start of the 3rd grade. Not only was she able to use more complete sentences, but also she began to understand what she needed to include in her writing. She started to cover certain topics in her journals, such as life events and later included information about the chapter books she was reading each week. Her reading habit was accompanied by the weekly book summary that her mother asked her to do. Even though those books were in English, she was able to translate what she learned into Chinese writings. In school, she had many classmates in the Chinese class, which made her speak Chinese on most occasions. Both the Chinese teacher and ESL teacher were enthusiastic about her improvement and kept contact with Joy's mother regarding Joy's literacy learning. Therefore, to a great extent, it was the coordination between teachers and parents that helped Joy not only maintain her Chinese, but also make progress in Chinese writing.

Nonetheless, Joy was still a beginning writer in Chinese. Her writing ability was not comparable with other 3rd grade Chinese classmates who just came from China. She still had many unclear structures at the sentence level and lacked the focus of grade-level Chinese 3rd graders. The vocabulary she was using was quite insufficient, limited to daily use and she had never used any four word Chinese idiom in her Chinese writings. In addition, even though the focus in writing improved over time, she still used event chronicling in many journals and the
book summaries at the end of the school year failed to give sufficient description and details.

**Writing in English.** There were three major features reflected in Joy's English writing development: writing as a self-expressive medium, the non-linear development in narration style, as well as the reflection of her out of school life.

*Writing as self-expression.* Journal writing was one of the major writing tasks for Joy and her classmates in ESL class. Most of her writer's voice was heard and sensed from the journal entries she created. In numerous places, she expressed who she was, what she liked and what she wished she could have. As the mother said, Joy was a girl who valued friends as the most important part of her life, therefore, the emphasis on friends and friendship was frequently seen in her ESL journals. Those journals not only exposed Joy's personality, but also her own way of writing narratives. At the beginning of 3rd grade, Joy often chose friends as her topic in the journals, such as whom she liked most and why she liked them. She introduced a number of friends she had in the school through journal writing. She was a straightforward writer who chose to write from the bottom of her heart. For instance, in one of the entries, she wrote about how she became a friend with one of her classmates:

*The best thing about school, that Sung-sook is my best friend, because when we were in second grade Lili left, so I was Sung-sook's friend. [Sep. 8, 2008]*

In this entry, the focus was very obvious: to introduce her best friend and give us some background information. In the rest of this entry, she continued to describe what commonalities she and Sung-sook shared. As the first entry of 3rd grade ESL journal, Joy wanted to tell her audience that friendship was something that she highly valued.

The following piece was written a few days after the semester began. Joy described her two friends and their favorites:
I have two best friends, their names are Tina and Sung-sook. We always play together at recesses. Both of us like the color blue, but Tina likes the color Pink. [Sep. 9, 2009]

This piece contained a number of interesting features. She used the first sentence to set up the theme of writing, and then used examples to illustrate the specific details she thought as the most important reason for being friends with two other girls. This piece was short, but, similar to the first example; it contained the setting and characters that a story needed. Many scholars (Stetter & Hughes, 2010) used “story grammar” to describe the elements that children needed to include to produce a “good story”. Those elements might include setting, characters, events, solution and theme. In the entries she created later, based on the characters she introduced, she began to tell us in more detail about the events. In a piece about a recess game, Joy depicted a story where different friends were playing hide-and-seek. Instead of describing the game itself, such as how they chose groups, where they hid, etc., Joy chose another approach that introduced to us the information outside the game.

Today, Sung-sook is sick. She cannot go to school. Today I am going to play with Tina and Ronnie. Oliver is my best friend, because he is very smart. I wish he go to the same class like me. He told me a secret, he said that he is a prince, and is dad is a king. I do not now is that true. Oliver has a big sister, that is bigger than him. I always catch oliver and Ronnie. I love to Catch them, but oliver do not like us. [Sep. 17, 2008]

In this long journal, Joy wrote about the participants in the game and why she chose “Oliver” as a member. To introduce more about this character, Joy wrote about Oliver's secret and her perception of Oliver's imagined role as well as his family background. After introducing the information outside of the game, she went back to the game itself. In addition to the text, she also drew a picture that illustrated the relationship and dialogue during the game (Figure Joy-1).
The speech bubbles contained the conversations between game members, as well as Joy's own interpretation of the relationship. The form of narration was not quite following the story grammar that scholarly research suggested, it had its own route: starting from the game, going outside of the game where readers had a better understanding of the main characters, and returning to the game in the end. The focus of the journal was obviously not on the game itself, but the subtle relationship that Joy sensed among play group members and her perception of Oliver's claim of being a prince. The picture also illustrated her imagination of the relationship distribution based on the true playful time.

Joy may not see this means of story telling as a technique, which, however, did look similar to what many adult writers used in narration. Those writers did not describe the story in a linear way, but inserted many other elements to enrich our understanding of the characters before going back to the main event. To Joy, how audience perceive the character Oliver seemed more important than the game itself and our perception might come from the depiction of his identity and his response to the girls' pursuit.

September became the month where the writing about friendship was the most prolific. Thereafter, the description of friends was seldom seen in her journals, with only three more
entries spread along the rest of the school year. Those writings were not only about the cheerful side of friendship, but also about conflicts. For instance, as a friend of Sung-sook, Joy wrote one entry to fully describe their relations, in which she revealed her true feeling about friendship. This entry demonstrated Joy's understanding of the complex relationship between people. She first introduced the background information about the two girls, and then listed the two sides of the relationship to her perception.

My friend is Sung-sook. She is very pretty. She has long hair. She is special to me, because she is nice. When we were in kindergarten we became best freind. When LiLi was there, we were not friends. Me and Sung-sook both like to play outside. Sometimes we are mean to each other, but she is still my friend always. Me and Sung-sook both like blue. We have a lot of things we like, that are the same. [Oct. 20, 2009]

A few weeks later, she used her journal as a tunnel to communicate with Sung-sook about their friendship. She was having some conflict with Sung-sook that day which triggered her to write down on her journal book: “Sung-sook hate Joy very much”. However, she could not stand being unfriendly with Sung-sook, therefore, she used her pencil to add some smaller words around “hate”: she put “love” under the word “hate” indicating her hope that they could get close again. On the same page, she wrote in huge letters a title “My friend”, under which, she listed ten students' names in five rows and numbered them from one through five. The friends in the top row would be her best friend and vice versa. After completing the list, she began to make some changes, such as moving the two names on Line three upward to Line one which added more friends to the “best friend” category, and moved one name down to Line 4. What also was interesting was that rather than writing on the usual journal pages where picture space and lines were provided, this piece was written on the back of a page that children normally do not use.
Therefore, it was not a piece intended to complete during the journal time, but an impromptu one on the basis of her emotion occurred at the time.

The last piece about friendship was in April 2009. As many young girls, Joy liked to have as many good friends as possible. In this piece, she ranked her friends based on her own criteria and provided the reasons for each rank. Among seven friends she wrote about, six of them were her classmates and one was her younger sister. She used the first sentence to introduce the names of those friends by starting with “My best friends are...”. Then she began to present each friend in order. At the end, she concluded the entry with “These are my best friend”. After writing about her friends, she went back to the first sentence and used two curves to connect the friend number one and friend number five, indicating that she somewhat changed her idea about this order and would like to switch the two names. Even though she did not change the descriptions in the main body of the journal, she did intend to revise her first choice.

All these entries suggested that Joy was using her journal as a channel to fully express her voice. In addition to her feelings about friendship, she also engaged in other topics to express her voice. In journals, she used many strategies to help her realize her voice. For instance, she wrote about receiving presents during Christmas. She reflected on the past years when she received the presents she wished or not wished for. At the end of the entry, instead of narrative statements, she used other sentence structures: an exclamatory sentence to express her excitement for Christmas and a question to ask the reader:

*I love Christmas! What is your favorite holiday?*

By giving a blank line, she was asking her readers to give her the answer and get engaged in her writing.

In some pieces, she used exclamation marks in the title of the journal to show her
excitement, such as,

MY WEEKEND!

I had a wonderful Spring break!

Those pieces, contained a number of exciting activities and events she experienced during the Fall break and Spring break, respectively.

She also used memory as a way to connect to current events. For example, in one of the entries, she wrote about the piano lesson during the weekend. In the main body of the entry, her memory flashed back to the days when she and Lili were together. She wrote:

I am almost done with level 3. I am going to go to level 4. I am glad, because in level 4 has the song Lili plays, Lili goes to Lincoln School to. Now Lili is at Tenesee, I always email her at home. Lili has a little sister, just like me. We some times call each other, Lili said “in the summer, she might come to my house.” [Feb, 23, 2009]

This piece contained many grammatical and spelling errors; however, it was obvious that the purpose of writing about piano lesson was to bring back the memories of Lili, Joy's long time friend who had moved to Tennesee. The music, the piano book and the piano lessons reminded Joy of her best friend. Her longing to see Lili in the summer was vividly reflected in the way that she told us about Lili: both attended the same school, had a little sister, and learned the same song in piano lesson.

To summarize, all the examples above suggested that Joy, as a young writer, used journals to show her feelings and orchestrate her perception of her life in and outside school. The various strategies she brought into journal writing were vivid demonstration of her passion for friendship and life as well as her anxiety to understand the perplexing relationships between people.
Non-linear development in narration style. Joy's English writing in her ESL class developed slowly during the 3rd grade. The writing in 3rd grade was very different from what Joy experienced before. More genres were introduced during this year; therefore, in addition to journal writing, she had many opportunities to practice writing. When writing narration, Joy was found to experience a non-linear development. In other words, the style in which she wrote narratives was not stable in the course of the study.

Joy enjoyed writing stories that she thought were interesting. For instance, the story of “Sung-sookeralla” was based on the fairy tale of Cinderella. She used the plot from the original fairy tale, but the characters from the ESL class. For instance, the main character was named after Sung-sook, the two step sisters and the stepmother were all changed to the names of the girls in ESL class. Instead of a long story, Joy told the new Sung-sookerella story in a very concise way. She even used hearts at the beginning and at the end of the writing to show that it was a love story. Admittedly, it was an imitation of original story, but it was out of Joy's own initiation and motivation to compose.

However, either the coherence within stories or the focus of narration was not maintained well during the course of the study. At the beginning of the school years, most of the entries had some focus in meaning. The pieces about friends were all focusing on some information that Joy wanted to express to the readers. Later in journal writings, the majority of the pieces were talking about her family life and some were about school life. Many pieces focused on writing, such as the assembly at school, the piano lesson, bunny for pet, etc. Those pieces also illustrated the coherence between ideas within the stories. Writing with focus and coherence demonstrated Joy's understanding of the structure in writing. However, this habit of writing was not stable for the rest of the school year. In journal writing, many pieces were still using the style of event
recording that did not have any concentration of ideas at all. In other writing practices, she showed similar features, especially in the Young Author Stories.

The Young Authors contest was held each early spring in the school as a way to promote students' enthusiasm and skills in writing. Every student was encouraged to participate in the contest with their best stories. While they were preparing for the contest, Mrs. Rose, Joy's ESL teacher, spent a good deal of time working with students individually on their stories. In Joy's case, however, those individual opportunities were missed due to Joy's constant excuse of forgetting her writing at home. By the last day before the deadline, Joy finally submitted her story to the teacher, leaving the teacher no time to confer with her for improvement.

As a matter of fact, Joy started thinking about Young Authors story long before the contest. In December, when Mrs. Rose informed her students about the contest, she asked them to start considering a story they wanted to tell. Joy was in the hallway with me one day during class time after the teacher asked me to talk to the girl about her story. After working on her paper for a while, she began to tell me orally the story:

A girl named Sally liked math. An evil man or woman was very jealous of Sally. He killed the animals and let other people think it was Sally, but someone saw what he did, so Sally had no problem. the end.

"Why did she like math and how does it relate to her being framed? Also how did Sally finally solve the problem?" I asked. Not being able to answer those questions, Joy seemed to have never thought about the global structure of her story and why some plots were not easy to explain or understand.

The story she actually created a few weeks later showed that she changed the story entirely to a different version. In the second version, she described how two friends who often
fought with each other became close after a boy told them to play together. Although the story had a focus, there many elements that could not be easily explained from the composition, such as the context or the characters.

In the third version completed in January, the story was changed to a different one again. The original story became a series of stories about friendship. The new version, entitled “Friends”, listed back and forth how four girls became friends and non-friends. Compared with the previous two versions, this one did not have any specific focus and the ideas between sentences were confusing. The characters were lacking the richness that Joy had portrayed in her journal writings as well.

The fourth version was written in February. The title was changed to “Friends Adventures” and the story consisted of five short stories with five girls' experiences in their friendship. There seemed to be no concentration of plots because each short story alone could be developed into a fuller one. However, when the five stories were positioned together, audiences were not able to grasp the focus. Even though there were some transitions in between experiences, the story as a whole lacked coherence.

In general, Joy was not able to maintain her ability of story telling or explaining objects in a more focused and detailed manner. Her narration was quite focused and coherent at the beginning of the school year, but gradually lost its advantage later, not only in English, but also in Chinese. The decline in narration skills in both languages may indicate that the skills in one language were connected to those in another language.

*Unsuccessful writing conferences.* Writing conference was an important technique that Mrs. Rose used in her writing practice. During the writing process, the teacher sat next to the young writer and talked about her/his writing. This was a good opportunity for both teacher and
students to communicate and exchange ideas about composition. To Joy, such opportunities seemed scarce. Along all the observations of the class, there were only a few writing conferences between Joy and Mrs. Rose and most of them were not successful.

The Young Authors Contest called for students to present their best writings based on their grade level. Many students used this opportunity to approach the ESL teacher as a way to improve writing. Joy, however, never showed any initiation to have the conference. In class time, Joy often appeared to the one who bothered other students. She never sat on her chair calmly for more than fifteen minutes and she was often called upon by the teacher to pay attention. Because of such behaviors, she was asked to go to the hallway and work individually with a few children so that she could be less “annoying”. The first few class periods for the preparation of the contest, she was sent to the hallway without talking to the teacher first about her stories. Later, she claimed that she forgot to bring back the story to school. Even though she turned in the story by the due date, she never had a chance to talk to the teacher about her writing.

Joy did have some conferences with the teacher in other writing practices; however, these conferences were not very successful. For instance, students were writing different genres based on the book chapter they were reading. One of the writings was the letter written to Annie Sullivan, the teacher and friend of Helen Keller. Joy had written a half a page already. After bragging about how much she had written in front of a group of friends, Joy was called by the teacher to confer. Sitting next to each other, Mrs. Rose and Joy corrected a few grammatical mistakes in the first part. The following dialogue took place when they were discussing this part:

Teacher: “You made me laugh and laugh again”. Maybe you can make a new sentence to this. “later” and only “laughter”? Laughter is certainly important, but think. Maybe you can tell “laughter and...”
Joy: “Thank you teaching me how to read...”

Teacher: Yeah, so maybe think more. Here I want you to think a little bit more.

Joy: So you want me to erase...?

Teacher: No, I don't want you to erase anything.

Joy: Erase this?

Teacher: No, no no, Okay? So I'd like you to think more about what you wrote.

The teacher had to tend to other children's writing, leaving Joy confused about what “more” she should think about. Obviously, the teacher was trying to help Joy to add more details to how Annie Sullivan helped Helen Keller. However, “think more”, to this third grader, did not seem to inspire her as much as the teacher expected. From Joy's response (“so you want me to erase?” and “Erase this?”), it was apparent that she had no clue of what the teacher meant by saying “think more”, even though she was following the conversation at the beginning. The teacher was not aware of Joy's confusion at all. She left comments on the margin at the end of the conversation for Joy to refer back later: “think about what she did and why it is important”. However to Joy, the written comments were not very helpful either. She looked very confused when the teacher went to another table and she went back to her own seat starting to play around again. She did not make any revisions to the text after the conference, and the comments were not applied to the writings she completed later that month either.

In another mini-conference between Joy and the teacher, a piece about owls was discussed. In class, students were preparing for the state test that was scheduled a few weeks later. The day before, they practiced the reading section and wrote a short piece about owls, and today they were asked to write a longer piece about the topic. Joy was not writing. She said that she did not know how to and what to write. She said that she only knew what she had already
written. She stayed on her seat and looked at other children without writing much except for one single sentence which was copied from yesterday:

*Owls are like in many different ways. (Owls are like birds in many different ways)*

Mrs. Rose came to Joy's table and told her that she was not writing. The teacher read the only sentence Joy wrote and said: “No, no, that doesn't fit right there, that doesn't fit right there. That's a really good sentence and it doesn't fit right there.” Joy looked confused by her comments.

Teacher: Why? The author didn't tell you that owls are like birds. That's something that you know. So Joy, we can say “owls, owls are all birds.” So you can get rid of all this.

Joy: I will erase it?

Teacher: No.

Joy: I will erase it.

Teacher: Well. If you want. Okay?

The conference was over, but it was apparent that the teacher's comments and directions were not what Joy wanted most at this point. Seeing that the teacher did not like the sentence she created, Joy volunteered to erase the sentence. This time, no written remarks from the teacher were seen on the margin and the conversation failed to solve Joy's problem which was not knowing “how to and what to write”. The sample sentence given by the teacher did not provide Joy with enough direction to writer further. Gaining little from the conference, Joy went back to playing after the teacher left for another table.

All these writing conferences were concrete examples of how Joy experienced the interactions with the ESL teacher regarding writing practice. The writing conferences in ESL class might add to Joy's dislike of writing, not only because she was not able to get the help she
needed, but also she was unable to write what she wanted whenever possible.

_A writer needing more motivation?_ Joy's case provokes us to pay more attention to the writing instruction among ELLs. First, Joy was said to need more motivation in literacy learning and writing. In my conversations with her as well her parents, they seemed to send me one message: that is, Joy did not enjoy writing. Such a statement might come from Joy's own experience working with the teacher about writing, as well as the reflections of the parents when they saw Joy's response to homework writing. Even thought they had tried different means to motivate Joy, the latter still would prefer playing to writing in class. On the other hand, the ESL teacher was an advocate for writing instruction and writing conferences for ELLs; however, as she once expressed, “how do you obtain this motivation, that is a mystery.” Mrs. Rose felt that Joy had improved in her attitudes toward writing since the beginning of the school year but still lacked the motivation she needed. To be specific, she felt that the lack of writing practice before 3rd grade might be the reason for lack of motivation.

She, from I recall, she had a lot of grammatical mistakes in her writing. Some of the mistakes, I thought, given that she had been here for a number of years, would have been corrected. Some of them are with tenses, subject-verb agreement; there was not a lot of fluency in her writing—it was obvious that she had not written a lot. That was the beginning of the year. I think in her previous ESL class, she did a lot of journaling, but that was probably the extent of her writing, but not necessarily a lot of descriptive passages and summary writing. Therefore, writing is a fairly new task, and I don't know how much direct help she got with the task of writing.

I wonder if “lack of motivation” was enough to answer the question of why Joy disliked writing. From what I experienced and observed, Joy did like writing the journals when she was
not assigned a topic. Instead of writing summaries of book chapters, which students were often asked to complete in class or out for homework, Joy wanted to write stories of her own. “You have to have your own story”, Joy told me in our interview when I asked how she felt about writing summaries, and she added: “This is the least I want to do in class-to write. It is very boring.” To Joy, originality was more important and appealing in writing than summarizing. When she was given the opportunities, her imagination was well motivated. Such an urge was reflected in the “friendship” stories and “Sungsunrella” story she completed in class. This was what she told me about these two stories

Do you know where I got the ideas for the stories? Form those students in ESL class. I was watching them reading books, so I mixed them up together for a story. Joy and Marina were two names I created for the stories. (Translation: 知道我从哪儿找到这些想法吗? 从 ESL 课上。我听他们读书所以就 mixed them up together for a story. Joy 和 Marina 是我自己想的名字。)

Second, the background of writing that Joy brought into her composition became an obstacle to teacher's understanding of her intention and lacking of such knowledge made writing instruction less successful. The new young author story was having some mini-stories where four girls became friends back and forth. Five different events were described: looking for a lost dog, looking for the baby dog, Halloween, Christmas and making new friends. In the stories, some girls left, leaving the rest of them to become friends. Her story did not seem to comply with any centralized theme. She might not have understood that a purpose was needed to compile all the mini stories or a storyline to connect the plots. Even though the essay was not well organized, the mini-stories portrayed some typical friendship experiences that children living in university towns were having. Many parents were the graduate students or scholars at the university and
only spent a few years in the town. Therefore, their children, such as Joy and Lili, often had friendships with other children for a short period of time. Saying goodbye when their parents had to leave became a common but painful experience for those children. What they still had might be the memories of some dramatic events that happened in their days together. For those 10-year-old children, holidays were the time when they felt most excited. Probably because of this, Joy recorded all these events in one contest entry. She wanted to express her longing for the memories and share why those memories were important to her. Yet this background information was not so familiar to the teacher.

Finally, the comments left by the teacher were difficult for Joy to digest and accept. For instance, to the Young Authors Contest story, the teacher's written comments were as follows:

*This is a series of events--Every paragraph has a different time period--To make it a story, you have to pick one time period and develop your ideas--However, this is so much better than your last story-Talk to me about this.*

In this comment, the teacher briefly summarized the structure of the story, provided Joy some future direction, and invited Joy to talk to her further. From the examples of the writing conferences, I noticed that comments like this were not very comprehensible to Joy. Instead of abstract remarks, perhaps Joy would prefer something more approachable such as more direct comments. In this sense, those comments, though doing nothing wrong, failed to ignite Joy's inspiration. In addition, even though the teacher asked Joy to come to her for conference, there was no conference that day due to Joy's absentmindedness, and she almost missed the deadline for submission.

Other times, the comments were too vague for Joy to comprehend and improve her writing. Some brief comments were concerned about the grammar, and adding more content to
the current version, such as “this is not a good summary” or “do no repeating the same thing 2
times.” Those comments were targeted towards improvement; however, many of them may have
sounded very harsh to the writer. In the second half of the school year, the teacher left many
marginal comments on Joy's papers. Some of them intended to give Joy directions of further
writing, some to praise and some to direct her to the teacher for further action. At the same time,
however, many comments were too vague for Joy to implement, such as “add more”, “explain
more” or “explain this”. Some were very assertive comments, such as “this is not a good
beginning”. For this type of comments, Joy would have no clue how to improve her text.

**Conclusion.** To summarize, Joy experienced progress in both Chinese and English. There
were some similar features that existed in the development in both languages. For instance, she
loved to express her writer's voice in both languages. The lack of focus in writing was seen in
both her Chinese and English journal writings and grammatical mistakes were also noticeable in
the composition. She tended to use event chronicling when writing her journals. Instead of
choosing a central theme for the composition, she often recorded a number of events she
experienced in the same day and used one or two sentences to introduce them. This approach
was most noticeable in the middle of the year in her Chinese journals and the end of the year in
her English journals. Overall, Joy's writing abilities developed slowly during the course of the
study, and such development was the result of the efforts from both inside and outside of school.
The ESL teacher was concerned about Joy's literacy in English and the Chinese teacher kept
constant contact with the parents regarding Joy's school performance. The parents took the
responsibility of helping Joy with writing and math at home. The mother also invested a four-
step revision method that helped Joy to pay attention to more focused and organized writings. All
the efforts that teachers and parents put into were reflected in Joy's progress as a beginning writer
both in English and Chinese. At the same time, however, although teachers claimed “motivation” to be Joy's major problem in writing, many examples in this section demonstrated more complex causes. Most of the writing conferences were not very successful and Joy was unable to get the help she actually needed. The teacher was not very familiar with Joy's reading habits at home either and thought she never enjoyed reading at all. The challenges Joy faced in writing, therefore, were beyond the problem of motivation. Probing into students' real needs in writing and familiarizing their literacy habits after school seemed critical in Joy's case.
Nora's Case

Nora was a Chinese-speaking child in Mrs. Rose's ESL class. She was born and raised in China and came to the US in August, 2008 after she finished her 2nd grade in an elementary school in Jiangsu Province in China. Nora's mother was a college teacher in Nanjing and came to the US as a visiting scholar for one year. Her father who worked at the same college was still in China while the mother and daughter came to the US, but he sometimes visited them for a few weeks.

Both the mother and father tried their best to accommodate Nora in an affluent environment. Since she was little, Nora was able to travel with her parents to many places, both domestic and abroad. Therefore, the mother felt that Nora had more knowledge about the world than most of her classmates in China. In addition, the mother said that Nora was a very out-going person and a strong learner in her elementary school in China: She enjoyed sports and excelled in academics in her class. She was also a good young pianist who passed Level ten in Piano right before she came to the US. She was noted by the mother to be a good reader and writer in Chinese. She enjoyed reading a wide range of genres and topics. The mother felt that overall Nora was an excellent learner, a talkative girl and had a variety of interests in China.

In the US schools, Nora appeared to be a different girl. She was the quietest person in all-English and ESL classes. Although there were Chinese speaking children in both classes, she never spoke voluntarily to any of them. When spoken to, she seemed to hold herself back and not to initiate any conversation. In Chinese class, she had two good friends whom she often talked with. Yet she did not often speak to other children in the Chinese class. In general, she gave both teachers and students an impression that she was isolated.

**Family literacy.** Nora's mother felt that Nora was a girl who got initiation in learning,
therefore, she wanted to give Nora the opportunities to learn by herself. However, after coming to the US, the mother found that Nora was not very responsive in class, so she began to worry about her English literacy. Most of their efforts were put into reading and English vocabulary. In order to do so, the mother took her to a local church and sent her to an English tutor from the church to help her with spoken English.

At home, the mother also helped Nora with vocabulary by using the same book that Nora's classroom teacher was using. The mother ordered the book online and helped Nora to remember the words in the book. They also prepared a dictionary memorizing the vocabulary that she did not quite understand. After a few months of effort, Nora was able to produce spoken English of her own. The mother remembered sometimes speaking with her at home in English to talk about their dreams. Moreover, the mother took Nora to the church and asked her to speak English to their Chinese friends there. All these efforts suggested that even though the mother wanted Nora to take care of the study on her own, she still participated in Nora's learning agenda.

In addition to English literacy, the parents also tried to help Nora in maintaining Chinese at home. Whenever the father visited them, he would bring a bag of Chinese textbooks that Nora would use in China. She started reading the books right away. The mother said that May enjoyed reading those texts so much that she refused to put them down. Afterward, the parents spent about two nights working on each unit. They helped Nora to understand the content of the text and monitored her to practice the characters and the words in the article. At the same time, Nora tried to recite the words or text. Two textbooks were finished in this way.

In terms of writing, the mother felt that not much help was needed because Nora had a very good writing habit due to her abundant reading. At home in China, Nora had kept personal journals since 1st grade at the request of her mother who wanted her to have some writing pieces.
Nora never regarded writing as an uncomfortable and frustrating burden in her previous school. Nora used to share the journal with her mother who displayed her work. When she grew older, she did not want to share her journal any more and kept it as a private property. When I was interviewing Nora, she told me that she still wrote journals at home and sometimes would share them with some very close Chinese-speaking friends who lived nearby.

**Writing in school.**

**Writing in Chinese class.** Nora was in the same ESL class as Joy, therefore, they had a similar class schedule for Chinese class. The weekly journal was the major writing task for 3rd grade Chinese children in this school. Nora's Chinese journals were always finished on time with neat writing of characters. According to Nora's mom, Nora was very capable of writing when she was in China: "She is a good writer and it was due to her abundant reading. She has a very good habit in learning: complete her work voluntarily and then go to read or write."

The journal entries from the Chinese class in the current school were a good demonstration of her writing abilities in the Chinese language. She was not only able to use vivid expressions and vocabulary, but also complex sentence structures to deliver her thoughts and feelings. Most of her Chinese journals focused on particular topics, such as trips, church, English study, etc.

First, Nora was able to utilize her language ability in a variety of ways. She had a large Chinese vocabulary that she could pick up whenever possible especially in the first semester of the study. For instance, she wrote about sharing with her mother a story in which a lazy person planted two different trees using the same method. She told the story in the form of a fable and integrated a number of four-word Chinese idioms (Figure Nora-Nora-1):
Figure Nora-1. Using Chinese idioms

In this short excerpt of the journal, she used two four-word idioms (circled in the picture) to enrich the readability of her text: the one on the top was 自言自语 which meant talking to oneself, and the one on the bottom was 大吃一惊 that meant being astonished. She used the first idiom to indicate that the character in the story was trying to speak to herself and the second idiom to describe the astonishment of the girl who found that all her plants were dead after she wrongly planted the trees.

She also used rhetorical styles to increase the strength of her writing. For instance, in the writing of seasons (Figure Nora-2), she personified fall season as a girl and described the fall scenery as a creation of the girl. The following excerpt from the writing can best illustrate Nora's ability to use personification in narrative. The piece compared autumn to a girl and described that the girl of autumn wrote letters on leaves to animals, telling the goose to fly to the south and the squirrel to collect their food for blizzard. It was such a nice writing that readers could easily get involved in the beautiful but familiar scenery of fall season.
In addition to using advanced vocabulary and rhetorical devices, she also tended to express her voice in writing, which was achieved in two ways: using specific sentences and words to reiterate the feelings; and using narrative comprehensively to communicate her thoughts about certain topics. To begin with, in many journal writings, she described her experience in the US such as going trick-or-treating with friends at Halloween and leaf collecting for a church member, etc. At the end of those journals, she usually put one sentence to reiterate the joy she had after having all the activities that day. The most frequently used sentences were: ___好开心啊, ___真难忘啊, ____真是开心的星期五啊, ____真好玩啊, etc, most of which were using 啊, a modal article in Chinese to signify the emotion. Those sentences were usually placed at the end of the writing as a way to conclude the piece. This method was common in many Chinese children's writings at the elementary level.

She also demonstrated a clear voice. She used writing as a channel to expose her wishes, aspirations as well emotions. For instance, in one piece, she wrote about her feelings of learning English in a new country. Instead of listing the difficulties she encountered in life and study, she used narrative to illustrate a number of experiences related to her learning. At the beginning of the essay, she wrote about choosing to come to the US with her mother instead of staying with her father in China during the mother's one-year visit. She went on to talk about what language
preparation she did before coming to the US and how the English she had learned was different from the language she actually experienced. She then introduced the method she and her friend used in English learning and how she witnessed her improvement from doing show-and-tell in class. At the end, she concluded the essay with her aspiration for the future. The whole piece was well organized in chronological order and each new point was grounded in the previous experience. The writing depicted the factors that triggered her to study and what she had done to achieve her goals. She vividly expressed her thoughts of English learning in two different countries, a way to deliver her voice as a young writer.

In another journal written in the second semester, she wrote about missing her father and waiting for her father's short visit to the US. She started the piece with her eagerness to see him after many months since their departure. Then she described the gift she had prepared for her father. She used many details such as color, material and shape to portray the flower she made, and emphasized how happy her father would be when seeing the gift. She went on to write what she expected to do with her father, such as playing games and learning about writing. Finally, she further expressed her longing for the father and wished that “tomorrow”, the day her father would arrive, could come sooner. The longing for her father was portrayed successfully in this piece with many details about her life and wishes. She did not use any specific exclamation sentences to strengthen those emotions; however, all the details demonstrated her feelings in a more indirect way.

The way that Nora expressed her voice made her a unique writer of Chinese in the class. Even though she was very quiet in the ESL and all English classes, she was quite eloquent in front of her two best Chinese friends, the two girls she had repeatedly mentioned in the journal. Mr. Gu was also satisfied with how Nora performed in writing. He expected that Nora could
maintain her Chinese ability until she went back to Chinese after one year. However, even though her class performance remained the same, the writing samples demonstrated that Nora's writing showed no improvement since the beginning of the school year. She began to use more routine recording in her journals than before and had more characters written and phrases used incorrectly. For example, in the pieces (Figure Nora-3) she wrote almost at the end of the year, the number of pieces that focused on certain themes decreased; instead, she wrote about the routines and added fewer details to those entries. More characters were written wrong as well, such as the places circled in the following two excerpts. The character 瑰 (rose) was written incorrectly and the phrase 很低 (low) was written as 很底, in which 底 meant “the bottom” rather than “low”.

Figure Nora-3-a. Chinese writing

In addition, she used to add phrases to some written work to show her revision, such as the following example (Figure Nora-4); however, those additions were not seen at the end of the school year.
Such changes correspond to Nora's mother's comments about her daughter's writing development -- that Nora's Chinese writing declined after they came to the US. According to the mother, Nora used to be able to write at whatever length she wanted to accomplish and was quite skillful at writing the pieces she was assigned. However, within a few months in the US, the mother found that Nora started to ask questions such as what to write and how to write, or what events to write about, which had never occurred to Nora before. The mother believed the reason was the lack of opportunities and contact with the Chinese language. Nora still read Chinese after school, but the amount was significantly reduced due to the increased amount of time for English. Since Nora finished all her writings at home, the description from her mother served as an indirect source of information on Nora's writing development. Her remarks and the writing samples both suggested that Nora's Chinese writing showed no significant improvement since the beginning of the school year. Although her class performance remained the same, the writing samples demonstrated she needed more help with Chinese writing structures and more emphasis on vocabulary and phrases both in and out of Chinese class.

**Writing in ESL class.** Unlike Joy who had been in the US for a number of years, Nora was a newcomer to this country. Nora was the quietest girl in ESL class. She was often put in the corner with another newcomer from Japan and led by Mr. Gu, who came to help for one and half hours, in most literacy activities. Mrs. Gu served as an interpreter for Nora and explained what Mrs. Rose was expecting. There were different writings practiced in class, and for Nora, the most
practiced were journal writing, book summaries and young author’s story. Rather than
delineating the features in her writing in general, I will chronicle her development as a beginning
writer in the two semesters.

First semester. Nora's writing in the first semester was a mixture of English and Chinese.
Nora had produced a variety of genres during this time, such as narrative, journals, poem, social
studies report, etc. In most writings, Nora was allowed to use Chinese in her ESL class writings.
At the same time, the Chinese teacher also sat with her to interpret for her. From the description
of the mother and my observation of Nora in Chinese class, I felt that she had a solid background
in Chinese. Using Chinese in ESL class should not have been an obstacle for Nora.

Journal writing, as an integral part of writing practices in this ESL class, was scheduled
two or three times a week. Most of the time, students were allowed to write about whatever
topics they preferred. In most of Nora's ESL journals in the fall semester, she described her
experiences as a newcomer to this country; however, the way she presented those events differed.
In some entries, she provide as many details as she could to give readers more understanding of
the events, yet in others, she simply chronicled her actions without elaboration or a central theme.
For example, the following entry (Figure Nora-5) created in September described her memory of
a winter experience in China [Sep, 2008]:
In this entry, she depicted a happy day with her friends playing at the Xuanwu Lake, a lake close to her hometown. A number of activities were listed, such as hide-and-seek, building a snowman, snow fight, ice sculpture, etc. They went back home excitedly and played more games. In the end, she concluded the entry with a summary sentence: “I had a busy and wonderful day.” This piece provided some details in each activity and gave us a clear picture of how she spent a winter day in China. As the first entry in her journal, she was using this piece to recall the happiness she once had in her hometown.

Later in her journals, she began to record her experiences in the US. However, many pieces were not finished in the time given. For example, the next two examples were produced in fall:

周末，我和好朋友一起去教堂。好朋友的爸爸把我们送过去就走了。我们进了教堂，发现没有很多人来，可能是因为下雨。祈祷开始了，牧师开始讲话。我一点也听不懂，我的朋友听懂了，但是她没给我翻译。因为我听不懂，所以我很着急。我的朋友是去年来的，她刚
This weekend, I went to the church with my friend. Her father dropped us off and left. There were not many people in the church when we got there, probably because of the rain. The priest began to speak. I did not understand him at all, my friend did, but she did not interpret for me. I was so anxious since I could not understand. My friend came here last year, when she first)

星期六中午我和Roxie 去一个中国cān 餐馆去吃饭,碰到了顾老师。我们把我们的家 长叫来就去cè 所了。等我们从cè 所出来家长正在等我们，这时，我看到顾老师已经走了。然后我们去nà 菜，我nà 地和Roxie ná 的完全一样因为我nà 地比她ná 地少一点，所以

(Translation: This Saturday noon, I went to a Chinese restaurant with Roxie and met Mr. Gu. We then went to the restroom while our parents were talking with Mr. Gu. When we came out of the restroom, our parents were waiting for us and Mr. Gu was gone. Then we went to pick up food. I got the exactly same food as Roxie but since I got fewer than her, so)

The first example described a church experience for Nora who did not understand English and needed help in interpretation. The example depicted her anxiety in a new environment and her eagerness to know the context. The second example was about having dinner at a Chinese restaurant with her friend Roxie. They met their Chinese teacher at the restaurant and started to get food. Both entries were unfinished in the time given. From the available information, she was trying to tell her readers some emotions as a newcomer to this country. However, since she did not finish the pieces, those emotions were not well presented. As mentioned earlier, journal writing was an important part of ESL class; however, since there
was much content that the teacher had to cover in ESL class, students were given about 20 minutes for the journal block. For students who had been using English for a number of years, writing journals during class time appeared to quite normal. However, Nora often needed a longer time to think about the topic and start writing. My observation of her during class time showed that her previous writing experiences in her former elementary school did not require that journals be written in class, and her perception of journals might have been challenged by having to write about her personal life in class.

Another feature in Nora's writings for this period of time was that she began to use action-recording method in most journals. For instance,

有一个星期六，我和yoyo一起去芝加哥。一大早，我们就上车了，等了很长时间，车才开。不知不觉，我和yoyo玩了好长时间。车还没到，我和yoyo已经没有耐心了，yoyo就看她带来的书，我就看我带来的书，看了一会儿书，车到了，我和yoyo就下车，我们下了车，首先玩了摩天轮，然后划了船，吃完饭，我们去了一个博物馆，我们

(Translation: There was a Saturday, yoyo and I went to Chicago. In the morning, we aboard the bus but it did not run until we waited for a long time. We played a long time without noticing the time. The bus was still running, but yoyo and I had lost our patience, she then read her book and I read my book, after reading for a while, the bus stopped, and yoyo and I got off, we got off, and played roller coaster, and rowed a boat, after lunch, we went to a museum, we)

In this piece, Nora introduced her bus trip to Chicago. She mentioned that she waited for a long time for the bus to leave. While she was waiting, she played with her friend Yoyo, and she then read her book and I read my book, after reading for a while, the bus stopped, and yoyo and
I got off, we got off, and played roller coaster, and rowed a boat, after lunch, we went to a museum. This series of actions failed to deliver any substantial feelings or emotions of this young writer: the whole piece seemed to be cluttered with a number of trivial actions.

Although she began to use English later in November journals, it was still hard to find the unique style in which she used to write.

Later in the fall semester, Nora began to use English in her writings. Not only in journals, but also in other genres Nora used both languages to present her ideas. Interestingly, Nora did not use literal translation from Chinese to English in those entries, but shifted sentence orders as well as changed ideas. Such changes suggested that Nora was able to use her available languages in a flexible manner. For instance, the first Chinese-English mixed writing was in her journal written in later October in which she described preparing a gift for one of her good friends:

Yesterday was zhengyi’s birthday, Roxie and I prepaiied birthday gift for her on Friday. My gift is blue toy dog. I made a birthday card for her. Roxie's gifts are some used toys. Roxie made a birthday card for zhengyi too.

Both English and Chinese versions were written on the same page with the exact format as the example showed. The English version was a bit shorter than the Chinese version: while the rest of the entry could match in meaning, she omitted the last few sentences: “Because Roxie had a lot of gifts, she put them in a bag,
yesterday afternoon, Roxie and I went to Zhengyi's home and gave her our gifts). This was the first step that Nora had taken to cross the boundaries of two languages. She successfully delivered her meaning to the readers by using correct vocabulary and sentence structure. What was also interesting was the use of punctuation in the English version. Except for one apparent mistake after the first sentence, the rest of the punctuation was correct. While in the Chinese version, the punctuation was incorrectly used. She put a comma throughout the Chinese part without any breaks until the end. The difference in the use of punctuation might suggest that she was beginning to acquire the basic knowledge of writing in English while at the same time losing some of her Chinese.

The following example (Figure Nora-6) also showed Nora's improvement in English writing. In the plant unit, students had the opportunity to write about plants in different genres and one of them was poem writing. Nora utilized her language ability in both languages and created a poem of “sunflower seeds”. Similar to the last examples, she started with Chinese and finished the English part with the help from adults. The final product was a combination of both writing and pictures that the teacher displayed in the hallway. The picture below showed the writing part:
I plant a sunflower seed,  
Under the sun.  
I water it every day.  
And watch it grow.  
The plant will look a big sun.  
We can eat the seeds.  
Or plant new seeds a gain. 

我种了一个太阳花，  
把它放在阳光下。  
每天给它浇水，  
天天观察它。  
种子可以吃，  
还可以再种

Poem writing was not a general practice in the writing curriculum in China. The most practiced writings at 3rd grade are narration and the descriptions of objects and people (Zuo Wen Wang). Students are given abundant model readings to follow and then create their own work.
They are also encouraged to use different rhetorical methods to achieve their goals in writing, such as simile and personalization. However, poem writing was rarely a focus of writing curriculum in Chinese elementary schools largely because of the pressure of college entrance examination whose Chinese writing section generally excludes poetry as an unacceptable genre in testing (Beijing Youth Daily). In order to prepare students for those tests, children as young as elementary school are rarely given any chance of writing poems. Given such a background in writing, poem writing would be a very challenging task for Nora who received the majority of her education in China. Yet, Nora faced the challenge and created a poem on her own. The poem in Chinese consisted of six lines and line 1, 2 and 4 rhymed with the vowel /a/ in Chinese. In the English version, she was trying to keep the same format. Since Nora did not speak in class, Mr. Gu talked with Mrs. Rose about the idea in the poem and the two teachers worked together on the English version while Nora was just listening by the side. When it was time to copy and color the poem, she added one more sentence: “the plant will look a big sun” as a way to make transition between the ideas before and after. Though the sentence was grammatically incorrect, the difference between the two versions indicated that when she was writing English, she was not copying exactly what she produced in the native language, but was appropriating the genre in her own way in which she could play with words in a language that she was learning.

Second semester: Turning to the spring semester, Nora had gained more vocabulary in English and most of her writings were in English during this time. Yet, two features were of special interest here: event recording style of writing and lack of writer's voice.

Many journal writings during this time lacked focus in writing. Similar to the writing style of the last semester, she simply recorded the events or actions she had during certain days. From those journals, it was very difficult for readers to gain an understanding of this young child.
For instance, she wrote:

*In spring break, I went to Roxie’s home every afternoon. At Roxie’s home, we saw a.*

Then, *we went to the playground and play, every 4:00pm, I went home. At home, I read a book. On Sunday, I finished my homework.*

In this example, she listed a number of routines she completed during the Spring break. However, the listing failed to include any details of the actions and thus lacked richness of elaboration.

In another entry, she wrote:

*On sunday, I finished my homework. I went o Roxie's house. I play with her in a playground. Then we watched a movie called The end of flutter villege. Then we pay with Zhengyi.*

Similar to the example earlier, those writings seemed more like fulfilling a writing task in class, far from completing a journal that depicted thoughts, feelings and real experiences.

This style was maintained until the end of the semester with only a few exceptions in her journal. The last journal she created during the semester was a much improved piece with more details and explanations.

*On Saturday, I finished my homework from China, then I went to free library with my mom. Then I played with Rosie. First we played with Jason, then we went to Zhengyi’s house to play with her. We played at the playground. At playground, we saw Hai and Angelena. They asked me to find the egg that they hide, because they forgot where they hide the egg. I saw four eggs in a holl. So I asked them if that is the egg they hid; they told me it was the egg they hid and we could tooke one. So we took one and hid it in another place. the place we hide was under an old tree and we found a ladder there.*
The first part was similar to many “event recording” journals where she listed the actions she had during the day. However, the second part of the writing was of particular interest. She used indirect speech to quote the dialogue between her and the original egg hunters. She continued to tell how she and the new egg hunters were sharing the egg. Compared with the event recording journals, this piece would appeal to readers more with its plot and details. However, pieces like this were rarely seen in the entire journal book.

The second feature drawn from her writing during the second semester was the lack of writer's voice. It was hard to find any revelation of her personality, thoughts and emotions in many writings. Journal, to students such as Joy, was a place to communicate, express and complain. However, those characteristics were not found in Nora's journal entries. Compared with Joy, a number of Nora's journals were not about her life in or after school, but about a picture from the exercise book that she and Mr. Gu were working on. The rest of the journals were very short and usually contained only a few sentences. One of the short journals was written with me when I had to offer all the sentences, asking questions for her to answer and translating whatever she said into English. The following example (Figure Nora-7) was created in February in which she described a picture in the textbook:

![Figure Nora-7. ESL journal](image)

This writing did not reflect any feelings or emotions of the writer. Instead of writing about herself, Nora was simply describing the scenes from the book. It was interesting to notice
this piece being written in her journal where everyday life or her feelings were supposed to be recorded. One possibility was that she was using the journal as a place to practice any type of writing. However, such writings were not able to show us much voice as a writer.

In another piece, she described a scene in the park based on the picture from a book rather than from her personal experiences. She described a variety of people conducting different activities in the little park by using her own English. Unlike her journals that were insufficient in details, the description of the park, as well as the above piece of a birthday party, contained a detailed depiction. These two writings suggested that Nora's knowledge of English vocabulary increased tremendously during the course of the study. The writings were produced based on her available knowledge of English vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure. However, at the same time, I also noticed that most of her writings were not able to demonstrate the feelings and thoughts of the writer. The description of pictures from the textbook, although more detailed than most journal entries, was strangely put in her journals rather than other places; in those entries, she was simply introducing the scenes and characters in the picture, all of which bore no relationship to her own experience and background. In addition, she produced a number of journals that could hardly connect to the readers, failing to unveil her personal likes or dislikes, or her uniqueness. Even though she was able to create some writings at the beginning of the school year that sketched her sensitivity of being a newcomer, she aborted the exposure of such a voice and presented readers with the monotonous recording of her routine life in the second half of the year.

**General features.** The writing samples as well as the observation of Nora in ESL and Chinese class provide us with many interesting features regarding this young author from China, such as what she needed most in ESL class and the discrepancy between her Chinese and English
First, Nora's English writing, especially her vocabulary and sentence structures, developed smoothly during the course of the study. In China, Nora had learned English for a few years in her school as part of the elementary curriculum and had some cram class before coming to the US. In addition, she was a diligent learner in her previous school and had formed good habits of reading and writing. All these experiences helped her to form a basic background in English learning. However, because of her quiet personality, she seldom shared her knowledge or exposed her ability in the language. Therefore, at the beginning of the school year, she was put in a small group and taught with the help from the Chinese teacher, Mr. Gu. Nora started ESL writing in Chinese, mixed the two languages in the middle of the school year and later used all English. Nora's previous knowledge of English was strengthened in ESL class. However, most of her class time was spent with the small group. While the majority of ESL class was doing activities such as writing and reading, Nora and her group member were at the corner of the classroom listening to Mr. Gu's interpretation of these activities.

In order to prepare Nora for writing practices, the ESL teacher had her complete the sentence making exercises from the book club. Those exercises were comprised of a list of questions related to the book club readings. Nora was asked to number each word in the question and provide her answer by rearranging the words. This activity was conducted within the small group as well. Even though Nora was able to complete the sumNora of books in the middle of second semester, she was not put in the large group the entire time, but still spent some time with the small group in the corner or in the hallway. In this sense, it was very likely that she felt isolated from the large group, thus further contributing to her already quiet personality. Her performance in the class also demonstrated that even though she had the ability to read and write
as well as other classmates, she was not willing to share her creations with the large group.

Moreover, compared with Joy, the other Chinese-speaking girl in the same ESL class, Nora barely had any experience conferencing with the teacher about her writing. There were some occasions where Mr. Gu served as an interpreter in between Nora and Mrs. Rose; yet there were no direct exchange of ideas across the school year. Nora's quiet personality might give teachers an impression that she did not know how to orally express herself during writing conferences. However, the talk with the mother showed that Nora had the vocabulary in spoken English. I also often observed Nora reading the English books that were one scale lower than the large group without much difficulty and writing the summary based on those books with only a little help from Mr. Gu. All the evidence might suggest that, because of her quietness and isolation from the main group, Nora's reading and writing abilities were not correctly recognized in the ESL class. In Nora's case, realizing her authentic writing ability might provide her with more opportunities to get engaged in the class sessions.

The second feature regarding her writing was the discrepancy in the development of voice between Chinese and English writings. From the writing samples introduced in the previous sections, it was apparent that Nora had a strong voice in writing Chinese and understood how to express her voice through vocabulary, phrases and rhetorical style. Her Chinese writings revealed many deep thoughts, authentic emotions as well as her perspective of living and studying in the US. The majority of her Chinese writings were well organized with a certain theme in each piece. Although she did show decline in Chinese writing, such as conventions (periods and commas), her writing generally demonstrated her advanced ability in writing with focus and voice. However, the abilities of having a focus in writing and of expressing writer's voice were not seen in Nora's English writing samples. Most of her English
writings started from the second half of the school year and the majority of those samples failed to reflect her voice and have any focus. The English writings were simply the recording of her daily routine without full descriptions and details as were seen in her Chinese.

Scholars found that students' writing strategies in one language were able to transfer to the second language, especially in terms of understanding two language systems (Bialystok, 2007). Nora's case, however, suggested that such transfer might not be voluntarily achieved in each child. With Nora's knowledge in Chinese, it was obvious that her understanding of Chinese writing was complex, but the complexity remained in one language and never was transferred to another during the course of the study. Mrs. Rose did not speak Chinese and even though she felt that Nora was an excellent Chinese writer, she never found a chance to sit together with Mr. Gu to read Nora's Chinese writings. Mr. Gu, on the other hand, was aware of Nora's level of Chinese, but since he was regarded as a helper in the ESL class, it was not his obligation to monitor Nora's writing strategies in English. In the Chinese class, Mr. Gu felt that there was no urge to teach writing strategies for 3rd graders although he had such instruction for 4th and 5th-grade Chinese students. The busy schedules of both teachers put Nora's writing in an awkward situation in which her English writing was not well supported. Therefore, communication between staff and specific instructions on the strategies in English writing seemed particularly important for students like Nora.

One question remained on how to balance the development of both languages. In Nora's case, Chinese was generally maintained but showed no apparent improvement. There might be a number of reasons contributing to this result: her Chinese gave a way to English learning when she reduced the amount of Chinese reading to learn English vocabulary; she was asked by the mother to speak more English in communication; and the Chinese class mainly focused on
maintaining Chinese instead of improving it, etc. The parents held high expectation for her one-year stay and thus subconsciously put more emphasis on English than on Chinese. The Chinese class also failed to provide enough instruction on improving her Chinese capability. Her Chinese was not lost during the course of this research; however, if she had stayed in the US for a longer time, it would be challenging for her to maintain Chinese in the same way.
Jay-A writer Struggling Between Languages

Jay was in the 2\textsuperscript{nd}/3\textsuperscript{rd} grade ESL class. Different from all other participants, he was the only one living with American parents. Growing up in an orphanage in Shanxi Province, China, Jay finished his second grade acquiring Chinese literacy before he was adopted by his current parents. Almost nine years old, he was old enough to attend 3\textsuperscript{rd} grade in the focal school, but due to his very limited English proficiency, he was eventually put in a 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade ESL class with other 7-year-old ELLs but was assigned by Mr. Gu to learn 3\textsuperscript{rd} grade Chinese.

Bearing a bit of an accent of the town where he grew up, he was an active and hilarious boy with tanned complexion. Adopted since August 2008, Jay was living with his new family. His mother was a full time office manager of a local library, who, in her own words, took care of “all the office stuff”. His father was a nurse who often worked at night. The couple currently had three children. The oldest child was the biological daughter of the couple. One year older than Jay, she was a third grader in another elementary school in the same district. Jay also had a younger sister who was also adopted from China when she was very little and she did not speak Chinese at all.

In school, Jay spoke Mandarin with his current Chinese friends in the same ESL class most of the time; however, towards the end of the school year, I began to hear more English. Jay spoke English with his family members. To the mother, Jay was a very social child. Just like many other young boys at his age, he liked teasing with his sisters and enjoyed playing computer games at home.

Family literacy. Unlike other children who had a family environment of Chinese, Jay was immersed in an all-English environment at home. Working in the library gave the mother and Jay more access to books. After school Jay came to his mother's office first and then went
downstairs to the Children's Department to check out cartoon books and DVDs. His favorite books were *Avatar: The Last Airbender* series and other Japanese cartoons. He also checked out some Chinese videos such as *San mao liu lang ji* and *Hulu Wa*, two of which were very famous Chinese cartoon films.

Reading was a very important part of family life. The mother said that she loved reading, but often had no time for reading on her own since she had to take care of all the children. Yet she still tried her best to find time to read to her children everyday. The children gathered around the mother and picked the books they liked. Whoever picked the book could sit on the lap of the mother who read the book to all three of them. Compared with reading, writing was not quite promoted at the time, even though the parents expected Jay to develop more reading and writing skills in the next year. The most common writings in the family were grocery lists or some quick notes between parents on the magnetic board at home.

Among all the family literacy activities, homework might be the most controversial issue to both Jay and his parents. During the course of the study, Jay was attending three types of class in the school: all English, ESL Chinese, and every class required homework. To the parents, ESL and Chinese seemed to have too much homework for Jay. The mother was not very pleased about homework. She felt that Jay could not finish the work from ESL and Chinese and therefore should not be given such a heavy load. She sat next to Jay at home to help him with almost everything. At the beginning of the school days, she read the instructions to him so that he could understand the problems. As time went by, she was reading less to him since he could get the problems faster than before. Yet, Jay still had to spend considerable time to finish his work from school. The mother complained that just a few days before our interview in April, Jay stayed up dong his homework until 10pm at night. Additionally, since Jay's two sisters were in a different
elementary school and did not have any homework at all; he was the only one concentrating on the work at night. When he noticed that his sisters did not such study, but played, he tended to follow them. In March and April, his mother sent notes to Jay's ESL teacher, Mrs. Long, and Chinese teacher Mr. Gu respectively to explain how Jay was not able to finish his work at home, which surprised both teachers. Mrs. Long believed that the work she left for her ELLs was not difficult to finish even for newcomers like Jay; Mr. Gu also felt that with Jay's Chinese background, the Chinese homework should be finished in no time.

To the mother, learning English was critical to Jay who would be living in the US and using the language. As for Chinese, she expressed that she was thinking about opting out of Chinese class the next school year. During our interview, she believed that Jay was still maintaining his reading ability in Chinese, but she was unclear about his development. The adoption of her Chinese daughter and the conversation with other foster parents solidified her doubt about first language maintenance. She had heard many stories of how adopted children lost their native language within a few months. Therefore, she was not very optimistic about Jay's Chinese. She expected that Jay could maintain the language as much as he could. However if a day came when Jay was no longer able to speak Chinese, she would not do anything. She thought about having some Chinese-speaking friends come to her home and tutor Jay once a week, but was afraid that it would not help due to the lack of a Chinese speaking environment in general. Half a year later when I visited the school, I saw Jay again in the Chinese class. However, he was quieter and not paying much attention to my greetings in Chinese.

**Writing development in school.**

**Writing in Chinese.** Jay's Chinese writing declined rapidly during the course of the study. At the beginning of the school year, Jay had finished his second grade in China. Due to his age
and Chinese proficiency, he was placed in the 3rd grade Chinese class although he attended his ESL class in 2nd grade. Such a placement was mostly based on his Chinese reading level. At 12:45 every day after a quick lunch, Jay and his 2nd grade ESL classmates came to the Chinese class. Jay was taught with the 3rd grade Chinese textbook. Each Chinese class consisted of two parts: students went over the new text with Mr. Gu and practiced writing characters. Jay was able to complete most tasks on time at the beginning of the semester. However, he gradually began to turn in his work late and sometimes delayed completing the work at the end of the school year. Over the course of the study, I also observed him using more English in the Chinese class.

The free writing practices for Chinese class were mostly conducted after school, which included weekly Chinese journals and the essays about seasons in each semester. Since Jay's parents were not able to help him with Chinese, all these writing were finished by Jay himself at home. The Chinese writing samples from the two semesters showed that Jay's Chinese ability fell more quickly than all other Chinese-speaking children in the same class. Such a decline took place as Jay's English grew during the course of the study.

At the beginning of the school year, Jay was able to produce journals that depicted his life experiences in his new family and new school. In those pieces, he was able to use examples, details, dialogues, four word Chinese idioms, etc to engage readers. For instance, in the piece about boat rowing with the mother (Figure Jay-1), Jay expressed his voice as a young boy who had never gone boating before.
In this example, Jay wrote that he could not believe that he was actually boating. He also expressed his feelings during boating such as “it felt so fast”. At the end of the journal, he mentioned to his mother that he was tired but he enjoyed the experience.

In another work earlier in the semester, he described what he heard from the Chinese teacher about the United Nations Day celebration. In addition to quoting what Mr. Gu mentioned in class about the specific activities during the celebration, Jay also added his own perspective of the issue: 所以要停止战争 (so we need to stop the wars). Even though those writings were very short pieces, they demonstrated a number of characteristics in Jay's Chinese writing at the beginning of the school year. First, he was able to use quotation in his writings. In both pieces, he was either using direct quotation or indirect quotation as a way to enhance the credibility of his writing. Readers were convinced of his experience based on this technique. Additionally, he expressed his feelings and emotions toward certain topics in those writings either using apparent markers such as “I felt” or directly uttering his perspective. Such a technique helped him to expose his voice as a young writer with his own ideas.

Jay's skill in using details in writing was detected in many entries as well. For example, in the following piece, he introduced his experience of preparing food for the family:
This was a very short piece, in which he wrote about how he prepared supper. A number of details were included in this entry: he washed his hands, put the meat into the pot, chopped the tomato into cubes and put them into the pot as well. He then put the spinach in and boiled it for a while. In the evening, everybody was eating the dish he cooked. The actions involved in the piece were in the order of cooking and the last sentence expressed his excitement when seeing everybody eating his dish. The writing was clearly and appropriately organized as well.

In another example (Figure Jay-2), he described how he and other children played in the church.

*Figur e Jay-2 Tag or chase*

He told the readers that he was playing tag or chase with his friends in the church. He was the one to be chased. The chaser was pursuing him closely, so he kept running until he could not see the chaser anymore. He was not caught in the end and had a joyful day. There were some phrases used here to set up the situation: 一直 meaning all the time, was used to describe the closeness of being caught; 拼命 literally meaning risking one's life, described how Jay was running desperately from the chasing. After the usage of those phrases, the last sentence 我们这
一天玩的很高兴 (We had a joyful day) seemed more natural.

Jay’s earlier Chinese journals demonstrated that he had acquired the vocabulary at grade level, understood the sentence structure in Chinese and was able to use details and other techniques to reflect his thoughts and emotions. At the same time, however, he had some difficulty writing certain characters. In the above examples of supper preparation and church chasing, he used pinyin to replace a number of complex characters. This strategy might suggest that at this point of writing, delivering meaning in journals was more important than writing the correct characters for this young writer.

The middle of the school year witnessed some loss of Chinese for Jay. Not only were more characters written incorrectly, but sentence structures were incorrect as well. The following excerpt (Figure Jay-3) was taken from his journal in early December.

Figure Jay-3. Jay's Chinese journal.

In this piece, he was describing decorating a Christmas tree. They pulled the old tree out from the attic and started hanging the ornaments on the branches. Even though the ideas were expressed, there were many awkward phrases, such as the ones that were circled in yellow in the example: the correct phrase could be 饰物 or 挂件, both meant ornaments; however, he all used
meaning things. Understandable in English, it was confusing to Chinese readers. The sentence structure was also incorrect in manner. The first sentence was pointed out by Mr. Gu as having no subject at all. The last sentence on this page, which was underlined in yellow, should be combined with the previous part of the sentence rather than being separated.

His ability to communicate meaning in Chinese worsened as time went by. Because of the state test in late January and early February, Chinese classes were canceled for four weeks. Together with the winter holidays, Jay had almost two months without Chinese education. When he and his classmate came back to the class in February, more regression in Chinese was observed. During class time, he would sometimes use English to answer questions. In reading, he had more words and phrases that needed explanation. The writing samples also showed such decline. The following example (Figure Jay-4) was taken from a February journal:

![Figure Jay-4. Chinese journal on the father's vehicle.](image)

In the sample, he wanted to describe how his father got the car out of mud. The piece contained two male characters, the father and the father's friend, who was coming to help. Yet in writing, the pronoun was not clearly indicated for many actions. The sentences were also short without smooth transition in between. In the last part of the story when Jay and his sisters came
out to help, it was unclear how the children helped although he did use a number of verbs (as readers of this paper might notice, there was no translation of this writing sample due to its unclear meaning).

Such types of writing did not improve during the rest of the semester. Although he was still able to tell stories and explain his experiences, the sentences never flowed as well as before. For example, in a piece about going to a birthday party, he wrote: “今天，我去我的朋友的过生日的家里” (Literal translation: Today, I went to my friend's birthday's home). The phrases 朋友, 过生日 and 家里 was in a very bizarre order. The correct form would be 今天，我去我的过生日的朋友家里 or 今天，我去我的朋友家里给她过生日。His vocabulary also was affected during this period of time. In one of the journals, he was trying to write the phrase 游泳池 (swimming pool) in Chinese; however, he used 泳yŏng的水(Literacy translation: swimming water) and wrote one of the characters wrong. The confusing order of phrases as well as the failure to find appropriate phrases in expression had never occurred in his journals before December; therefore, it was very possible that after many weeks without Chinese class and close contact with Chinese speaking children, Jay had lost a large portion of Chinese in his repertoire.

By the end of the school year, the sentence structure in his writings was so loose that they often failed to convey his original meaning. Shorter sentences were used more often and when longer sentences were written, they tended to have incorrect punctuation or resulted in a lack of clarity. Some characters were omitted within the sentences, which added more confusion. The next excerpt (Figure Jay-5) was taken from the journal from April, in which, no specific meaning could be derived. He wrote about his hair and a number of other items related to him, such as instant noodle, cat, TV, etc. However, even at the end of the journal, readers were not able to understand what he actually wanted to express.
To summarize, over the course of this study, Jay's Chinese not only failed to develop, but also declined drastically. At the beginning of the semester, Jay was able to effectively express his ideas with rich vocabulary, a variety of sentence structures and a strong writer's voice. He could use details as well as vivid descriptions in narratives and clearly articulate his ideas. However, as time went by, his Chinese plunged seriously, especially after the winter holidays and almost a month of state test preparation when no Chinese class was offered. By the end of the school year, although he was still able to write with a unique voice, other traits were not seen in his writings. In addition to the fact that the class assignment was continuously delayed, the writings showed that many sentences became impossible for readers to comprehend, more characters were replaced with Pinyin which was often written wrong, and he faced more difficulty locating the proper vocabulary in meaning making. The reasons for such a plummet in Chinese development might be the result of a number of factors. One of the most significant was the lack of opportunities to practice Chinese. For Jay, Chinese was only used in Chinese class when he was speaking with Mr. Gu or classmates. In ESL class, even though Chinese was allowed for communication, Jay gradually switched from Chinese to English in those conversations. At home,
he was the only one speaking a second language; with no audience of Chinese, he quickly mastered oral English in daily communication. Even his former orphanage friends who were adopted by an American family a year earlier were not very helpful in Jay's Chinese maintenance. When Jay and she were having conversations over MSN Messenger in February of 2009, both had to use English because it appeared to be the only language they could mutually understand. When Jay realized his decline in his mother tongue, instead of overcoming this difficulty, he chose to escape. In some phone calls to China with his former orphanage teachers, Jay was told that his Chinese “got worse”; from those conversations onward, Jay stopped calling his former teachers. The parents' perspective and expectation of his Chinese also played an important role in this regard. They claimed that they wanted Jay to maintain his native language “as much as possible”; however, such an expectation was not executed with any real action. This perspective also might have affected Jay's attitude toward Chinese learning, considering it as something not essential. Without parents' careful and special attention to the maintenance of Chinese, it was predicative that Jay's Chinese would be completely lost in a short time.

Writing in English. Although Jay's Chinese writing deteriorated during the course of this study, his English writing showed major growth. Not only his English vocabulary increased over the year, but also his ability in narration and his voice as a young writer were transferred from his home language to English. The beginning writings were all conducted with the help from the teacher. In Jay’s ESL class, there were a few students who were new to the US, therefore, the ESL teacher often organized these students as a small group. Since most group members were not able to write on their own, they were allowed to follow the teacher in writing activities. The group met everyday with reading and writing blocks that often took thirty minutes while the rest of the class was involved in their own literacy activities. The writings were often based on the
reading. Mrs. Long, the ESL teacher, admitted that writing was not her strongest area of teaching, however, she still tried to provide as many writing opportunities as possible. For students like Jay, Mrs. Long used modeling at the beginning until December of the same year. “He had no English whatsoever. Anything we did, I did it and he copied,” Mrs. Long's remark could best demonstrate her approach to Jay's beginning writing. Examples of Jay's early writings also showed that it was the production of the teacher rather than his own.

![Figure Jay-6. Dedan saves the day.](image)

This example (Figure Jay-6), written after reading *Dedan Saves the Day* showed that Jay was able to follow the teacher's model and copy the sentences to his own journal book. Interestingly, there were places where no space in between words, such as the first sentence in the journal: “Dedanisagiraffe.” Additionally, instead of writing sentences one after another, Jay started each sentence on a new line, separating the ideas. Such characteristics could be seen in other writings during the same month.

Like younger writers, e.g. kindergarten writers in the same study, Jay also had problems in space arrangement. For instance, the following journal (Figure Jay-7) was written in November when he was still copying the teacher's sentences.
Figure Jay-7. Amphibians

In this example, all the sentences were connected, a step beyond what he was able to do the previous month. Yet there were many words being separated and written on two different lines in spite of the correction that the teacher had made to his previous entries.

Since the beginning of December, Jay started to produce sentences of his own. Mrs. Long described how she used this opportunity:

I would write it and correct it: if the word is open, say mother open door. So I will say oh, “my mother opened the door.” Then I would write it correctly and he would do that.

That's probably what he is at right now. He is giving me things of his own and I am correcting or expanding on it. The big difference is he wants to do that whereas anytime before that, he did not want to try anything of his own: he just wanted it to be given to him.

The writing samples produced during this period of time showed that Jay began to write about his personal life experiences in addition to writing about books. In his personal journal, he liked to use details to depict the scenarios. In the following example (Figure Jay-8), he wrote about his mother's birthday. After the piece was written, the teacher made a few corrections to his grammar.
The conventions of writing were interesting in this piece. First, Jay used back slashes (\) to separate his sentences whenever he felt it was necessary to break. Second, similar to what he had been doing in the past few months, he broke the work into two lines, such as the word “present”. Also he used capital letters in the middle of sentences, such as “I gave to My mom present”, “My mom liKed the pres-ent” and “…a Kiss”. Those features were observed in the kindergarten participants' writings as well where younger ESL children described their experiences. Mrs. Long provided help using the writing process. Before Jay was able to create his own writing, Mrs. Long asked about the idea he wanted to deliver. She wrote down his idea on a small white board and let Jay copy it down into his own journal. As Jay began to produce his own writings, the support from the teacher was also important. Mrs. Long continued scaffolding by giving Jay more ideas. Mrs. Long noticed the difference in Jay's reaction to her support:

He is giving me things of his own and I am correcting or expanding on it. The big difference is he wants to do that whereas anytime before that (December), he did not want to try anything of his own: he just wanted it to be given to him.
Jay showed great progress in his English writing during the second half of the year. In addition to journal writing, a number of other genres were practiced including story writing, science writing as well as letter writing. All these writing practices not only increased Jay's vocabulary, but also showed his ability to use English as a tool for communication. Many writings reflected his life experiences with his family, in his class and with his teachers. At the same time, although he was losing his native language, he did use it in his ESL class writings. I will illustrate his development in writing for the second semester with specific examples.

First, more vocabulary was learned than before. Starting from this term, Mrs. Long was trying to implement the use of “word book” in class. Students learned about five or six words each day and copied them a few times so as to remember the spelling. Then they were asked to use those words to make sentences. Students could either look up the words in dictionaries by themselves or consult with an adult in the classroom including Mrs. Long, Mrs. Levine the Russian teacher, and Ms. Cyprus the student teacher. Jay, however, sometimes would miss the opportunity due to his late submission of homework. While most students were sitting beside an adult, Jay was still trying to finish his homework from yesterday. The following writing (Figure Jay-9) was an example of the list of words that Jay was learning in early February. Jay was able to copy the words repeated in his book, however, he was not quite understanding the meaning of each word. It seemed that he was placing those words randomly in the sentences without inquiring about the meaning.
Figure Jay-9. Word list.

If those sentence writings were not reflecting any context, then more functional writings, such as letters would serve as a channel for Jay to communicate with other people. During the second half of the school year, Jay produced some letters that were entirely his own creation. One of the letters was written to Mrs. Long. In the letter (Figure Jay-10), Jay was trying to show his interest in Mrs. Long's vacation.

Figure Jay-10. Letter to Mrs. Long.

Dear Mrs. Long,

How are you doing? Do you like it on the boat? Is your skin going to change color?

(How are you doing? Do you like it on the boat? Is your skin going to change color?)
He asked a few questions to inquire about Mrs. Long’s trip: he started with a very common greeting, a sentence that demonstrated his understanding of social norms. Then he went directly to ask about Mrs. Long's experience which was as detailed as her skin color change during the trip. Mrs. Long responded to this journal entry a few days later with “Yes, it did”. The simple dialogue between Jay and Mrs. Long in this letter was the perfect example of how writing served as a communicative tool.

Another letter that Jay wrote during this period of time was for Mrs. Levine, the Russian teacher who out of the class one day to take the oath for US citizen. Every student in the class was asked to write Mrs. Levine a letter of congratulations. Jay seized this opportunity and created the following piece:

\[
\text{Dar Mrs. Levine.} \\
\text{congratulations on you} \\
\text{I like you are oath.} \\
\text{Thank you for teach us.}
\]

The vocabulary was introduced before students started writing to get them familiar with words such as \textit{congratulations} or \textit{oath}. Yet how to arrange the ideas and the norms of letter writing were determined by the students. Notice that Jay's usage of \textit{congratulations}---he was not told what preposition to use, but seemed to understand that there should be a preposition there. After writing up, he asked me to read his letter and I told him that the sentence in the middle (\textit{I like you are oath}) could be said differently. Hearing this, he got a bit upset and went to Mrs. Long for help. Mrs. Long told him to say “teaching” instead of “teach” and put capital C for congratulations. “\textit{I like you are oath}” does not make sense,” Mrs. Long said. She asked him to erase \textit{oath} and maintain only \textit{I like you}. Jay happily came back to the table and added \textit{to} and
From to the letter and put a picture of a small US flag on the front and a bigger flag on the back of the page. With all the additions, the way he expressed his congratulations was similar to a native speaker with opening greetings, reason for writing and extension of feelings at the end. Although “to: Mrs. Levine” was put at the end, Mrs. Levine surely would have no problem understanding Jay's intention in the letter.

The last example of letter writing (Figure Jay-11) was created before Mr. Gu's birthday. Interestingly, this piece was completed in ESL class when students were having 15-minutes of free time. All students were having their own fun activities during the break, while Jay was thinking carefully about what to write on a blank paper. When asked what was in his mind, Jay quickly told me that he was going to give Mr. Gu a birthday card. After decorating the edge of the letter with different lines and curves to indicate a stage, he started putting down the core content. While I thought he was going to use English in the letter because he was having ESL at the time, he wrote his letter entirely in Chinese:

Figure Jay-11. Letter to Mrs. Gu.

Translation: Happy Birthday: Mr. Gu. You have worked very hard. This is Mr. Gu. (Mr. Gu's real name was covered by the author of this paper for anonymity)

While he was writing, he seemed to get confused by one of the characters. He wrote down 心奂 (the last character in the first line), while the correct form should be 快. Looking at the writing and realizing that “it did not look right”, Jay turned to Zhengyi for help. For the third line
of the text, Jay was also having a difficult time writing the characters 辛 (the character in the middle of line 3). He asked Zhengyi again to help him complete this character. Seeing that he was having difficulty, Zhengyi put Jay's letter right in front of her and put down three characters 辛苦了 for him all at once. Both 快 and 辛 were common characters that most Chinese 3rd graders would be familiar. The inability to write those characters showed Jay's decline in Chinese. Yet at the same time, Jay maintained his ability to communicate his ideas. The last sentence (This is Mr. Gu) clearly demonstrated that he was trying to illustrate how excited Mr. Gu would be when receiving a note like this. The note also became a piece where he expressed his gratitude towards Mr. Gu who cared not only about his Chinese, but his development as a young child in a new environment. Mr. Gu seemed very happy when he received this card from Jay. A “thank you” from Mr. Gu demonstrated the effectiveness of Jay's writing of this piece.

All the three aforementioned letters suggested that Jay was well aware of the functions of letter writing: communication and meaning making. Such an understanding was built upon the classroom support not only from the teacher who taught writing, but also from fellow students who shared the same language.

In addition to his development in letter writing, Jay also started writing in science. As Mrs. Long mentioned in our interview, she intended to provide more opportunities for writing about science in the second semester and the plant unit was the realization of her intention. In the unit, students read non-fictional books about plants, conducted experiments on plants to observe their growth and recorded the growth in writing. Compared with narratives, science writings demanded more collaboration among students. Jay was engaged in every activity, especially the experiments. Because of his active participation, he was often appointed the group leader who took charge of organizing ideas. This duty helped him to establish a sense of responsibility and
also an urge to write about science. Some writings were as simple as a few sentences while others were composed as short passages. In those writings, he was not simply copying the teacher’s or other students’ ideas, but also creating his own. The following example (Figure Jay-12) was taken from Jay’s science journal where he recorded the growth of leaves:

![Figure Jay-12. Science writing.](image)

Before writing, each group of students had already grown a small plant. During the science unit, students tied red yarn and blue yarn to different leaves and put Vaseline on the top and bottom of the leaves with different colored yarn respectively. They also observed the color, shape and texture of leaves. Three days later, they took the plants out and observed again to explore any emerging differences. The above sample was the record Jay jotted down when he was observing the leaves. The teacher provided the vocabulary to the whole class, yet how to use the new words such as _shiny_ or _bottom_ was embedded in the repeated instructional speeches and the conversations among group discussion. Therefore, Jay had no difficulty writing those sentences. Science writing also strengthened his understanding of the scientific concepts elucidated in class. In a class period later, he was responsible for collecting questions for the plant game. Each group was assigned to create ten questions and answers so that they could use
them the next day for a whole class contest.

Figure Jay-13. Questions and answers in science unit.

As a group leader, Jay wrote down most of the questions and contributed the answers (Figure Jay-13). Although the structures of many questions were incorrect, the way he was using writing to help organize his thoughts and strengthen his understanding of science concepts demonstrated his progress in English writing.

General features. Jay's decline in Chinese writing was noticeable. At the beginning of the school year, he was able to produce creative, detailed writings with correct Chinese characters and sentence structures. However, his later writings not only lost the correctness that helped readers to understand, but also the flow of ideas. He began to have more characters replaced with incorrect Pinyin and was unable to use appropriate words or phrases to represent his intended meaning. There were a number of reasons causing such decline. One of the biggest obstacles in Jay's Chinese learning was his family environment. Compared with the parents of other participating students, Jay's parents were the only ones that did not quite support Chinese homework. In addition to the 40-minute class time, Chinese students were often left with 30-minutes of homework, including practicing character writing, reading or writing weekly journals.
According to Mr. Gu most students should be able to finish their homework within 30 minutes and for those who had no Chinese background, 40 minutes. Since Jay had a very solid Chinese background, homework to him was presumed to be quite easy. However, Mr. Gu was surprised that Jay's mother sent notes to him twice in a semester stating that Jay was not able to finish his homework. The teacher repeatedly mentioned to me the importance of homework in learning Chinese in an English speaking country: “since they only had 40 minutes everyday in class, in order to catch up and maintain their Chinese literacy, they have to put more emphasis on their after school practice.” Such a conclusion was based on his twenty-year's experience working with children who speak two languages and communicating with parents about possible improvement in instruction. He acknowledged the challenges that children had to encounter in order to master two languages, but pinpointed the importance of parents' encouragement and participation in Chinese learning. In Jay's case, however, parents did not seem to want to invest in the endeavor. Or because they did not speak Chinese themselves, they were struggling with how to help him. They did not have specific expectations for Jay's Chinese development and appeared inconsistent in their support for Chinese learning. A lack of Chinese speaking context at home, together with the parents' ambiguous goals for Chinese maintenance greatly affected Jay's attitude toward Chinese learning. He often forgot to bring his homework back to school and sometimes carelessly completed the work. The ultimate consequence was shown in his writings, which were incomprehensible.

The parents' stand also affected Jay's learning in English. The mother did not want Jay to spend much time on homework from other classes either. Mrs. Long received notes from the mother as well that listed the excuses for not completing ESL homework. In addition, the mother also requested that Jay should reduce the time in school: having half a day in school, leaving the
other half bonding with his new parents. Mrs. Long was very upset hearing the mother's reasons, and felt that such a request would leave Jay an impression that school was not important. The request was not approved by the school administration and Jay continued attending school for full day. However, Mrs. Long noticed that he often came to school late or forgot to fulfill the ESL homework.

Despite the decline in Chinese, Jay's English writing developed over time. He transferred many positive capabilities from Chinese to English. For example, he was well aware of the purpose of writing and applied such knowledge to his English writing. Many of his English entries expressed his feelings of certain events and his experiences in the US. Other writings served as communication with other people, such as the letters to his teacher and letter to his orphanage friend, which suggested his understanding of audience in writing. There were also writings in science that served as tools for understanding content. Moreover, similar to his writings in Chinese, he used details in English writings to set up context and present dialogues. The multiple opportunities of writing in the ESL class facilitated those transfers. Mrs. Long and her fellow teachers in ESL class provided timely and close support for Jay whenever he needed help. Most of Jay's spellings were corrected by the teacher even until the end of the school year. Because of this, however, Jay began to rely exclusively on the teacher's help with spelling. In his interview, he also said: “you just tell the teacher what you want to say, and she will write it down for you, then your journal is done. One two three four five, five sentences.” There were a number of times when Jay got upset simply because I refused to write down the exact spelling for him. The over-reliance on the teacher's help with spelling became evident when he misused words in sentence making activities where he often chose to create sentences by himself.

Conclusion. As a boy who had almost no English background in his previous schooling,
Jay's improvement in English reading, writing and speaking was remarkable. Raised in an orphanage, Jay received very little English before he came to the United States. He started from what the ESL teacher called “zero” English. His encounter with English began when he was brought to his American parents, and soon he was surrounded by an all English environment—his family where everybody spoke no other languages than English. In school, he was placed in the 2nd grade class even though his age matched the 3rd grade. He also received Chinese instruction together with other Chinese-speaking children from 3rd grade, which became one of the few opportunities where he could learn and use his native language. Many abilities in Chinese writing were transferred to his English writing, yet those transfers failed to stop him from losing his Chinese rapidly. I often wondered what his Chinese would be like if his parents had been able to insist more on Chinese learning and provided more encouragement. Yet, it seemed inevitable in his situation that without parents' support and appreciation of his native language, he would become monolingual in the near future.
Cross Case Analysis

The cases of Joy, Nora and Jay presented us with different views of the development of young writers. During the study, all three children had a challenging year.

Joy was a girl who had been living in the US since she was very young and attended ESL since kindergarten. All her past experience in the English-speaking environment made her a fluent English speaker. She attended Mrs. Rose's ESL class in the morning. She was a lively girl who liked talking and making friends. However, in class, her active personality often became the cause of a reprimand from the teacher for bothering other students. She enjoyed free reading after class but often appeared to dislike reading during class time. She was considered by the teacher to be a beginning writer.

Nora was a newcomer to the US and attended Mrs. Rose's class as well. She was educated in China until the end of 2nd grade when her mother brought her to America for a one-year visiting scholar program. Nora had a very solid background in Chinese that was reflected in her Chinese reading and writing. Her prior English background also helped her in learning a second language. A very outgoing girl in China, Nora became extremely quiet in the new environment and seldom expressed her ideas in ESL class, even though she was capable of completing most of the required writing. Her advanced ability and techniques in Chinese writing were not transferred to English, and the time invested in learning English affected her maintenance of the Chinese language.

Jay was the oldest participant in the study who was attending 2nd grade ESL and 3rd grade Chinese classes. Adopted by an American couple, Jay came to the US a few months before the study began. With very little English background in his prior education, Jay started learning English by listening to the conversations among his family members. Before coming to the
school, he was beginning to gain some basic understanding of spoken English. Yet he did not start writing on his own until a few months later in Mrs. Long's ESL class. With the teacher's help, Jay's English slowly developed from writing nothing original to producing his own stories and journals. However, the improvement in English writing was at the expense of his Chinese.

The development of these young writers showed many interesting features. In this section, I will identify the features across the three cases and discuss how these factors may inform writing instruction for ELLs at 2nd-3rd grade level.

**Chinese Writing Development.** The 3rd grade Chinese class was scheduled for 45 minutes every noon. The textbooks they were using were the standard books were used a few years ago in many Chinese elementary schools. The format of textbooks reformed over the years, yet Mr. Gu believed that the major content remained the same. Similar to the language instruction in China, students in the class read text during class time and practiced writing characters. They also were asked to construct phrases and sentences with the new vocabulary. They were asked to read the text before class and sometimes recite afterward. Most of the class time was devoted to the dictation of characters and copying the ones that were written incorrectly. Those students who did not finish such work in class would have to finish it after class. After a few weeks in to the first semester, due to a time conflict, Joy and Nora's class time was rescheduled to the slot before ESL in the morning thus reducing their Chinese class to 30 minutes. Class content for the girls was reduced as well.

The three participants had different Chinese backgrounds. Both Nora and Jay received their Chinese education until the end of 2nd grade. Nora was the most proficient in Chinese and her ability in writing was the highest. Jay also had a solid background of Chinese at the beginning of the study and could effectively produce writing in major genres. Joy started her
systematic Chinese education from kindergarten in the focal school and was the least proficient in Chinese.

The major creative writing task in 3rd grade Chinese was the weekly journal that students completed at home. There was no word limit for the journal, but Mr. Gu often expected that children could write at least three hundred words, a minimal requirement for students at the same grade level in China. Jay, who was attending 2nd grade ESL class due to his English proficiency, was asked to meet the same requirement. In the middle of each semester, students were also asked to complete a writing about the seasons. Different from journal writing, this essay was assigned with a topic. Children wrote their drafts, revised the writing and submitted the final version to the school for records.

In their weekly journals, students had the freedom to choose any topic they preferred. Some wrote about the experiences in school, such as the piece that Joy wrote about “first day in Chinese class”, some were book summaries, such as those that Joy and Nora tried. Most of the journals were depicting the daily experiences that students had after school. During class, students spent half of their time listening to Mr. Gu's explanation of the textbook and the other half of the class practicing the characters newly learned. The noon Chinese class consisted of students from two different Chinese proficiency levels and students were automatically divided into two groups. Mr. Gu often chose to do the above activities for both groups. While students were practicing the characters, Mr. Gu sat down and graded the homework that students brought to class. The journals were checked each Monday during class time.

According to Mr. Gu, the main purpose of Chinese class was to maintain students’ Chinese proficiency. To achieve this purpose, he kept constant contact with the parents and negotiated with them the best method to maintain Chinese. For instance, journal writing
originated from parents' suggestion a number of years ago. He immediately accepted their suggestion and implemented the genre in his class, which he found quite helpful for students to use the language they had learned. However, the grading emphasis of the weekly journal was placed neither on the grammar or sentence structure of the writing, nor on how students were able to tell their experiences or stories. Mr. Gu paid more attention to the amount that students completed each time and the incorrect characters in the entries. He corrected the wrong characters and put the correct ones on the page.

The three Chinese speaking students experienced different development in their Chinese writing, yet they all used journals as a way to document their life experiences. All three participants were able to complete journal writing at the beginning of the school year. Nora brought with her the rich Chinese background that she established from the education she received in China. In her journals, she was able to use a wide range of vocabulary and varied sentence structures to express her ideas and thoughts in her journals. Jay, who was also proficient in Chinese at the beginning of the school year, distinguished himself in using details to depict the actions and conversations in his daily life. Joy, who failed to write the journal as expressively as the other two children, was able to use basic knowledge of Chinese to complete most of the journal writings.

As time went on, the three participants experienced different forms of development in their Chinese writing. Nora, although still able to complete her work, was discovered to decline in her word choice and writing style. She tended to have more writing recording the events on weekend rather than the rich description of one event. Jay's Chinese regressed quickly and seriously especially during the second semester. Not only was he unable to make readers understand his ideas, he also repeatedly forgot to write in his Chinese journals. Comparatively,
Joy's Chinese writing improved greatly during the second half the school year. She progressed from someone who had difficulty constructing a sentence to a beginning writer who established a relationship between reading and writing.

The development in Chinese writing among these three children demonstrated the importance of the teacher's role in Chinese instruction. The instruction that Mr. Gu provided was similar to the typical Chinese lessons that many teachers in China are still practicing. He aimed his lessons at maintaining students' oral Chinese proficiency. Yet during the observations, what was mostly noticed were copying and remembering the characters after Mr. Gu's explanation of the text. Only one mini lesson was observed when Mr. Gu used a text as a mentor to show how details were used to support main ideas. Yet such a lesson was only used to explain the reading rather than being developed into writing. The grading of the journal also focused on the correctness of character writing instead of ideas and organization. Such a focus might direct students' attention to the conventions in writing instead of the meaning the journal was delivering. Nora's and Jay's Chinese journals showed that their ability to produce clear and focused writing decreased to some extent. The Chinese proficiency of these two students was also affected. Therefore, such writing instruction was not able to provide students with the information they needed most to maintain their proficiency in Chinese. Instead of being active participants in class, children became passive learners in the learning process. Moreover, such instruction showed a disconnection among speaking, listening, reading, writing and thinking. While the teacher read and explained the text, students listened. However, students did not further their understanding of the text with discussion or sharing any writing. The topics of journal writing at home did not seem to have any connection with the text either. The consequence of the disconnection was that students who had previous Chinese background would rely on their writing abilities built from
previous schooling at the beginning of the school year and failed to develop further.

Since there was no specific and direct instruction on Chinese writing at 3rd grade level in class, the role of parents in the development of Chinese writing seemed more critical. In this study, the role of parents in maintaining Chinese varied. The Chinese-speaking environment at home may help students to keep their oral communication skills. Except for Jay's parents, most parents of the focal students spoke Chinese with their children. Nora's parents provided Chinese materials at home helping her to catch up with the lessons she should have learned in China. Yet the mother, who was with Nora most of the time, entrusted learning to Nora herself. Joy's mother was an active advocate of writing process. Joy's unsatisfactory performance in the first half of the school year was discovered by the parents who communicated with the teacher and took actions immediately. The four-stage writing process was practiced at home to complement the writing activities in school. With the involvement of the parents, not only did Joy's Chinese writing became focused, she was also able to be punctual and responsible for her own work. Although Joy was still a beginning Chinese writer, the changes in her writing indicated that parents' active participation was a significant factor in her progress. Compared with these two girls, Jay's parents lacked the Chinese resources that most other Chinese parents were granted. Although they wanted Jay to maintain his native language as long as possible, the parents did not speak any Chinese and were unable to provide a Chinese-speaking environment. In addition, except for the Chinese class at school, they found no other resources that they could utilize to help Jay with oral or written Chinese outside the school setting. Perhaps due to these limitations, they were not as active and motivated as other parents in children's writing development. Seeing Jay's difficulty in learning a new language, the parents thought about quitting Chinese class, which suggested their conflicts as well their struggle. Consequently, Jay's Chinese deteriorated quickly during the
course of the study.

**English writing development.** The scarce writing opportunities in Chinese class motivated me to know more about the English writing development of these young children. Compared with Chinese class, all focal students had more opportunities to practice writing in ESL classes. Mrs. Rose, who was the teacher for Joy and Nora, was a keen writer herself. Writing had always been a significant portion of the class. Within such a rich writing environment, Joy and Nora produced abundant writings including journals, book reports, science writings, poems, stories for Young Authors Context etc. Mrs. Long, the teacher of Jay, was also experienced in teaching ESL. She tried to balance the four aspects (speaking, listening, reading and writing) of language learning in her daily instruction. She used modeling at the beginning of the school year for newcomers such as Jay and provided spelling for those students. During the second half of the school year, students began to have more writing activities in class including science writing, story writing, journals and sentence making.

In the course of the study, the three children's development in English varied as well. With her strong oral English background, Joy was a writer who produced many texts. She was often regarded as a student with motivation problems in the first semester. Largely due to her active personality, she appeared to be absent-minded in class and lazy in learning. However, her writings were filled with imagination and feelings, which was unfortunately neglected by the teacher. She concentrated more on learning during the second semester with the help from her parents. Nora, who was attending the same class, was new to the US. She was often placed in a group of 2/3 new students that was separated from the majority of the class. She was able to complete many writing tasks with little help, but her quiet personality often made people unable to recognize her capability in English. Jay was a student placed in the 2nd grade ESL class due to
his limited English background. He began to produce writing of his own from the second semester. He was an active participant in class activities but had difficulties in writing.

After a brief overview of the three young writers, I will discuss some features that were commonly seen across the cases. By comparing the three cases, I found the following features that characterized their English writing development.

**Writing instruction.** The writing instruction in the class critically affected the writing development of ELLs. Across the three cases, the ESL teachers played important roles in creating the meaningful writing instruction for ESL students. The three students came from two classes: a 2nd grade ESL and a 3rd grade ESL. Each class offered a variety of writing activities for students to practice composition. Mrs. Long, the ESL teacher of the 2nd grade class, considered all language aspects to be essential. Therefore, in her daily instruction, she incorporated them. She increased the amount of writing in the second semester to accompany the science unit and the word book. In Mrs. Rose's class, writing was regarded as the one of the most important components. As a teacher who had personal interest and professional training in writing, Mrs. Rose was an active advocate for writing in ESL class. Students wrote journals every other day, composed poems, recorded their science inquiry and participated in the Young Authors Writing Contest. Reading and writing were also closely connected. Students were asked to write summaries of the books they were reading in the book club and revised the summaries after teacher-student conferences. The writing process was applied in almost all genres. There were also activities where students critiqued the writings of each other. All these activities in Mrs. Rose's class illustrated the versatility that the teacher provided to motivate writing.

Both teachers encouraged the interactions between teacher and students during the writing process. Mrs. Long had a big class; therefore, she was entitled to have a foreign language
teacher and later a student teacher. With the assistance, Mrs. Long divided the class into smaller groups so that each adult could take one group for differentiated instruction. As members in the new students’ group, Jay and his group members wrote with Mrs. Long at the beginning of the semester. While they were not able to produce sentences of their own, they used different gestures and basic vocabulary to express their ideas. Mrs. Long also encouraged students to use any available means to communicate their thoughts. Therefore at the beginning of the school year, most writings that appeared in Jay's book were constructed by Mrs. Long. Most interactions during this process occurred when Jay was trying to describe his intentions in creating sentences. In the second half of the school year, Jay began to have ideas of his own in writing and the most frequent interaction with the teacher was requesting help for the spelling of certain words. Most times, Jay could get the spelling letter by letter from the teachers.

The instances I gave in Jay's case regarding his frustration when not being offered the spelling, however, prompted me to ask the question: How much help is sufficient in spelling? For Jay, the interactions with the teacher in the writing process mainly focused on spelling. While he was able to spell words with teacher's help, it became habitual that whenever he did not know how to spell, he asked the teacher. In the last few weeks of the class, Jay began to use some other resources in spelling such as the word book, yet the consultation on the word book occurred after he obtained the spelling from the teacher.

Compared with Mrs. Long's class, the interactions in Mrs. Rose's class mainly occurred in the revision process. Mrs. Rose often walked around the room, sat with a group of students and talked to each student about his/her writing. As a veteran teacher, Mrs. Rose did not keep a record of students' progress, but was very familiar with the progress that most students were making in composition.
Mrs. Rose's interactions with the two focal students varied in the study. In Joy's case, the teacher often regarded Joy's performance in class as lacking motivation, partially because of Joy's active personality. In some occasions, Joy forgot to bring her writings to school and other times, she appeared to bother other students during writing activities. There were also interactions between Joy and Mrs. Rose during the writing conferences. However, those conferences were generally not very successful. The two examples of writing conferences in Joy's case demonstrated that Joy did not quite understand Mrs. Rose's suggestions. In one example, the teacher confused Joy about the intention of elaborate writing, whereas in the other example, the teacher failed to recognize Joy's challenge in writing the piece. While in both examples, the teacher was trying her best to help, the young writer misunderstood the intentions that the teacher was offering.

Compared with the interactions between Joy and the teacher, Nora's interactions with the teacher were very scarce. Nora was usually placed in the hallway in a smaller group and assisted by Mr. Gu. When seated in the class, Nora was often busy listening to Mr. Gu's interpretation and observing Mrs. Rose's instruction. She was a very quiet student who did not initiate any conversation with other students, including Joy. The writing samples of Nora showed that she was able to complete many writing tasks, especially the book reports, with only a little help from Mr. Gu, yet she was not observed having any conversations with the ESL teacher regarding her writing. One possible explanation might be that her quiet personality, together with the fact that she needed Mr. Gu's interpretation in class, made the ESL teacher difficult to evaluate if she had understood the writing process or the teacher's intention. The conversations about Nora's writing often occurred between Mrs. Rose and Mr. Gu, the latter of whom would later transfer the discussion to Nora. Such a style of writing conferences not only might affect the amount of
information being transferred, but also deprived Nora of the opportunities to have personal interactions with the ESL teacher. The consequence was that the teacher was unable to assess the development in Nora's writing. In my communication with the teacher, she was aware that Nora had the English background, but unsure how to help the student to initiate a conversation with her. While I understood that it was partially due to Nora's personality, I also wonder if the lack of interaction was another reason. Educated in China, Nora was not quite used to the learning style where students should actively participate in a conversation. The more access to this style, the more she could understand and learn from the process. However, the lack of interactions made the child unable to have such experiences.

*Parents' perception of learning and writing.* Different from the parents of kindergarten participants, all the parents of 3rd graders understood that their children could write and writing was a very important part in language learning. They all held high expectations for their children regarding the development in writing, either in one language or both languages. For example, Joy's parents hoped that she could progress well in both Chinese and English; Nora's mom expected Nora to gain as many English writing skills as possible within their one-year stay in the US; and Jay's mom anticipated that Jay could develop his English writing faster and maintain his Chinese.

While all parents were concerned about children's learning, their involvement in the learning process was different and had varied effects on the children's writing development. Joy's mom participated in her daughter's learning actively. She interacted constantly with the ESL teacher, the Chinese teacher as well the teacher in the all-English class. She even went to some classes to observe and ensure Joy's performance. Once she found that Joy was not behaving well in class, she immediately took actions and used her knowledge of academic composition to guide
Joy in her English writing at home. She took the approach of writing process and helped Joy to revise her writings in four steps. The time she spent with Joy on writing was not wasted and Joy's writings in both languages showed great improvement in organization. Therefore, in Joy's case, parent's involvement played a positive role in language learning especially in writing.

Nora's parent showed a different approach to language learning. The mother believed in Nora's self-discipline for Chinese since the child's writing had always excelled in China. During the father's short visit to the US, Nora was able to catch up with the lessons in the new Chinese textbooks, but the parents followed traditional methods of Chinese teaching in those days: asking Nora to read the texts and practice characters. In general, Nora's parents played a role of facilitator who tried to provide opportunities for their daughter to try different experiences in both languages. However, Nora's decline in her Chinese might generate a question of how parents should balance the time spent on each language. Due to the mother's expectation, she had Nora spend considerably more time on oral English, which simultaneously reduced her time to maintain her Chinese.

Compared with other adults, Jay's parents were the only ones who did not speak the same language as the participant. The mother spent much time each night to help Jay with his homework. In order to ensure that Jay adapted to his foster family, the parents proposed that he stay at school only half a day. Although this proposal increased the amount of time that Jay could spend with his new family, it negatively affected Jay's perception of schooling. Jay started to forget ESL homework or failed to complete and submit it on time. The teacher soon talked to the parents and persuaded them to keep Jay in school full time. The difference between Chinese and American cultures in terms of homework also became an obstacle for the parents. The Chinese homework, according to Mr. Gu, was a normal amount for his students, yet Jay's parents
perceived it as too much. In addition, the lack of resources also created a dilemma for the parents in terms of maintaining Jay's Chinese. One the one hand, they understood the difficulty of maintaining Chinese in school and expressed the inclination of providing extra Chinese help for Jay. On the other hand, the lack of resources made them unable to provide such help outside school and they articulated to both teachers and Jay about quitting Chinese class. Jay's attitude toward Chinese learning was thus influenced by the parents' lingering decisions; as a result Jay began to shorten his weekly journals and repeatedly forgot to complete homework.

By comparing the form of parents' participation in their children's learning, I learned a great deal of how parents' involvement may affect students' development in learning a language. The focus of each parent varied, but all were eager to provide a positive learning environment for their children. Active participation helped students to gain more knowledge in writing and be more focused in learning, while parents' overemphasis on learning English resulted in students' gradual decline in their native language writing.

Writing in two languages. The English writings of all three children demonstrated the influence of their first language. Native language not only facilitated students' learning, but also became a way of self-expression embedded in English writing. Nora's ESL writing started with Chinese. In her journals and poems, she wrote in Chinese to express her ideas and used the language to guide her English. Jay also used Chinese in ESL class when he wrote a letter to Mr. Gu for his birthday. The format he used was very similar to the Chinese letter writing style. Joy, although not as proficient in Chinese as other participants, wrote some Chinese characters in her books as a way to entertain herself. All these examples showed students were using the linguistic resources they acquired from the native language class in another class setting.

However in Chinese class, I hardly saw Nora and Jay writing English in their Chinese
entries and Joy was the only one who occasionally used English in her Chinese writings including title of books, the names of holidays, places and people. The main reason for such a difference lay in students' proficiency in two languages. While Jay and Nora were more proficient in Chinese, they might still encounter some characters that they could not write. In those circumstances, they would use Pinyin to represent the characters, a common method that children in China are using. However, for Joy, who was more proficient in English than Chinese, using pinyin was not an automatic method.

**Language transfer in writing.** Many scholarly works have documented the linguistic transfer that bilingual or ELLs experience, yet most of them focused on the transfer at the oral level. The language transfer that will be discussed in this paper was more concentrated on the writing strategies and techniques that students used in both languages.

The three participants in this chapter all demonstrated their writing techniques in one language or another. For example, Joy was a very expressive writer. She used questions, exclamation sentences, etc to depict her personal experiences in English. Her writings were filled with her own voice as a young writer and she used writing as a channel to communicate with and entertain her friends in the world of composition. Nora, who was not as proficient in English as Joy, used Chinese as a means to describe her life. In her Chinese journals, she outlined many experiences she had as a newcomer to this country. The rich description in her Chinese journals demonstrated many writing skills, such as using metaphor, simile and examples to illustrate her main ideas. The focused writing showed that she was an excellent writer in Chinese. Jay, who also was new to the English language, displayed his writing abilities in Chinese as well. Jay distinguished himself from the other two girls in his detailed writing. He incorporated dialogues as well as varied adverbs to create stories and write journals.
The students all had certain writing techniques in one language, yet when they wrote in the other language, their original skills did not seem to be reflected. For instance, Joy's strong voice in her English writing was seldom seen in his Chinese. Joy's Chinese journals consisted of entries that chronicled the events during certain days. From those writings, readers could hardly sense the writer's own feelings. In Nora's case, the writer's skill in rich description was lost in her English writings. In Nora's English journals, similar to the writings that Joy did in her Chinese, most entries were simply descriptions of a picture from the textbook instead of expressing her own emotions. Similarly, Jay’s ability to use dialogue and details in his Chinese writings was hardly seen in most of his early English texts. Although he incorporated some strategies later, they were not very steadily reflected in his English writings.

All the evidence above suggested that the transfer of writing strategies or techniques was not an automatic process. Students who were proficient speakers and writers in one language had difficulties writing in another language even with the same techniques or strategies that they had already mastered. The reasons for the failure to transfer those techniques were multifold. One reason was the proficiency in both languages. All the 3rd graders in this study were proficient in one language but not both. Joy was raised in the US and attended schools in the US since kindergarten. Compared with other participants, she was the most proficient in English. However, she only received 30-45 minutes of Chinese since kindergarten, considerably less Chinese education than other participants. Her writings also showed that she was more capable of writing with her voice in English rather than Chinese. In Chinese writings, she often had difficulty finding the words she wanted to use. Jay and Nora both were excellent speakers of Chinese and wrote Chinese before they came to the US. The strategies used in Chinese writings did not transfer to writing English, which was limited by their English vocabulary.
The failure to transfer may also be the result of the disconnection between ESL and Chinese classes. First, the topics or genres that students practiced in ESL class were usually not practiced in Chinese class. Mrs. Rose regarded writing as an important part of literacy. Topics such as ancient cultures or plants were introduced during the semester. In Jay's class, Mrs. Long also allowed students to experiment with different genres in class. Students learned writing from content-based instruction such as the science unit of plants. However, in Chinese class, only journal writing and once-a-term essay were assigned. The topics for journal writing were open to students whereas the topics for the term paper were restricted to “Spring” and “Fall”. In addition, the topics that students experienced in ESL readings were not connected to the Chinese textbook. In ESL class, students joined their book clubs and wrote reports about the books they were reading. Yet in Chinese class, even though the textbook contained numerous readings, none of them were closely connected to the ones from ESL class. The Chinese teacher did not usually connect the topics in the textbook to students' knowledge learned from ESL class either.

The strategies that students used in either language were not recognized, which might also affect students’ ability to transfer their strengths into the other language. In the ESL class, Joy's strong voice in writing was often neglected. Such a trait was not recognized as strength in Joy's writing. Therefore, when Joy was writing in Chinese, she might not consider her voice as exceptional. Similarly, in Chinese class the teacher focused on the correctness of characters rather than other traits in writing; therefore, students' strengths were not directly acknowledged. For example, Nora’s description with four-character idioms and her ability to focus on particular events in her Chinese writings were not explicitly noted by the teacher; neither was Jay's style of using dialogue in journal writing pointed out by the teacher. Given the lack of acknowledgement of students’ strengths, transferring effective techniques from one language to another was very
difficult.
Chapter 6
Discussion

In this chapter, I will start with an overview of the cases, then synthesize the findings from the writing development at each grade level and finally provide some instructional implications.

Three questions were raised in the current study in order to examine the writing development of young ELLs. Specifically, I aimed to discover how kindergarten ELLs developed as writers in Chinese and English, how 3rd grade ELLs improved their writing in both languages, and what were some similarities and differences between the two groups.

The data of this study were generated from the following sources: observing writing activities in all four ESL classes (2 classes in each grade) and the Chinese class in each grade, analyzing the writing samples, as well as examining the interviews with teachers, focal students, their parents and an administrator. The experiences of having contact with the teachers, the children, as well as the parents provided me with rich information about the development of ELL children’s writing at early elementary grade levels. The younger children held a unique perception of the relationship between pictures and writing. Their invented spelling developed quickly as they increased their understanding of English language and content knowledge. The 3rd grade children had many more writing assignments than younger children and most of the writing instruction was conducted in ESL classes. In both grades, writing instruction played a critical role in the students’ writing development. How teachers organized their writing instruction and interacted with the writers were vital to the improvement in writing at both grade levels. In addition to the influence of the class context, parents also played an important role in the process of development.
The Development of Kindergarten Writers

The Chinese-speaking ELLs from the two grade levels were chosen to understand their development in English and Chinese writing. The children included four from kindergarten, two from 3rd grade and one from 2/3rd grade. While they came from different grade levels, their writing improved substantially during the course of the observations. In this chapter, I will focus on the comparison of the two grade levels and discuss the similarities and differences regarding the writing development of students from the two grades. I also asked how the similarities and differences might inform us about the role of writing instruction in ELLs’ development.

Four kindergarten writers were selected in the study. The findings not only showed ELLs’ understanding of writing, but also reflected the role of students' prior knowledge of the English language. Those findings were complicated by the social relationships that children were experiencing in the class setting, especially with teachers.

First, kindergarten ELLs had unique understandings of the relationship between pictures and writings. Similar to the children in existing research, for most young writers in this study, pictures appeared before writing occurred (Clay, 1980). However, one child in the study started with writing and then turned to picture drawing. Such a tendency suggested that the order of picture and writing might be an indicator of children's writing development. While most children were using pictures to guide their writing, this child had possibly formulated ideas in her mind before composing, which indicated a more advanced stage of writing development where writers utilized their own understanding of the topic rather than the visual stimulation of a picture.

In addition, many writers at this stage seemed to believe that pictures were more effective than words in telling stories. This understanding could be the result of their limited English proficiency, which constrained them from using linguistic markers to deliver meaning. Yet, for
the aforementioned writer, pictures, although occurring after composing, were still included in
the writing process; this suggested the importance of pictures in story telling among young
children.

For some writers, writing only told part of the stories, so readers might need background
information to comprehend the entire story. By understanding the relationship between pictures
and writing in this way, the writers invited readers to get involved in the stories they were
creating. They asked readers to conjecture the meaning behind the pictures as well as providing
an avenue to connect to the picture. Either the invitation or the involvement in conjecture
demonstrates children's unique perception of the relationship between pictures and writing while
taking audience into consideration.

The study also illustrated the importance of social factors in students' writing
development such as the interactions between the ESL teachers and students as well as the
influence of parents on children's understanding of native language writing. The writing
instruction that each kindergarten ESL class provided seemed to play a critical role in the
children's writing development. The two teachers showed different approaches to teaching and
understanding writing. While Mrs. Cane valued children's shared experiences of composition,
Mrs. Macy tended to have her students rely on their own abilities. Hence, the interactions
between teacher and students varied according to teachers' perceptions of writing and writing
instruction. The results of the study also showed the difference among young writers under such
influences. The students in Mrs. Cane's class were eager to share their writings both with the
teacher and with their classmates. Mrs. Cane created a welcoming atmosphere for students to
share their own writings and valued the texts that others produced. The class writing activities
such as the prewriting discussions, the writing conferences and hands on experiments
encouraged those kindergarten ELLs to use English to express their ideas. Both writers in this class developed writing smoothly during the course of the study.

In contrast, Mrs. Macy’s class focused more on individual writing. Students were asked to write alone, sharing the final product only with the teacher. Students in the class seemed to have accepted this norm and interacted solely with the teacher about their writing. While this practice helped students to concentrate on their own compositions, it discouraged children from collaborating with each other. The conference between teacher and students was also conducted without any input from other students. Such conferences usually occurred after the composition and took the form of “question and answer”, meaning that the teacher asked the writer one or two questions and the writer answered accordingly. The two focal students in this class showed different approaches to writing under the influence of the teacher's instruction. The more advanced writer appeared to be very quiet. Very few conversations were captured between this girl and the teacher even though she had many interesting ideas. The other student in the same class was also quiet at the beginning due to his oral English proficiency, yet as his oral English improved, he did not answer the questions the teacher raised during the conference. Moreover, even though the teacher encouraged individual writing, her instruction failed to realize the uniqueness of each writer. While Mrs. Macy stressed the importance of writing individually, she did not point out the voice or other features that writers expressed through their texts. The two examples indicated the ineffectiveness of such writing instruction and the attention that individual writers needed, especially when students were trying to use a new language to express their voices.

Another social factor that affected students writing development was the parents' involvement in children's learning. To be specific, parents' understanding of learning Chinese
seemed to have affected students’ native language writing. Almost all kindergarten students' parents were amazed at how students were able to write in ESL classes. For Chinese writing, parents had originally believed that only by establishing some basic knowledge of Chinese pinyin and characters could they begin to “write”. Therefore, the focal children rarely had any authentic opportunities at home that promoted Chinese writing. Due to the education that parents received when they were leaning Chinese, children as young as kindergarten were presumed unable to write until they gain the above basic abilities. Such beliefs also corresponded to the teaching philosophy of the native language teacher who learned writing in a similar manner. Writing, to their understanding, required children to use correct characters or pinyin to deliver certain meaning. In addition, in China, children do not start systematic public education until grade one when they begin to receive instruction on writing characters and pinyin. Although the word “writing”, translated into Chinese, could mean either writing characters or composing, many parents of younger children tended to emphasize the correctness of characters or pinyin more than meaning making. A common notion among Chinese parents is that writing exemplifies the ability to copy and remember the characters. The above reasons could justify the surprise that parents had shown when hearing and reading the compositions children completed in ESL classes. Such surprise also revealed the clashes in the writing instruction between Chinese class and ESL class.

Parents' perceptions of writing in Chinese might have affected their children's Chinese development in the aspects including but not limited to: fewer opportunities provided to accommodate the emerging interest and overemphasis of correctness. On the one hand, parents may not realize students’ emerging interest in expressing themselves through scribbles and words. Therefore, the early signs of random lines and shapes might simply have been overlooked as play
rather than the early signs of writing. Some children might get scolded for scribbling on the board or messing with papers. With no accommodation to guide and support this play-like action, children were left alone in the process of emergent writing. Once students started learning pinyin and characters in school, like the focal children did in this study, parents' perception of “satisfactory performance” might make them easily detect errors in children's homework. Those errors may be considered as unacceptable mistakes rather than markers of a natural process when children experiment with emergent writing. Children, therefore, might perceive errors and writing in a similar way—in order to please the teacher or the parents, they needed to focus on correctness over meaning making.

While I stress the importance of children's ability to use the language in writing, I am not disregarding the role of correctness in Chinese writing. Similar to English, word choices in Chinese are vital as well. A subtle difference in writing a character may result in a different meaning; therefore, it is important to take correctness into consideration. Yet, for younger children, the overemphasis on the accuracy of characters may fail to realize their creativity, considering that they are still at a stage of exploring, experimenting and experiencing a language in which they receive only thirty minutes of instruction.

The Development of Third Grade Writers

Similar to kindergarten children, the writing development of 3rd grade ELLs was also affected by many social factors such as parents' perceptions of language acquisition and involvement in children's learning, as well as the interactions in the classroom between teacher and focal students. In addition, the transfer between the two languages also presented an interesting feature that may help teachers and parents to offer their help in children's writing development.
First, classroom instruction greatly affected students' attitudes toward writing. For all three 2nd/3rd grade children, the writing instruction they received played a critical role in their writing development. The instruction that the two teachers offered differed in their focus: Mrs. Long emphasized all aspects of language learning and Mrs. Rose had always been an advocate for ESL writing. Mrs. Long's instruction, therefore, was incorporating reading, writing, speaking and listening in most activities. Her aim was to offer instruction that would help students who were new to the country to catch up with their native English-speaking peers and improve their communication skills. New students, such as Jay, were able to learn communicative skills at the same time as the academic skills. Jay's writing development corresponded to Cummins's (1979) proposal that ELL students need more time to develop their academic abilities than their communicative abilities. While he was able to communicate with teachers and classmates, his writing was not developing at the same rate as his oral skills. The imbalance between these two types of abilities made Jay seek help from the teacher constantly: he continually relied on the assistance from the teacher and often refused to try spelling on his own.

The writing instruction that Mrs. Rose provided focused on writing process, especially the stage of revision. The writing conferences that Mrs. Rose held with her students took revision into consideration as well. With the two focal students, however, what I discovered was not a flawless picture with a teacher having a perfect conference with the ELL. Joy did not gain a better understanding of how to proceed to the next step of writing. The failure to successfully facilitate Joy's needs suggested that challenges occur in teacher-student writing conferences, even in the case of veteran teachers such as Mrs. Rose.

The conferences with Joy reflected another problem with the writing instruction. With Nora's quiet personality, there was rarely a conference between her and the ESL teacher. She was
put in a separate group most of the time out of consideration that she would study more efficiently with the Chinese teacher translating for her. However, such an arrangement was not getting the anticipated results. Nora was more active within the small group; however, whenever she was placed back into the large class, she remained quiet even though she was able to complete many tasks. The function of the Chinese teacher as an occasional mediator between Nora and Mrs. Rose failed to effectively translate and transfer the ideas from both sides. It seemed that the early placement in the small group helped Nora to be situated in a more linguistically comfortable environment, yet she was separated from the whole class so frequently that the ESL teacher was unable to truly evaluate her writing abilities.

The role of parents in children's writing development was also examined in previous research of ELL writers. Similar to McCarthey et al's (2005) study of fourth and fifth grade ELLs, the parents in this study also paid attention to students learning in school. However, different from the parents who came from Mainland China portrayed in their study, Nora's parents who were well-educated considered learning English was more important even though they planned to go back to China after a year. What's more, Jay's case proposed a new situation of how students immersed in English speaking families could maintain two languages In addition, how students expressed their writers' voices seemed to correlate with their proficiency in a more familiar language: the more proficient the writer is in that language, the more voice she/he could incorporate into writing. For all three writers in the 2nd/3rd grade, language proficiency played an important role in students' abilities to express effectively their voices. Nora and Jay's strong Chinese background ensured that they could use their existing Chinese knowledge to show their uniqueness. Similarly, Joy, who was more proficient in English, was a writer with a strong voice in English writing.
Features across Grade Levels

In both groups, there were writers that came from different proficiency levels in Chinese or English and such differences generated different effects on the children's writing development. As new learners of the English language, children who were not proficient in English were facing a common problem in literacy—writing. For these students, spelling was learned from the beginning. Kindergarteners acquired the basic knowledge of phonics and spelling through their experiences with letters, sounds, as well as pictures. Their development in spelling was observed to have many similarities to native English speakers. The stages that native English speakers experienced in the early phase of writing (Gentry, Clay, Bisex, etc.) were also found in the children's writings in this study. Such a finding corresponds to other previous scholarship that found similar results about the stages of writing development among ELLs (Samway, 2006). In addition to learning English writing, students from both groups were learning Chinese at the same time. However, different from their writing experience in English, the Chinese classes for both groups did not focus on writing at all.

The data partially support the findings of Katznelson, Perpignan and Rubin (2001) and of McCarthey, Guo and Cummins (2005) that students' ability in self-expression improves with the growth in their language proficiency. Both kindergarteners and 3rd graders' writing developed with more knowledge gained through learning and practicing. However, either grade was presenting some features that do not coincide with previous studies. While previous research noted the existence of transfer between languages among adult ELLs (Wang, 2003; Wang & Wen, 2002), as well as the transfer of story grammar for Spanish speaking children (Durgunoglu, 2002), the current study showed that such transfer was not as obvious among younger children who speak Chinese as their first language, and the 3rd graders had non-automatic transfer in their...
writing. Kindergarteners wrote English letters in their Chinese exercise sheet, but since they hardly ever had creative writings in Chinese class, the strategies they used in English writing such as implementation of voice, narration, description of personal experiences and invented spelling were not observed in their Chinese copy exercises. For 3rd graders who excelled in Chinese writing techniques such as implementation of voice, the usage of four word idioms, etc were not readily transferring those techniques to English writing. Nora, who had solid background in Chinese and higher proficiency in English than Jay, seldom wrote with her voice and use examples in English, while Jay was able to incorporate voice as well as examples and details in English writing. As a writer who was more proficient in English writing, Joy transferred only some techniques from English to Chinese. The current study also enriches our understanding of the notion and practice of writing with voice, which has been scarcely researched in the writing studies among young ELL writers. While 3rd graders had gained more proficiency and were apt to use their linguistic knowledge and express their voices, the kindergarteners were able to express their emotions through invented words and pictures. By comparing the writing development of seven students, I found some commonalities that prevail across the grades.

The disconnection between learning to write in Chinese and in English. Although both English and Chinese were taught in school, class activities, teachers’ instruction as well as writing opportunities differed between ESL class and Chinese class. Consequently, learning Chinese and learning English were disconnected as two distinct experiences. This finding corresponds to McCarthey et al's (2004) study where fourth and fifth grade ELLs negotiated the norms and practices in multiple writing contexts. Students in the current study spent most of their school time receiving English instruction. The ESL class and the all-English classes were taught
by native English speaking teachers and the Chinese class, by Mr. Gu, who had been teaching Chinese in the school for almost 20 years. For kindergarteners, the Chinese class took 30 minutes everyday. Students learned to write simple characters in the first semester and Chinese pinyin in the second semester. Class activities consisted of reading and identifying characters with the teacher and copying characters and pinyin afterwards. For 3rd grade Chinese students, the Chinese class took 45 minutes originally and was adjusted to 30 minutes for Nora and Joy. Mr. Gu used the textbooks from China as a teaching guideline and students normally did not have any other complementary readings in class. Class time was spent mostly on reading comprehension, copying new words and dictation.

The disconnection is shown in the form of writing in Chinese and ESL classes. The writing activities in the kindergarten Chinese class were dominated copying and practicing the characters and pinyin they were learning. The characters usually did not have any common theme in meaning, but shared some similar strokes. The pinyin that students were learning in one class period did not have commonality in meaning either. By copying the pinyin, students were expected to master the basic knowledge of labeling Chinese with sound. Yet throughout the school year, there were barely any opportunities for children to practice free writing. Students' learning was focused on the knowledge transmitted rather than creating writings of their own or applying the characters or pinyin in authentic writing practices. On the contrary, both ESL classes provided opportunities for students to explore the language and apply it to authentic circumstances. Mrs. Cane created a friendly and welcoming atmosphere for students to appropriate the new language they were learning. Children in this class shared their experiences, through pictures and invented spelling, with both peers and the teacher. The other kindergarten class, although providing fewer opportunities to share writing, still promoted students' writing
through journaling and writing letters. In both classes, therefore, writing became a channel where students could utilize their linguistic tools in literacy practices.

For 3rd grade students, such disconnection between Chinese and ESL also existed. The three focal students from 3rd grade ESL classes had Chinese together at first and were separated into two groups later in the first semester due to the time conflict with a math class. While they were taught in different time slots, the writing instruction was the same for all three students: weekly journals and two term papers completed after class. During class time, students read textbooks that contained many short articles and copied the characters from those readings to memorize the Chinese characters. Textbooks served as a guideline for reading and were rarely used in writing instruction. Students did not have any specific instruction in the techniques in writing. Therefore, they often had to conjecture by themselves the strategies and techniques to achieve their purpose in composition. In the two 2nd/3rd ESL classes, however, writing was either integrated in content-based instruction or considered a crucial part of the class content. In one class, students shared their writings with their classmates and often had writing conferences with the ESL teacher in the process of revision. Students also learned writing through content-based instruction such as science and social studies. In the other ESL class, the teacher encouraged students to use different resources and promoted vocabulary in writing. Students formed groups in the science unit to compose science notes and quiz questions.

In addition, the content of writing was disconnected between Chinese and ESL classes. Kindergarten children did not use any textbooks in their ESL classes, and the teachers followed the guidelines from the district. During the school year of my observation, students learned about rocks, plants, solar systems, as well as holidays. Students wrote about the content knowledge while they were learning English. In the Chinese class however, no specific content was assigned.
With the curriculum designed by the teacher himself, students started learning pinyin and characters, which did not have any overlap with the content in ESL class. The Chinese class was not content-based either. Most of the time, the characters had some similar strokes so that students could combine and make new characters. Children learned characters and pinyin through repeatedly pronouncing and copying them. However, the meaning of those characters was not necessarily related because there was no particular theme among the characters learned in one class period or even in a week. The knowledge learned in Chinese class was therefore constrained, and it was difficult for students to transfer the content from this class to others. At the same time, the content that children learned from their ESL class was not mentioned or practiced in the Chinese class, which also suggested that the content from the Chinese bore no connection to that in the ESL setting. Therefore, the writing instruction in Chinese class set up a sharp contrast with the diverse writing instruction that ESL classes were providing. The disconnection between Chinese and ESL instruction may have prevented students from being able to connect the writing strategies.

The lack of authentic writing opportunities in Chinese class set up a sharp contrast with the writing practices that were implemented in the ESL classes. In Mrs. Cane's class, writing not only served as a way of learning, but also as a communicative tool. Students began to understand the emotional world of the teacher through writing and the teacher got to know her children via the same manner. In this class, writing became a tool for communication. The daily short note on the blackboard adds students' understanding of the purpose of writing in Mrs. Cane's class. With the model established by the teacher, it was easier for students to accept writing as a natural literacy behavior. Instead of making copies of letters or words, students used their invented spelling to create ideas. In the Chinese class, however, students lacked authentic writing
opportunities. Copying pinyin and characters by following the teacher was the major activity in class. Chinese knowledge was inculcated rather than internalized through the actual use of linguistic elements. Although students sometimes played games as a whole class to facilitate learning, those games were used to help memorize characters or pinyin instead of being used to express ideas or communicate among children. Students viewed these games as exercises rather than language learning experiences.

A similar situation could be seen in 3rd grade ESL classes as well. Yet different from kindergarteners, 3rd graders had more experiences writing about content area topics. Writing therefore became a channel through which students could learn. The content knowledge was thus internalized while reading books about plant science and ancient cultures, experimenting with different materials in class, and writing about the ideas they learned as well as writing their reflections and observations. All these writing activities provided students with authentic opportunities of using writing to learn content knowledge. Yet, for the same group of Chinese students, native language class was devoted to copying the new characters from the textbook, taking dictation or inviting the Chinese teacher to explain the texts.

The lack of authentic writing opportunities may be the result of the culture of language teaching as prevalent in China as well as the result of the arrangement of class time. As discussed earlier, the Chinese class in the focal school was similar to the class that both the Chinese teacher and Chinese parents received when they were in school. In addition, in many Chinese elementary schools, Chinese class was designed for students to learn the language only. Therefore, it often does not overlap with any content area knowledge. With their own Chinese learning experiences, the Chinese teacher and the parents of the focal children would regard this type of Chinese class as a natural and acceptable phenomenon.
Moreover, the Chinese class was only allotted half an hour for kindergarten and 45 minutes for 3rd graders; therefore, it was difficult for the teacher to elaborate on content knowledge. Teaching writing was a challenge within such a constrained period of time. The teacher, therefore, might have compromised his instruction to the maintenance of oral Chinese. Instead of helping students to improve their writing abilities, retaining the oral language seemed to satisfy the basic expectations of the parents and appeared to be easier for the teacher to implement his instruction. McCarthey et al (2004) showed similar findings in their study of the 4th and 5th grade ELL writers whose Chinese teacher had to reconcile with the structured time frame and parents' concern about language loss (p. 370). The disconnection between Chinese writing instruction and English writing instruction was the result of multiple factors. In either case, students' existing knowledge of writing was seemingly maintained. However, the decline in the writing of some 3rd grade participants exemplified the limitation of this type of instruction. Also building on students' existing knowledge to further their understanding of writing was not achieved either. Chinese class claimed that oral language was the main focus and emphasized reading, thus separating writing from the other language arts. While the idea of maintaining students' oral Chinese was the expectation of many parents; the way that the class was organized made it difficult to achieve this basic goal, not to mention writing, a task that many parents considered as a higher order skill.

Parents' perspectives on writing development. Parents' perspectives on learning were shown to have critical effects on the writing development of children from both grade levels. Such effects were reflected in parents' facilitating literacy at home and communicating with teachers as well.

3rd grade children were influenced by their parents' perception in the process of learning.
When parents showed their enthusiasm for students' learning, the children were more willing to participate in the literacy activities. The parents of Joy showed the most enthusiasm and interest in the child's learning. Her mother integrated family literacy with her personal experience in English writing. By working together with Joy, the parents demonstrated their support for Joy's improvement in literacy through close attention to her performance in school and providing prompt scaffolding at home. The support that Nora's parent provided represents the perspective from another group of parents who wanted their children to focus on English during their short stay in the US. While she still expected the child to maintain her native language, she focused more on speaking, listening and reading abilities in English rather than writing, since those are assumed to be more important traits children needed to master if they wanted to use English in the future. The Burks were representative of parents who faced a dilemma of providing adequate support for children's development in both languages. Such a problem actually perplexed many Chinese parents as well. The opportunities for students to practice Chinese at this grade level were very limited given an all-English environment that students were immersed in everyday. While they had Chinese each weekday, the class was not able to provide them with all the necessary Chinese skills. Students spent most their class time taking in the knowledge rather than creating their own ideas. The time was also constrained to less than one hour for each class period. Therefore, students may need to find other resources to maintain or further enhance their Chinese. Parents often played the role of seeking those resources. Jay was in an all-English environment at home and the parents found little success in finding available resources for Chinese outside the school setting. The failure to locate resources created a dilemma for the parents—whether to keep the child in the Chinese class or not. Jay, under such parental influence, also began to show negligence in fulfilling Chinese homework. At the same time, Jay's parents
also wanted Jay to spend less time in school in order to bond with the new family, which unintentionally sent a message to the child that school was less important and made him slack off in ESL class.

Although it was easier for most Chinese parents to create a Chinese-speaking environment at home, the fact that children began speaking in both languages still bothered some adults, especially the parents of some kindergarteners. Compared with the parents of older children, these parents were concerned more about the overall development of their children and expected that they could maintain Chinese easily. Most kindergarten children's parents, therefore, asked children to practice copying characters and use the Chinese dictionary at home before the students started US schooling. The children, therefore, were more apt to use the resources that parents provided. Most kindergarteners in this study were eager to learn Chinese because they were affected by their parents' positive perspective toward native language learning. Yet at the same time, since most parents still perceived Chinese writing as inaccessible for young children, writing in Chinese at home was infrequent. Previous research on parents' involvement in the writing development also pointed out the importance of parents' support for home literacy (McCarthey & Garcia, 2005). Yet how such involvement may have impacted ELLs' school performance was less researched. The current study views the involvement of focal parents as significant social factors that may affect children's understanding of writing. A positive perspective on literacy contributed to children's increased confidence in learning languages. More importantly, many parents scaffolded the students in action, offering specific support and engaged them in literacy experiences both at home and in school. On the contrary, those who showed less support for students' literacy found their children to be less enthusiastic about learning. In this sense, the parents were creating a social environment where children were
The effect of teacher-student interaction on writing development. In addition to the impact of parents' varied perspectives on writing and learning, the interaction between teacher and students also played an important role in children's writing development. Both in kindergarten and 3rd grade ESL classes, interaction occurred frequently between teacher and students, and such interactions were vital to children's understanding and attitude towards writing. A positive, friendly and welcoming writing atmosphere allowed children to use their imagination and share it with their peers. Yet at the same time, I also noticed how complex interactions were in both grades.

The study reiterates the importance of sharing and interacting with peers as well as with text during the writing process, as discussed in a number of Dyson's studies. Mrs. Cane, Mrs. Rose and Mrs. Long all intended to create a positive environment for writing. Mrs. Cane promoted writing as a shared experience. Children in the class were encouraged to share their writings both with the teacher and other classmates. The interactions between the teacher and the students also showed that students enjoyed writing and talking about writing either in front of the teacher or with the whole class. Mrs. Rose's 3rd grade ESL class also highly encouraged interactions during the writing process. Almost every student would have some opportunities to converse with the teacher about their writings. The teacher-student writing conferences thus became a routine activity in this class. The interactions in Mrs. Long's class mostly focused on providing timely assistance to students' needs in spelling and responding to students' written work. Mrs. Long used nonverbal hints to prepare students for their science experiments and to get ready for writing, which illustrated her intention of offering a positive context for writing.

All four classes faced different challenges regarding the teacher-student interaction. Due
to some misunderstandings, Mrs. Rose did not have very successful conferences with Joy or Nora, the two focal students in the class; they showed different attitudes towards writing because of their conference experiences. Students' dislike of writing or fear of writing conferences showed how the interactions during the writing conferences may affect students' perceptions and attitudes towards writing. Although Mrs. Rose had taught ESL class and conducted writing conferences for a number of years, the difference between students' personalities and how students perceived and responded to feedback still needed teacher's serious consideration.

Mrs. Long faced the challenge of how to get beginning writers to create their own writing. The weak English background of the focal student in her class made writing tasks even harder. The teacher also had to respond to the challenge of the student's unwillingness to experiment with his own spelling. The focal student in this class was new to English and relied on the teacher to provide correct spelling for him at the beginning of the study. In the middle of the school year he showed some invented spelling, a type of spelling that was often observed among kindergarten children. However, toward the end of the year, he again depended on adults to provide correct spelling for him. How to balance the assistance to students and the independence that ELLs needed in writing thus became a challenge for Mrs. Long.

Mrs. Cane's challenge in the class was consistently providing active interactions with students. Since many parents were visiting the U.S. for a short time, their children would leave the class after one year. The same situation occurred to one of the focal students in this class, which reduced his opportunities to interact with the teacher about his writing at the end of the school year. Therefore, it was challenging for Mrs. Cane to maintain consistency in interacting with students about their writing while they were busy preparing for their return to the home country. All these challenges suggest that the communication between the teacher and students
depends upon teachers' willingness to give students enough time and space to respond. For ELLs, the complex nature of teacher-students interactions coexisted with factors such as the parents' plan of staying in the US, student's English proficiency and students' eagerness to take initiation in such interactions.

The interactions between teacher and students were less frequent in Mrs. Macy's kindergarten ESL class. The only interaction between teacher and students was after writing when students submitted their work. Different from other classes where students interacted with each other and conversed with the teacher about their writing in depth, the students in this class were asked to conduct individual writing and the conversation between teacher and students often followed the Initiation/Response/Evaluation (IRE) communication pattern (Mehan, 1979). Cadzen (1988) suggested that the IRE pattern may deprive students of their opportunities to engage and enjoy literacy activities. Decades since the publication of Cadzen's book, this type of interaction was still prevalent in the classrooms studied. The teacher's perception of journal writing determined her writing instruction. Instruction like this resulted in students' dislike for composition. Similar to the class described in Toohey's (1998) study, such a class environment and teaching philosophy were apparently destructive to learning writing in a joyful way.

**Non-linearity of writing development.** The study confirmed the non-linear characteristic of children's writing development. For kindergarten children, the feature was evident in their spelling development. Most students' ability to spell progressed in a way similar to young native English speakers. Although the stages of writing development were not specified, the general discussion of invented spelling did show that the ELLs' spelling went from simple to complex, from single syllable and repeated letters to multiple syllables and phrases. Such evidence demonstrated the overall progress of the kindergarten ELL writers. However,
their progress was not straightforward. An occasional regression was a characteristic illustrated in almost all cases. Yet, students used this opportunity to experiment with new ideas and methods in spelling, which ultimately helped them to grow as young writers of two languages.

A similar situation was found among 3\textsuperscript{rd} grade ELL cases, where non-linearity was reflected in their development and transfer of voice between languages. Different from previous research (Durgunoglu, 2002) where 4\textsuperscript{th} grade children were able to successfully follow the story grammar in two languages, this study presents some uneven development of writing with voice in English and Chinese. Students' utilization and the ability to transfer voice varied. While proficiency in a certain language may have played a role in those circumstances, there were discrepancies among cases: Nora who was a skillful Chinese writer composed without a similarly strong voice in her second language writing; Joy who was more proficient in English showed her voice more in English writing. Jay, however, was able to write with voice in both languages, although his proficiency in either language fluctuated during the course of the study. The differences here indicate the complexity regarding the transfer of voice in the writing process, which is non-automatic in nature for these third graders. Possibly, students might need further development in writing in two languages to gain the ability to transfer voice, or they might need teachers' assistance to initiate the transfer from one language to another, and to integrate voice in writing. Building upon students' existing knowledge of voice such as their self-expression, understanding of one's identity, perception of ownership, etc, might help students to further recognize their potential as writers.

Implications

The similarities and differences among the four cases at the kindergarten level are informative to both teachers and parents of young ELLs. First, many writers share similar
features in their writing development. For example, writers used pictures to accompany the writings they created. Even though the reliance on pictures differed, all the focal children started writing by focusing on the pictures rather than on the written work. Therefore, at the beginning stage of writing development, teachers and parents may pay special attention to children's scribbling and intention to tell stories. Encouraging children to tell stories through pictures may help them to invest in narration.

All the focal students presented their non-linear development in English writing. None of the writers developed writing in a straightforward manner. Some students failed to internalize spellings long after they grasped the spelling rules, some students regressed in their vocabulary, and some discontinued their original excellent narration skills. Although all students improved their writing in the long term, teachers and parents need to be aware of this curved feature. Instead of blaming children for their mistakes in writing, teachers need to understand that it is just a temporary stage in children's writing development. They used the regression period to explore different aspects of writing and accumulated their knowledge of print for later use in their writing practices. Therefore, more time and patience are needed for students to develop their writing skills. At the same time, teachers and parents could have casual conversations with children about their writing, such as encouraging them to tell more about the story while pointing out their previous correct spellings.

The cases in this study indicated that each writer is different. Each individual writer had his or her own understanding of writing, audience and topics. While understanding that young writers share some similarities in their writing development, educators should value the individual difference that each writer brings to us and target his/her uniqueness in composition. With more targeted instruction that focuses on individual variation, children would be able to
perceive themselves more as writers of that language.

Parents' perception of writing had a significant impact on children's Chinese writing. On the one hand, all the kindergarteners' parents were very eager to get involved in their children's literacy activities. They all sent their children to the daycare centers where students could communicate with English-speaking children. At home, they provided as rich literacy environments as possible. Some parents also endeavored to keep contact with the teachers to learn about their children in school. On the other hand, all the parents in the study showed their surprise when they saw their children's work. Their presumption was that children at this age and grade level were unable to write at all, either in English or in Chinese, and they need to accumulate enough vocabulary before actually writing. Such an understanding might prevent them from noticing the teachable moments and from encouraging children to explore the world of writing. Therefore, parents can have more communication with teachers to learn the literacy activities in which children are participating in English classes and with native language teachers to exchange ideas about writing to achieve the best result. Some basic knowledge of children's writing development may also help parents to decide how and when to give support in the process.

In the 3rd grade, the factors such as the type of writing instruction, the interactions in classrooms, as well parents' perception of learning and writing affected the focal students' writing development in both languages. Their writing also highlighted the fact that the writing strategies and writing with voices were not automatically transferred from a language in which they were more proficient to the second language. Those characteristics arising from the analysis may provide us with information about young ELLs' writing development as well as the challenges they encounter in the process of learning to write.
To facilitate students’ writing in both languages, the ESL teachers put effort into providing students a rich writing environment. Mrs. Rose created many writing opportunities, such as class time for journaling, mini lessons, teacher-student conferences, creative story writing, etc. Mrs. Long, who was the teacher for Jay and teaching 2nd grade ESL, also used mini lessons, science inquiry projects and personal journals. All these activities activated students’ creativity and enthusiasm for writing.

While these activities in general were beneficial for students' writing development, the style of how the teacher interacted with each focal student informed us that students needed more patience, understanding and clarity in the interactions. Students' enthusiasm for writing not only comes from self-motivation, but also teachers’ appreciation of their work and encouragement for future writings. For ELL students at 2nd/3rd grade levels, instruction or comments that are more direct, specific and explicit in the writing conferences might achieve better results than some general guidelines, especially for students like Joy who was not enjoying the interaction or realizing her weaknesses in writing. Simultaneously, teachers need to provide challenging tasks that enable students to think critically about their current status and strive for a higher level, which is important for students like Jay who got accustomed to accepting help rather than creating his own spellings. Practices like this also correspond to Vygotsky's (1978) perspective on the zone of proximal development that values the guidance from teachers to help children to move beyond their actual writing level to a higher level of performance.

Framed by the sociocultural perspective, I also understand the importance of students being participants in a learning community where parents take part as well. The various forms of parents' participation inform us of the advantages of parents' help in students' learning. The example of Joy's parents showed us that parents' assistance outside school could successfully
complement and promote school writing. Yet at the same time, I also noticed the challenges that parents encountered in maintaining students' native languages. This prevailing obstacle calls for even stronger support from parents. The collaboration with native language teachers from school is a start, which could be followed by interactions with local native language communities.

In addition, the failure to transfer techniques and voice between Chinese and English also implies the importance of the collaboration between teachers to promote writing instruction. In all three cases, students had the opportunity to get instruction in both languages; yet valuing the techniques and skills students bring to their writing in a more familiar language may require the teachers to work together with their colleagues who speak the other language. Due to the limited writing opportunities in the Chinese class, I suggest that the Chinese teacher not only vary his assignment and grading focus, but also connect the topics to what students have learned in other classes so that children could apply their knowledge of writing in various ways. For ESL teachers, it is an invaluable opportunity to become familiar with students' writing abilities in their native language as well as the techniques and skills they have demonstrated in their writings through communicating with native language teachers or parents.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are some limitations that may influence the results of the current study. First, I chose two class settings as the major location of the study: Chinese class and ESL class. The reason I chose these two settings was based on my initial understanding of the writing opportunities that students had access to in the school. While students also attended all English classes, my conversations with the ESL teachers informed me that the ESL class was the major setting that students received their English literacy education. Therefore, I focused on the ESL setting to obtain the most information about ELLs' writing development. However, by focusing
on the ESL class, I might have overlooked the writing opportunities that students might have had in their all English class. Therefore, the study would be more systematic and complete if the third class setting was also examined.

Another limitation comes from my own background. As a native Chinese speaker, I could understand and communicate with the students as well as their parents in my native language. This advantage, at the same time, could also affect my understanding of the focal children's writing development. After receiving education in the US, I began to form some critical thinking about the traditional format of learning and language teaching in China. Such thinking might have affected my perspective on the Chinese instruction in the current study. In addition, my previous volunteering experience in the focal school might also make my analysis biased. I have been a volunteer in the current school for almost 4 years, helping one of the ESL teachers with classroom activities. My role in the classroom varied throughout my engagement there: interpreter, group leader, teacher, facilitator, etc. Visiting the school at least once every week, I became a familiar face in the hallway and thus established a good rapport with other ESL teachers in the school. While I benefited from the close relationship with the teachers, I was also challenged to maintain my objectivity during the course of the study. The teachers' personal opinions toward teaching and certain students might have affected my perspective in this process.

The nature of the study might be limited in its application to other settings. The multicultural program in the focal school is a special program offered by the city's school district. While there might be ESL students in other schools, the ESL classes were only offered to students who mainly resided within certain boundaries. Moreover, in the current school, ESL classes took a major role in literacy education. The features may appear different from other ESL programs or from other schools with ELLs. While results obtained from this study reflect the
nature of the focal school, teachers or researchers may find different situations in other contexts. Therefore, other studies might examine the experiences of ELLs in a variety of contexts.

Conclusion

The study investigated the writing development of seven Chinese-speaking children who came from two grade levels. With the analysis of their classroom writing activities, writing samples as well as the interviews with students, parents and teachers, I was able to synthesize and perceive some important factors, social and instructional, that affected children's writing development.

The study of young children's writing development offered multiple ways to understand children's literacy, contributing to both educational theory and practice. By concentrating on the writing samples and classroom activities, the study supported sociocultural theory that emphasized the social factors in children's writing development. Kindergarteners in this study, who are learning English and Chinese, are experiencing similar stages in early writing development as native speakers of English. Such a result not only corresponds to the scholarship in second language learning, but also suggests to educators the importance of supporting both languages in children's learning process.

The study offered data about the significance of parents' involvement in bilingual children's writing development and reiterates the role of the teacher in scaffolding and responding to students’ construction of texts and their voices in writing. The study also notes the effects of two different instructional settings on students' experiences in writing, which may shed light on the understanding of multilingual and multicultural programs nationwide.

The study expands our understanding of the development of young writers who are speaking Chinese as their first language. With the population of Asian students, especially
Chinese speaking children increase in public school, the study suggests to the language and literacy educators, including ESL teachers and native language teachers, the importance of providing continuous support and encouragement during writing instruction.

Finally, future research is needed regarding the integration of family literacy with school writing. Research as this would increase our understanding of other factors that may contribute to ELLs’ writing development outside the school settings.
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Appendix A

Sample ESL Teacher Interview Questions

1. Tell me your general language arts curriculum

2. What activities are provided for students to engage in writing?

3. What is your goal in teaching in general?

4. What is your goal of writing instruction for this class?

5. What features do you see regarding ___ (student name)’s writing?

6. What are the strengths and weaknesses in his/her writing?

7. How do you interpret the overall development of your students regarding writing in English?
Appendix B

Sample Chinese Teacher Interview Questions

1. What is your language arts curriculum?
2. How did you develop your curriculum?
3. What do you see as differences in your class from ESL or English classes?
4. What is your goal of writing instruction for native language class?
5. What features do you see regarding ___ (student name)’s writing in native language?
6. How do you interpret those features?
Appendix C

Sample Student Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself: Your home country, family and anything that you like to do.

2. What language(s) do you speak?

3. What language(s) do you write?

4. How often do you write in each language?

5. What do you usually write and why?

6. How do you like writing?

7. Do you see yourself as a writer in ____ language?

8. Why do you think so?

9. What do you think has been changed since you started studying here in the school?

10. How do you like the ESL class?

11. How do you like the native language class?

12. What helped you most when you write?

13. Show me some pieces of writing you did and tell me what you think as changes in your writing.
Appendix D

Sample Parent Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your child: what he/she likes after school, language background, etc

2. Are you familiar with what your child does at school?

3. What is your habit in writing and reading, as well as learning?

4. Do you think you are a “writer’ to some extent? Why do you think so?

5. How do you help your child at home regarding reading and writing? What opportunities do you provide for your child at home to improve his/her literacy skills in English?

6. What opportunities do you provide for your child at home to improve his/her literacy skills in native language?

7. Regarding literacy, especially writing of your child, which aspects in particular do you want to improve in a short term and long term? How are you going to do so?
Appendix E

Sample Administrator Interview Questions

1. Are there any standards set up by the school district regarding writing curriculum?

2. How did you support the ESL teachers’ writing curriculum?

3. How did you support the native language teachers’ writing curriculum?

4. What programs does the school offer to develop children’s writing ability?

5. How are parents involved in the school curriculum and school activities?