

**CONNECTING WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ESL
STUDENTS THROUGH DIALOGUE JOURNALS**

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BY

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents my experiences using dialogue journals with English as a Second Language students at Ephesus Road Elementary School in Chapel Hill, NC. The history and background of dialogue journals is discussed, as well as my philosophy of teaching. The practical aspects of using dialogue journals with elementary school non-native English-speaking students and the benefits and difficulties associated with them are described using student material. In addition, the work covers how my experience using dialogue journals differed from my expectations when I began using them. Excerpts of written dialogues between students and teacher are included.

ERIC Descriptors

Dialog Journals
English (Second Language)
Second Language Instruction
Teaching Methods
Writing Exercises
Individualized Instruction
Classroom Communication
Teacher Student Relationship

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to Dialogue Journals

This paper presents my experiences in using dialogue journals with my twenty-two English as a Second Language students at Ephesus Road Elementary School in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Over the course of the spring semester 2003, I exchanged dialogue journals with those students as part of my ESL instruction. The students were pulled out of their regular classrooms for ESL classes. I will discuss the methods I used, what worked and what didn't, and what I learned while researching the subject.

Dialogue journals are an effective tool for use in developing communication and language skills in almost any student population. In addition, they are a valuable way for teachers to connect with their students on a personal level. Jana Staton describes them this way:

A dialogue journal contains a genuine conversation, written rather than spoken, a means by which individual students at any age can carry on a private discussion with their teacher. The interactive format of equal turns on the same topics is quite different from the traditional student personal journals, in which a teacher may sometimes make some kind of marginal comment on a student's entry, but only days or weeks after the student wrote it. The distinguishing characteristics of dialogue journals are their interactive, functional nature, and the creation of mutually interesting topics. Such dialogues occur on a daily or regular basis throughout the school year, extending the conversation across time for purposes of communication, self-understanding, negotiation of the

classroom relationship, and problem-solving. In the elementary school classroom, this simple, teacher-developed practice also involves meaningful, functional reading and writing as a single whole, just as speaking and listening are a seamless whole in oral discourse. (Staton, “The Power of Responding in Dialogue Journals,” 1987, 49)

Peyton and Reed give a slightly more practical explanation:

A dialogue journal, put very simply, is a conversation between a teacher and an individual student. However, this conversation differs from all others they may have, in or out of the classroom; it is written, it is completely private, and it takes place regularly and continually throughout an entire school year or semester. All that is required is a bound notebook and a teacher who is interested in what students have to say and committed to writing regularly to each of them. Students write regularly in the journal, as much as they want and about whatever they choose, and the teacher writes back – not grading or correcting the writing, and not responding with simple platitudes or evaluative comments such as “Good!” or “Interesting point!” The teacher is a partner in a conversation, who accepts what is written and responds as directly and openly as possible, while keeping in mind the student’s language ability and interests. The value of the dialogue journals lies in the open exchange of ideas that can occur and the concerned and warm acceptance by the teacher of the student’s writing. (Peyton and Reed, 1990, 3-4).

1.2 How I Became Interested in Dialogue Journals

My interest in dialogue journals began when my supervisor at Wake Technical Community College (Wake Tech) in Raleigh, North Carolina, Karen Brown, gave me an article about them written by Joy Kreeft Peyton (1993). The subject intrigued me for several reasons. Dialogue journals seemed to be a way to get to know my students better and to improve their writing and reading. In addition, dialogue journals offered a way to challenge myself, a way for *me* to increase my fluency in writing, an area that I felt I

needed to improve on. However, it was the middle of a term: too late, I felt, to begin using dialogue journals that semester with my adult students.

Half a year later (August 14, 2002), I attended a workshop on dialogue journals presented by Catherine Elliott, my classmate in the Summer Master of Arts in Teaching (SMAT) program at the School for International Training (SIT). In her workshop, she described her many years of using dialogue journals with her high school French language students. Her passion for dialogue journals, extensive knowledge of the research on them, and the practical advice she gave convinced me to make dialogue journals a significant part of my teaching. I began using them that fall with my adult Beginning II level English as a Second Language (ESL) students at Wake Tech. In the few short months that I used them, I was amazed at the amount and quality of the writing my students produced. I got to know my students and they me on a deeper level than would otherwise have been possible in the six hours we met every week.

Concerns related to my perception of my own writing skills and my fears that I might say the “wrong thing” proved to be unfounded. The good advice I had received from Catherine Elliott and the informal, low-pressure nature of the journals helped me to quickly relax and enjoy responding to the journals. I found that writing my responses was not difficult and was even fun. My positive experience convinced me to continue using dialogue journals no matter what my teaching context would be.

1.3 What are Dialogue Journals? How Long Have They Been Used?

Dialogue journals have been used for over 35 years by teachers of many different student populations: regular (Kreeft, 1984) and English as a Second Language (ESL)

students in elementary school (Peyton and Reed, 1990, 14), middle school (Atwell, 1987), and high school; adult basic education (Peyton, 2000), and college students; foreign language students (Staton, in Peyton and Staton, 1991, xiv); deaf students (Staton, in Staton, et al., 1988, xii); trainees in teacher training programs (Rhodes and Christian, 1993; Balliro, 1991); and students in content areas such as accounting (Rogers and VanOs, 1999).

It appears from an extensive review of the literature that dialogue journals were first used beginning in the mid-1960's by Leslee Reed, a sixth-grade teacher in Los Angeles, with her classes of regular-education students. She quietly developed and refined her methods of responding to students' entries over the next fifteen years. Staton et al. began the first systematic documentation and comprehensive study of dialogue journals from Reed's regular-education classes and subsequent classes of sixth-grade ESL students in the late 1970's (Staton, in Staton, et al., 1988, ix).

As we saw in the quote above by Jana Staton, in addition to improving communication between teacher and student, dialogue journals give students practice reading and writing. The reading and writing have many aspects. Staton, Peyton, and Reed, with others, identified several characteristics of the writing in dialogue journals (in Peyton and Reed, 1990, 7):

- *The writing has qualities of good conversation.* Both the students and the teacher can choose topics to discuss. Both can contribute equally, making comments and offering observations and opinions; requesting and giving clarification; asking and answering questions.
- *The writing is student-generated.* ...they generally write about activities they are involved in and issues that interest them, as they happen.

- *The writing is continual.* The daily journal exchange allows students to discuss certain topics with their teacher over a period of several days, weeks, or even months...
- *The writing is functional.* Students write to accomplish a wide variety of real purposes. They might request information,... an opinion,... or clarification,...; describe a personal problem,...; or express a complaint...
- *The writing is varied in terms of topic, genre, and length.* Although students are usually allowed to write about personal topics, they may also be encouraged to discuss nonpersonal topics, such as things they are studying in school, books they are reading, or current events. They may write descriptions, explanations, narratives, complaints, or arguments with supporting details, as the topic and communicative purposes dictate. Entries or topics may be as brief as a few sentences, or they may extend for several pages

Writing in dialogue journals can give students confidence in their writing that they have not felt before, and can give them skills that they can use in other, more academic types of writing. Zamel (1992, 463) speaks of the “heuristic, generative, and recursive nature” of writing. Elbow (1986, 59) states that:

Freewriting and exploratory writing... are almost invariably productive because they exploit the autonomous generative powers of language and syntax themselves. Once you get yourself writing in an exploratory but uncensored fashion, the ongoing string of language and syntax itself becomes a lively and surprising force for generation.

He further speaks of the “generative force that comes from the use of actual syntax - speech on paper.” While dialogue journal writing is not what he is focusing on per se, it does share many of the same aspects as the freewriting and exploratory writing he discusses. Peyton (in Staton, et al., 1988, 88) argues that:

...dialogue writing, in which two participants write back and forth, “conversing” in writing, incorporates both the interactive aspects of oral, face-to-face communication and the solitary self-directed aspects of essayist writing. As a result, dialogue writing can bridge the gap between the two forms of communication and provide a natural means by which children

can be helped to move from a skill they already know (making sense in face-to-face oral communication) to a new skill (unilateral sense-making in writing).

Peyton et al. (in Peyton and Staton, 1993, 219) further conclude that dialogue journal writing “allows for higher level thinking and contains features that are valued in more formal writing.”

Another aspect of dialogue journals is that they are also a reading text tailored to each student. Jana Staton states that:

Analysis of the dialogue journals as a reading text shows that: (1) the teacher’s writing is usually much more complex syntactically and more varied in function and more mature in propositional reasoning than is the basal reading text for that grade level, yet students understand the message and respond appropriately (Shuy, 1986); (2) the teacher in responding can progressively increase the complexity of his or her response, staying just ahead of the student. This creates a text which is continually challenging in terms of comprehension and inferencing. (Staton, 1986). (Staton, “The Power of Responding in Dialogue Journals, 1987, 54)

The teacher, as he or she becomes intimately knowledgeable about each student’s abilities, keeps the level of the response slightly above ($I + 1$) what the student can easily read, challenging the student to read more and more complex text. It rarely becomes frustrating for the student, though, because the student is familiar with the context and the teacher’s style of writing. Staton (in Peyton and Staton, 1993, 122), explains this concept of linguistic accommodation by a skilled teacher well:

Within the context of a dialogue, a more competent language user, whose intention...it is to communicate, has the innate capacity to generate “comprehensible input” tuned to the language comprehension level of the other participant.

Dialogue journal writing is also an excellent way for teacher and student to get to know and to facilitate communication with each other. This leads to many benefits in

terms of improved classroom atmosphere and student behavior; as well as aiding in individualizing instruction and lesson planning.

One benefit of dialogue journal writing is that teachers may learn about the gifts quiet or shy students possess which are not immediately obvious in their classroom interactions. Leslee Reed (in Peyton and Staton, 1993, 32, 36) tells about two students of hers, one who was very shy, and one who was embarrassed at being much older and bigger than the other students in his class. By reading their dialogue journal entries, she was able to find out what their interests were and learn just how well they understood the subjects they were studying in class.

On the flip side, dialogue journals offer a way for proficient students to discuss subjects with their teacher on a high level without leaving less-proficient students bewildered and frustrated. Jones (1991, 103) says that writing in dialogue journals "...enables less reticent, even aggressive students to exchange ideas at length with the teacher, without monopolizing limited class time." This shows that dialogue journals are an ideal way to individualize instruction, a way to play to the strengths of shy and aggressive students alike.

The dialogue journal can be a means to work through conflicts between students or between teacher and student. Reed, in Peyton and Staton (1993, 38), says that "Problems and disagreements...are an inevitable part of any classroom and take time and energy to resolve. I prefer to do this work in the journal as much as possible..." She goes on to say that potential problems can often be headed off by an alert teacher before they occur. She warns that working through problems in writing can sometimes take a long time, but that the resultant harmony in the classroom makes the effort worthwhile.

Information gleaned by the teacher from dialogue journals can also be used as an effective aid in planning lessons. While responding to dialogue journals, the teacher can uncover areas of the curriculum that students have not yet mastered. In addition, the teacher can learn of any special interests that the different students might have, and plan lessons to take advantage of those interests. If the dialogue journals are truly a part of the life of the classroom, students will give feedback on lessons they have had, giving the teacher another means of determining the effectiveness of the lessons.

1.4 Philosophy of Teaching

Dialogue Journals as a teaching tool fit well with my philosophy of teaching which has developed over the years as I have learned and taught in various contexts: as a German language drill teacher in college, a student of several foreign languages, a preschool teacher, a special education teacher assistant, a student earning a teaching certificate in English as a Second Language, a master's candidate in teaching ESL, and an ESL teacher of elementary school, middle school, and adult students.

I feel that students learn best when they feel safe, comfortable, and supported in their classroom. It is important to me that teachers and students “bond” and that students feel they can take chances. By bonding, I mean that if students and teacher know and trust each other, an atmosphere of safety, connection, communication, and support exists in the classroom. This atmosphere helps to lower the affective filter, or the inhibitions that language students often have, which in turn facilitates language learning. In whatever class I teach, I strive to create a community of learners who help each other and learn from each other as well as from their teacher.

Another important part of my philosophy is that I believe that students who become comfortable with informal writing will better learn formal writing, have improved cognitive abilities, and naturally become better readers. I developed this conviction after two presenters came, in July 2002, to my Teaching the Four Skills class in the Summer Master of Arts program at SIT. They were Vivian Zamel, director of the ESL Program at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, and Ruth Spack, Director of the ESOL Program at Bentley College. In addition, Vivian Zamel's ideas on errors and error correction made a big impression on me, because her statements confirmed what I had up to then instinctively believed, that errors are normal and excessive error correction is unhelpful and inhibiting to learners. She stated in her handout given on 2 July, 2002, "Addressing Error,"

Errors do not necessarily indicate a lack of seriousness or commitment. Students may have worked quite diligently and carefully on their writing, but because they are in the process of acquiring another language..., errors are not only inevitable but a sign of learning.

I also believe that students who are interested in what they are reading and writing will certainly produce more and thus continue improving in those skills. I saw this confirmed in practice many times. Those students who wrote regularly in their dialogue journals improved at a faster rate than those who did not.

CHAPTER 2: CLASSROOM APPLICATION AND PRACTICE

2.1 My Teaching Situation and How I Began Using Dialogue Journals

In the middle of the school year I was hired as a long-term substitute ESL teacher in a public elementary school in my town of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. As the third ESL teacher these children had had in four months, many parents and their children were skeptical when I arrived on the scene. I knew I had to prove to these students and their parents that I was worthy of their trust and that I would give them what they needed at that point – stability, support, consistency, and follow-through. One of the ways that I hoped to do this was through the use of dialogue journals.

The ESL population at my school was diverse. The countries my 22 students hailed from, in decreasing order by number, were Korea, Japan, Mexico, China, El Salvador, Taiwan, Israel, and Portugal. Their grades were kindergarten and grades two, three, four, and five, and their skill levels ranged from beginners who had just arrived to advanced. Most of my students, and indeed most of the 10,000 students in our school system, are the children of highly educated parents.

I discovered in conversations with parents that many of these parents are the products of school systems and countries that place a high value on having teachers correct a student's writing. Since dialogue journals should not be corrected and children should feel free to write in them without worrying about correctness (Peyton, 1993, 2), I

thought it imperative that I inform the parents about what the dialogue journals were and to enlist their help in this aspect of their children's education. I sent home a letter telling them about the routine I would set up, that the journal would be used for a private, written dialogue between their child and me, and that I would not be correcting their children's writing in the dialogue journal (see original and modified parent notification letters in English and Spanish-Appendix A).

I decided to wait to begin using the dialogue journals until a few weeks had passed, and the children were accustomed to me and to the new routine. When I introduced the concept of the dialogue journal to the children, I tried to create a sense of excitement around the journals. I told the students that this was a private, written conversation between them and me, and that their parents could not help them with it. I stressed to them that I would help them with anything they couldn't understand, and that I would write to them at an appropriate level. They were intrigued by the fact that this was something *secret*, and many of them would not let their parents see the dialogue journal. In fact, several parents that I met by chance around town told me that they would sometimes sneak a look at the dialogue journal, but that they could only do it after their children were asleep!

For the first few weeks after beginning to use the dialogue journals, I had to sit down with many students individually and explain what I had written. They soon became accustomed to my writing style and the context and most no longer required my help. To keep the students interested in and excited about the dialogue journals, I wrote my response quickly but thoughtfully and returned the dialogue journal to them that same day. Indeed, this was my habit until the end of the school year. When I walked around to

their classrooms at the end of the school day to give them their dialogue journals, the students often ripped the journal from my hands and began reading. By the same token, I was truly interested in what the students had to say and found that I was as eager to see what they had written as they were to read my responses.

With about fifteen of my 22 students, there were about four to five exchanges of the dialogue journal a week. With the remaining students, I made about one to two exchanges a week. These latter students were not as interested in the dialogue journal; they tended to be the more advanced students who have more English-speaking friends. I was reluctant to require my students to write in the dialogue journal a certain number of times a week, since I wanted it to be a pleasant experience. The dialogue journal was by no means the only writing done in my classes; I enjoy integrating writing into almost all aspects of my English teaching. Therefore, rather than requiring a certain amount of writing in the journal, I preferred instead to persuade these students in an indirect way to write more often by letting them see their classmates' excitement when they got their journal back or when they got to take home a finished, sticker-bedecked journal. However, I asked those students who did not write in their dialogue journals for over a week to bring them to class and write their entries there.

2.2 Logistics of the Dialogue Journals

My first dialogue journals were 'blue books' (small, thin, paper-covered booklets used by college students to take exams) from the local university. I removed the covers, put two books together, and covered them with colorful paper. I stapled the covers in four places along the edge and covered the staples with clear tape. Later, when my donated

stock of blue books was depleted, I purchased marble composition books, dissected them, and used ten to twelve pages to create the journals. The journals had to be small and portable enough for me to carry several home if need be, and the small size also meant that if a journal were lost, it would not constitute a tremendous loss of written material. Another consideration was that the paper-covered journals began to get a bit bedraggled as they made their many trips back and forth between school and home. The thin size ensured that they were completed and taken home before they began to fall apart.

The small size and colorful covers were appealing to the students as well. They eagerly decorated the covers as soon as they chose their dialogue journals, and filling a dialogue journal was an exciting event. As they neared the end of a journal, many would keep me posted on how many pages were left.

Joanna¹, a second-grader from Korea, wrote on the second to last page of her first journal:

...I got one peper [page] Now Now I will just get New Dilog gower...

Then, as she neared the end of her second dialogue journal:

...and I am almost Done page...

Another student, Susie, a fourth-grader from Korea, wrote a postscript to her last entry at the end of her second dialogue journal, in which she showed her excitement:

p.s. we meet dialogue journal 3! I think dialogue 3 is mostly fun!

¹ Personal consent of the students and written consent of the parents was obtained to use the excerpts of students' entries. The excerpts are reproduced exactly as the students wrote them. Most excerpts are part of longer entries; these are set off by ellipses. The real names of the students, their relatives, and friends are not used in order to maintain their anonymity. See Appendix B for photocopied sample pages from student journals.

Many students began to write longer entries as they saw their classmates getting their completed journals to take home. When students did completely fill a dialogue journal, I would photocopy them, put stickers on the back covers, write “congratulations” on them, and give them back to the students to take home (photocopied example- Appendix B-1)

When I first began using dialogue journals with my adult students, my plan was to have them write their entries in class. My intention was to collect them, respond to them, and give them back the next class period. I soon realized that this was not going to work. Some students sat the entire fifteen minutes I had allotted and did not write anything. Others finished within a few minutes. I decided then to let them take the journals home, complete their entries there, and return them to me the next class period. This seemed to work better for that population of students.

When I began teaching elementary school students, I continued this practice. In my school, my pull-out ESL classes met two to five times per week for one-half hour to one hour per meeting. Most of my elementary students saw me every day, and on any one day about ten to fifteen students would hand in their dialogue journals. This routine worked for me and for my students. If I had had the students write in class, precious class time might have been wasted. Writing their entries at home meant that my students had more productive class time *and* that they were thinking about, reading, and writing English during a larger part of their day. Although the normal practice with dialogue journals is for students to do their writing in the classroom, most of my students actually enjoyed taking their time to write at home and didn’t see it as “homework” at all. I would

like to think this attitude was a result of the feeling of excitement and specialness I tried to maintain around the dialogue journals.

If the journals are to be photocopied, then consideration should be given to the impact that the size will have on time, money, and resource conservation. I wanted to have photocopies of all the completed dialogue journals before I gave them back to the students to keep. The small blue books were easily photocopied two pages to a side of legal paper, while the composition books, which are bigger, were photocopied onto regular sized paper, one page to a side. These copies provide an excellent record of the students' progression as writers over the course of a semester or year.

2.3 Day-to-Day Management of the Dialogue Journals

As soon as I had given the second- to fifth-grade children their dialogue journals and they had decorated the covers, I wrote a prompt on the board for the students to copy into their dialogue journals. For most classes I wrote: *Tell me about your favorite family vacation ever*, or *Tell me about your best birthday ever. Write about one-half page*. At that point in the school year, most of the students could understand the prompt and easily write to it. Toshio, a fourth-grade Japanese boy, wrote to this prompt:

Teacher: Tell me about your best birthday ever. Write about ½ page.

Toshio: I invited my friends to my birthday Last Saturday, and Sunday. my mother made a birthday cake and my friends my family celebrated my birthday then. I was happy. I really enjoyed.

A third-grade Israeli boy, Ben, wrote the following to a different prompt:

Teacher: Tell me about the best family vacation you've ever had. Write about ½ page.

*Ben: Dear Ms. Collins,
I was in Disneyworld last year. It has 4 parks: Magic
kingdom, animal world, Epcot center, and M.G. N. We had
a lot of fun. the best part was a new roller coaster. My
grandma and grandpa joined us. We been in all 4 parks. We
have been in Disney world for 4 days and drove home.*

Another student, Jackie, an advanced fifth-grade girl from China, wrote to that
prompt:

*Teacher: Tell me about your very favorite family vacation. Write
about ½ page.*
*Jackie: Dear Ms. Collins,
My favorite family vacation was when I got to go to Outer
bank because there I got to play with Linda one of my good
friend. We got to do a lot of things together of course there
was more than 2 children there were 5 kids but as I said
Linda is the closest person in the group we watch our favrit
movie eat candy drank soda (I am not allowed to eat candy)
and even go sand sliding I had the best time of my life.
P.S. The only thing I did not like cheesy flavored candy Yuk!*

A few students ignored the prompt or didn't understand it, but at least they wrote
about what they were interested in, as second-grader Helena from Portugal did:

*Teacher: Tell me about your favorite family vacation ever. Write
about ½ page.*
*Helena: Dear miss. Collins,
My best vacation was yesterday. I go to Animal Shelter. I
play with a dog and I said to my mom can I have these dog
because it was funny and when I throw a ball he catch and
give me back. Her name is tommy and he is a boy. On
animal shelter are beautiful dogs, Sad, and wonderful
[wonderful] dogs.*

After that first prompt, the direction the written conversation took was up to the student.

However, at times, the student would ask for a little guidance, as Susie once did:

*Susie Dear Ms. Collins,
You went Norway and Denmark? Cool! And you show the
picture. Ms. Collins I make a book good and Fantagic
Story. [I will write a story] Hmm... Well, I wait make
book. bye. (Today have no letter Idea.)*

*Your student,
Susie*

Teacher: ...Since you ran out of ideas, why don't you write the days of the week in order of preference, with your favorite day first, and your least favorite last? Tell me why they are your favorite and least favorite. For example: ...

Occasionally, the student herself would change the subject, as Susie later did:

Susie: ... Ms. Collins, I think we need new talking. [We need to talk about a new subject] Mmm...first I want a talk about my story. When I live Korea, I...

As promised, I didn't routinely correct errors in the students' writing. Instead, I rephrased or commented on what they had written using correct grammar and spelling, as in this exchange:

*Helena: Dear Ms. Collins,
My dog in Portugal is a Girl and her name is dificulte to say in Englis, her name Pioga. One [When] I say her to sit down she sits down, and one I say to give her hand She give me her hand, and one I say to roll over she roll over.
Your friend,
Helena*

*Teacher: Dear Helena,
Your dog, Pioga, sounds very well-trained. We call a dog's 'hand' a paw. When you tell her to give you her paw, she gives it to you! What other tricks does she do besides giving you her paw, rolling over, and sitting down? Does she chase and bring back a ball?...*

And this one, from Rita, a Mexican second-grader:

Rita: ... I eat sandwich. I love the sandwich...

Teacher: ...I like some kinds of sandwiches, too...

A second grade Korean girl, Jessie, wrote:

Jessie: ...p.s. Thank you for Teching me and my firend.

Teacher ...P.S. You're welcome! I enjoy teaching you and your friends.

Students did not always pick up and use the correct form immediately, of course, but occasionally they did, if only partially:

Susie: ... And my family went Disney world, Seaworld, and Universerstudio. I think universer studio have exited Adventure! (May Be I think...) First we went to the Animal Kingdom, Epcot. and we went to the Seaworld, and last one is Universer Studio!...

Your student,

Susie

Teacher: ...Tell me more about why you think Universal Studios was exciting...

*Susie: Dear Ms. Collins,
Because Universal Studio has Jaws, E.T.,...*

Toshio and I had this exchange over four days, in which he partially picked up and used the correct form:

Teacher: ...Do you ever see deer in your yard? Recently I saw five deer run through my yard...

Toshio: I don't have some deer in my yard...

Teacher: You haven't seen any deer in your yard?...

Toshio: I haven't seen any dear in my yard, but I have seen some deer another place one once a time...

As I read the students' entries, I would keep track of common errors and problem areas so I could address them in my lessons. Other teachers have done this as well. Paul Jones (1991, 123) states that,

A number of teachers have told me that they customarily plan grammar lessons or units around mistakes that recur in a majority of their students' journals. Finding that half of a class consistently forgets question marks and other punctuation, for instance, might prompt a teacher to devote a lesson to those issues."

My own entries were like any other conversation or letter: I would comment on what they had written, ask a question or two, answer any questions they had posed (many

did), relate a similar experience I had had, give advice, commiserate, and join in their happiness. Students would often pose questions of me, such as this one from Jackie:

Jackie: ...What do you think the 5th book of Harry Potter will be about
Jackie
PS. Is the 5th book The "Something" of Pixses or The order of the phenix.

Teacher: ...I think the fifth H.P. book will be called The Order of the Phoenix. I think it might be about a secret society Dumbledore was in in his younger days. That's just a guess, though. What do you think?
Your teacher,
Ms. Collins

and this from Jessie:

Jessie: Dear Ms. Collins,
I went to Niagara fall Dare [there] was very beautiful. is cane of rean. [It's kind of rain] I have very fun. I went with my Dad firend. If you went to go you need wmbrrblla.
[smiley face] I like Nigara fall rea you went to Nigara Fall. I went to. How about you?

Teacher: Dear Jessie,
Yes, I've been to Niagara Falls! It is beautiful and it feels like rain. I didn't have my umbrella, so I got wet! Did you go to the Canadian side, too? ...

I saw these questions in a positive light; the students were engaging in real give-and-take conversation.

Within the time constraints I had, I attempted to engage the students, and to draw them out with questions that required more than a simple yes or no, as I did here with Rita:

Teacher: ...If you could have three wishes, what would you wish for?...

Rita: I wish that I well be big and rich have a lisend and a car live with my best friend have a house in the graund and the house will be whith trees and the color of the house blue and otside a big pool. The other one is live in the new

house of Mexico that my dad buy and my room will be blue and all the thing of my room will be blue and have on a pool a dolphin and have a polar bear with me and she well be my pet. The other wish is have lots of friends and live in Florida and go to Disney World and just be happy.

Teacher: Dear Rita,

Your wishes are wonderful! I've never heard of anyone having a polar bear for a pet. Do you know how big they get? You will need a big pool of cool water for your polar bear.

It would be fun to have lots of friends and to live in Florida with them.

Tell me more about your first wish for a house in the ground. Can you draw a picture of it?

Your teacher,

Ms. Collins

My entries were not always perfect since they were often written in haste; sometimes I would read a previous entry and wonder, *What was I thinking?* One example of this was when I asked too many questions of the student. My reply to Susie when she described her trip to New York fell well short of my standards, since it consisted almost entirely of questions, with little comment on what she had written:

Teacher: Dear Susie,

I guess it was sad to see the World Trade Center site. Tell me what it looked like.

I wonder if the art museum you saw was MOMA- The Museum of Modern Art?

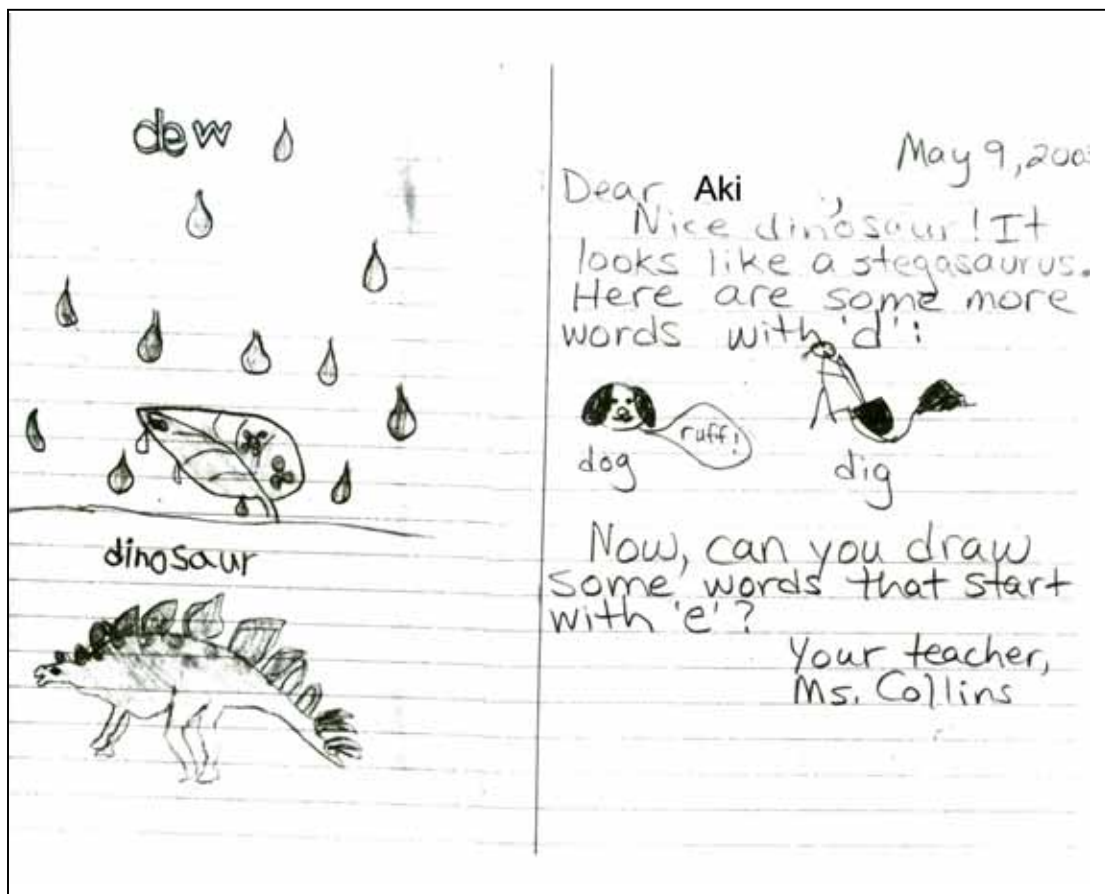
Did you go to the top of the Empire State Building?

Your teacher,

Ms. Collins

My entries *were* always sincere, however, which is important to me. One of my reasons for using dialogue journals is so that I can learn more about my students and they can learn about and become comfortable with me. I feel that children, like adults, prefer to carry on a conversation with a person they can trust and that they like.

With the kindergartners and with new arrivals who didn't know much English, I wrote the original prompt myself as an entry on the first page of the dialogue journal. I would ask them to begin by drawing some pictures of things that begin with "a". When I responded, I would draw a few pictures of my own of things that began with "a". In addition, I would add some details or color to their pictures. Then I would ask them to draw some pictures of things that begin with "b", and we would go through the alphabet in that fashion. By drawing pictures myself, I showed them that I was no great artist and they shouldn't worry about their drawing talent. Many of them were amused at my attempts to draw. By the time we made it through the alphabet, these children were able to write answers to questions or at the least circle a "yes" or "no" in answer to a question I had posed. I began asking them to draw pictures and write a few sentences about their favorite or least favorite foods, activities they liked to do with their friends and family, and other similar questions. In each response I made, I answered the same questions myself, often tying my answers in with theirs by comparing and contrasting our likes or dislikes. Below are some sample pages from the dialogue journal of Aki, a beginning third-grader from Japan who arrived in Chapel Hill in April. (see Appendix B-2 and B-3 for other examples of dialogue journals of beginning ESL learners):



One may ask how I could find the time to respond to the ten to fifteen dialogue journals that were handed to me each day. Indeed, my schedule was full; most days I taught seven one-half hour to one-hour classes, with one hour of planning time. In order to get the dialogue journal back to the students that same day, I would take a few minutes whenever I could to write an entry. Part of my daily routine with second-grade and older students is about ten minutes of board work near the beginning of class. While the students were writing in their notebooks, I responded to a few dialogue journals. Often the students were delighted to receive their dialogue journals back at the end of class. I would prioritize them and try to return the journals more quickly to those students who wrote less often. I would respond to a few during my lunch period and planning times. At

the least, I attempted to get them back by the end of the day, and always by the next day. With 22 students, this was manageable to me, but I imagine that if I had had many more, I would have had to take them home more often than I did.

As I have said, responding to the dialogue journals was not a chore, but was a task I tackled with relish. I agree with Jana Staton (“The Power of Responding in Dialogue Journals,” 1987, 60), who wrote,

But there is also tremendous value for teachers in this activity [responding to dialogue journals], which does take up precious time. There is real joy and renewal for teachers as well when they become involved in genuine dialogues with their students.

About halfway through the semester, I noticed an increase in interest in writing in the journal among some of the students. Some seemed to feel more confident in their ability to write, and some others seemed to want the extra attention other students were getting. I always showed my delight when I was handed a dialogue journal or when I handed a completely full one back to the proud recipient.

As a parent and former preschool teacher as well as an ESL teacher, I have become adept at deciphering children’s writing. However, there were a few times when I couldn’t understand what a student had written. If this happened, I would meet with the student briefly at the beginning or end of class and have him or her clarify the entry in question. I worked with Saburo, a Japanese second-grader, one-on-one, so it was easy to ask him about his often cryptic notes:

*Saburo: I am Qlasny Do you have boyfring and I moy sngy Do you like to play bescketball. And my best fring is Seongsoo and Brad. I like to play togaday.
[I have a question. Do you have a boyfriend and one more*

thing: Do you like to play basketball? My best friends are Seongsoo and Brad. I like to play together.]

and this one:

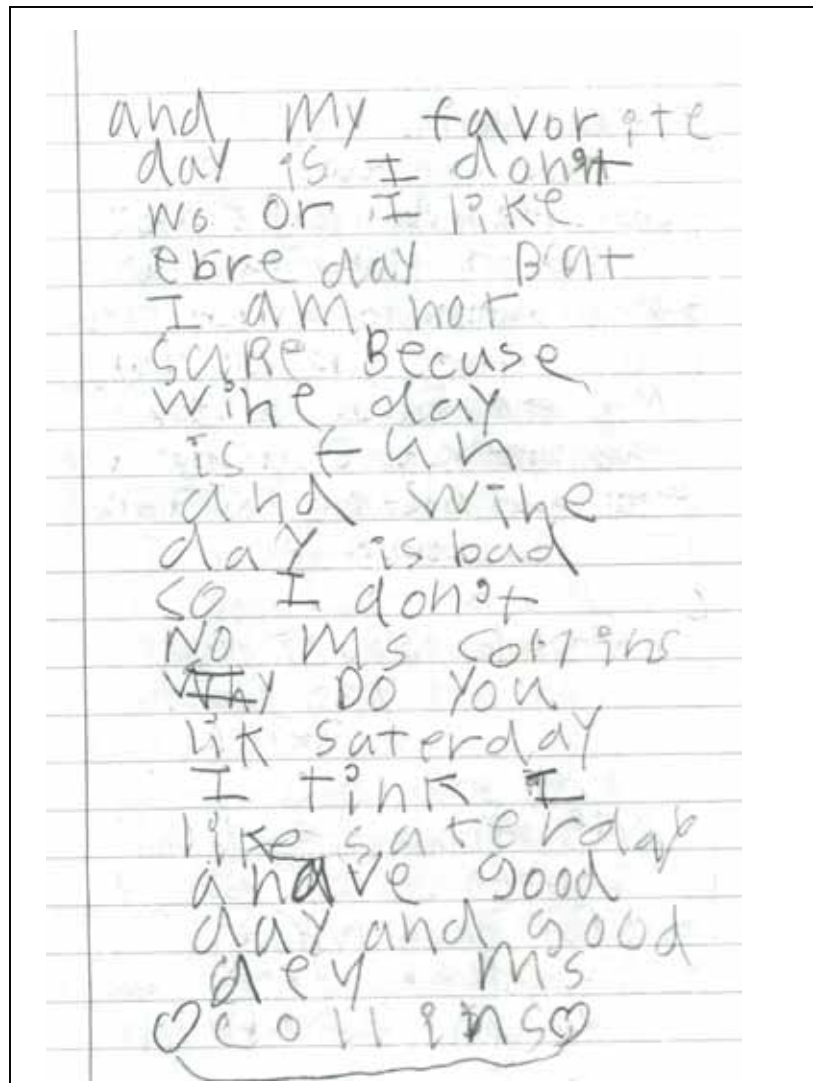
*Saburo: Dera Ms. Collins,
I Jillno the splet.
It was good.
I like Splet.
So I goot a splet...
[I drank Sprite.
It was good.
I like Sprite.
So I got a Sprite.]*

Another second-grader, Jessie, often wrote notes I did not completely understand.

A quick conference after class soon cleared those up:

*Jessie: Dear Ms. Collins,
Towrom will be valentins. Do you have a fun? Me to.
becase I lik chorcrtr. [smiley face] Yesttoday was a bad
day becace It was parea on my husees. eayone was coming.
but the kise was not coming. So I was sad. Do you like that
thing I hate that thing.
[Tomorrow will be Valentine's. Do you have fun? Me too,
because I like chocolate. (smiley face) Yesterday was a bad
day because there was a party at my house. Everyone was
coming, but the kids didn't come. So I was sad. Do you like
that? I hate that.]*

With some students' dialogue journals, part of the difficulty was in reading their handwriting. Joanna's writing (shown below) was a good example of this:



One might wonder if students felt “singled out” or upset if they were pulled aside to be asked about something I hadn’t understood. If I really couldn’t understand a phrase or word, I would usually just ask the student in writing in the dialogue journal. If I did pull a student aside, I tried to do it in a sensitive manner. In addition, I often pulled students aside for other reasons, such as to discuss more deeply some subject we had been writing about. I believe that, because of the goodwill and trust that had grown between us, my students did not feel upset when asked to clarify their writing. Also, in my teaching, I try to emphasize that mistakes and misunderstandings are not bad, but are

an essential part of learning. I always laugh at my own mistakes and stress to my students that English is a difficult language that they are nevertheless learning well.

My students also knew that they could ask me at any time to clarify what I had written if they couldn't understand something, an opportunity that a few of my students took advantage of several times. Often, I asked these students to read my reply out loud, after which they understood it and would be on their way.

Occasionally I felt I had to correct a student's errors. For example, if the error was a single misspelled word that changed the meaning significantly, or if a student continued to make an error in spite of my correct usage in my responses, I would write a postscript or a small note in the margin. I might write, *We usually say... instead of ...*, or just write the correct form. Also, I knew from experience that some students would pay attention and make changes in their usage if I corrected an isolated word or phrase. Robert was one of those students:

Robert: ... I ride very scary thing. that is The tower of terror. is like I ride elivator but elivator going up and fast going down So I'm very scary.
(I wrote 'I was scared' in the margin)

Robert: Today I have ESL tutoring first I do my homework is little bit hard. And I play some play and Gallon game but I'm just helping. [I didn't play; I was the helper] And have a snake and go outside play...
(I wrote 'that's a snack' and drew pictures of a snake and a snack.)

Of course, if students used language or misspellings that might cause them to be ridiculed or to get in trouble, I would set them straight immediately. One instance where I thought I should tell a student to use another word was in one of Rachel's entries in which she used a word that, I felt, would cause other fourth-graders to laugh at her if she used it in their conversations:

Rachel ...The chick made so many dung all around the floor...
Teacher: ...Chickens do make a big mess, don't they? Usually, with house pets (and babies) we use the word 'poop' instead of dung. We use dung for cows, etc. So we would say, 'The chicken pooped all over the floor.' Also, 'poop' is a more informal word, while 'dung' is more formal or scientific. Enough on that subject!

There is a movement in our school system, as elsewhere, toward differentiated instruction, which is teaching a diverse group of learners while meeting the needs of all the students. I can't think of a better way to reach all of my students consistently and on a deep level than with dialogue journals. By definition, each dialogue journal is like a novel/textbook/dictionary/diary tailored to each individual student and of high interest to each student. Every dialogue journal is unique. Over the course of the semester and previously with my adult students, the following have at various times been tucked, glued, or stapled into a dialogue journal: travel brochures, a pressed flower, a packet of seeds, newspaper notices about museum shows, audiotapes, an old photograph of a dog of mine, Yu-Gi-Oh and Pokemon cards, recipes, songs, and poems. With different students, topics of our written conversations have ranged from the sublime to the scatological; from vacations, sports, movies, customs, superheroes, gardening, to funny pet stories, the travails of being a middle child, and, as noted above, the difference between dung and poop.

2.4 How the Dialogue Journals Helped Me Get to Know My Students and How They Facilitated Bonding Between Me and My Students

Exchanging dialogue journals with my students was instrumental in our reaching a level of trust and comfort with each other that would have been difficult to achieve

otherwise. At any one point in the semester, I was actively carrying on a private conversation with most of my 22 students.

Once, after I had comforted Joanna, a Korean second-grader, when she was upset about a fight with her sister, we had the following exchanges over the course of a week:

Teacher: ...I know it is hard being a middle child because I am a middle child, too...

Joanna: OK But the middle is herd Big siter is bad and little siter is cry so I Do Not like my Big siter and My little siter...

Teacher: ...it is hard sometimes, but there are good things about having sisters, too. It's fun having someone to play with. When you are older, you will really enjoy having sisters. Even though I didn't always like my brothers and sisters, now I am so glad I have them. We have fun when we get together...

Joanna: Ms. Collins... and your right My siter is good some time...

While I am not a counselor or psychologist, I felt I could manage this type of situation. Of course, I would have brought in the school counselor if I had felt it was necessary. In fact, when Joanna came into her regular classroom upset about the above-mentioned fight, the only person she wanted to talk to was me. We had formed a special bond, as teachers and students often do. Our dialogue journal conversations played a major part in the closeness we felt, in my opinion. Emotional turmoil can be an obstacle to learning, and I feel that any way that I can help students over inevitable bumps in the road will facilitate their learning English more quickly. I concur with this statement from Susan Hinebauch, an eighth-grade teacher from Colorado (1999, 23), here commenting on the importance of knowing and connecting with students: "Consider what a difference it makes in a student's day if a teacher takes the time to talk with her about something significant in her life instead of just focusing on her missing homework or excellent report."

Joanna's and my entries above were excerpted from over one page of writing each day in which we wrote about several different subjects. Because these were subjects that interested Joanna and were important to her, she wrote extensively on them. It was rare for her, and indeed for many of my students, to produce much writing in their regular classrooms. Conversely, because the dialogue journal was relevant to their lives, they often wrote profusely in it.

Often, I would tell my students about an experience or situation that had happened to me that was similar to one they had described, such as this one in which Rachel told me a story, then I related a similar one to her:

*Rachel: Dear Ms. Collins,
I'll tell you another story of Comy.
One day my mom, Debbie and Steven went to a clothing
shop with Comy [dog]
Mom put down Comy under floor of shop and looked
around a variety of clothes.
While looking around the shop they forgot about Comy.
Mom bought some clothes for us (three kids) and then mom
took Debbie and Steven to afterschool.
Mom returned to home without thinking of Comy. When she
go into home, the auntie said "Where is Comy?"
My mom surprised to know that she didn't carry Comy with
her.
She run outside to find Comy.
At first she met an old man who saw Comy was crossing
the intersection toward my apartment.
And then mom asked an owner of fruit shop on the way
home.
He answered "Oh! I saw a little puppy with golden gray
hair passing by in front of my shop about 1 hour ago. It
maybe go to that apartment."
So she run into front yard of my apartment.
She asked an old guard of apartment of Comy.
He said, "Oh! I saw a little puppy wondered about in front
of guard post."
At that time mom wondered "Where is Comy now?"
She decided to go near the kindergarten of Steven. Every*

*morning mom took Steven into kindergarten placed near
the back door of apartment with Comy. In front of the
kindergarten she met a peddler and asked about Comy.
But he didn't know that.
So mom was crying. And then surprisingly Comy was found
behind of the peddler under a small bush.
Mom was so happy and Comy was happy too.
What a smart dog is Comy!
Rachel*

*Teacher: Dear Rachel,
What a wonderful story with a happy ending! Comy
certainly was smart to go to a place he knew.
I know exactly how your mom felt when she discovered she
had lost Comy. Parents' heads are so full of thoughts of
their children and of what to do next that it's hard to
remember everything!
That reminds me of a story. When my younger daughter
was a baby, I was visiting my parents. All my siblings and
nieces and nephews were there. I was very tired, because
moms with babies are always sleep-deprived. Suddenly, I
jumped up and said, "Where's Carson?" Everyone burst
out laughing, because, of course, Carson was in my arms!
My family still teases me about that!
Do you have any other good stories?
Your teacher,
Ms. Collins*

Then Rachel returned with another story along the same lines:

*Rachel: Dear Ms. Collins,
I have a similar story.
One day I played house with Debbie.
Suddenly the frypan was missing.
"Where is my frypan?" I yelled at Debbie.
But Debbie said,
"I don't have your frypan! Why do you ask me?"
And then I was puzzled.
Because the frypan was in my hand!
I was sorry at the Debbie.
Rachel*

Not only did I learn about Rachel's thoughts and feelings from her entries in her dialogue journal, but I could also (with her permission, of course) use family stories she

revealed to me when I corresponded with her second-grade sister, Debbie, who was a beginning ESL student still in her silent period.

The examples above bear out a sentiment of mine which was expressed quite well by Leslee Reed in comments on her use of dialogue journals with her sixth grade students (as quoted in Staton, "The Power of Responding in Dialogue Journals," 1987, 59-60):

I think the journals...help us to develop a comprehension, too, that is deeper. We work on comprehension in reading and math and everything else, but I think this is a comprehension perhaps on an emotional level, of values, of moral rights and wrongs, of sensitivity to other people. I would like for everyone else to see the love that goes into the journals, not just on my part, but on the children's part, too: the love, the respect, the mutuality of goals, the feelings that we develop for each other.

2.5 How My Experience Differed From What I Had Expected

When I first began using dialogue journals with my elementary school ESL students, the letter I sent home to their parents stated that their children would bring the dialogue journal home on their last school day of the week and bring it back the first of the next week. If we had kept to that routine, there would have been about twenty exchanges of the dialogue journal over the course of the semester. As it turns out, most students and I exchanged the dialogue journal *each day*; there were as many as 89 exchanges in the semester. The average was about 50, a number which includes four students who arrived after the start of the semester. Not only were the students able to produce more writing than I had hoped for, they also were able to participate in more of a give-and-take conversation than would have been possible with a longer time between exchanges. The conversation could be more pertinent to what was happening at that time in the children's lives. There could be comment on what was going on in class or in

school, or whatever was foremost in their minds right then. Susie had this to say the next day about afterschool ESL tutoring, during which members of a local high school honor society came and did activities with ESL students at my school:

*Susie: Dear Ms. Collins,
It was fun tutoring day Because I met the Other Country
[international] people and We played the game and eat the
Snack and made Strong friendship!
Your student,
Susie*

Susie might not have had the afterschool tutoring on her mind several days later if we had kept to my original plan to exchange the journals once a week.

I had been concerned about the work load I would be taking on if I used dialogue journals with my twenty-two students. In actuality, I added greatly to the amount of work I had to do by increasing the number of exchanges each week. This work was so enjoyable to me, however, that it didn't seem like work at all. As I have mentioned, I was eager to read and respond to the dialogue journals, and gladly took the time during my day to do that. The fast turnaround was key to maintaining the excitement about the dialogue journals that most of the children showed.

I gained other important insights that I had not expected when I began using the dialogue journals. Many students who I thought would be strong writers based on their classwork and speaking ability did not write as well as I had expected. Michael, a Korean fourth-grader, was one of my more diligent and loquacious students. However, he seldom wrote more than a few lines in his dialogue journal and was slow in returning it, in spite of my cajoling. This is a typical entry from him:

*Michael: Dear Ms. Collins,
My favorite animal is Bear, Deer, and eagle. then what's
Ms. Collins favorite animal.*

Other students surprised me with their amazing writing abilities. I am reminded in particular of two (unrelated) students, Robert and Rachel, who arrived in Chapel Hill from Korea after the semester had begun. Both had studied English in Korea but did not have much active knowledge of the language. These two, a third- and a fourth-grader, both quickly embraced the dialogue journal and wrote often. Their writing soon evolved into clear, understandable English that was a joy to read. The fourth-grader, Rachel, who could barely write a paragraph when she arrived in February, regaled me a few months later with one- to two-page stories about fantasy books she had read and various pets her family had owned. In addition to her stories about her dog, Comy, she told me about her hamsters, birds, chickens, and cat. This was written in early April:

*Rachel: Dear Ms. Collins,
One day we got a baby cat.
A sunday school student got a baby cat crying on the street
in the cold winter.
He wanted my mom to take care of the kitten because his
mom do not let him bring the cat in to his home.
So my mom could not refuse the kitten.
Suddenly we got a new family member.
The kitten was so cute, so little and so lovely a baby.
She liked to play with pencil, ball and our feet and was a
champion climber.
We all got loved "Nangman" (her name), except Comy.
Comy was very upset and jealous of Nangman.
Comy grawled at her and did some strange behaviors.
For example, she tore down newspapers and tissues.
We should have taken Nangman to my aunt. [We had to
give Nangman to my aunt.]
We miss Nangman.
Rachel*

A reader may wonder if Rachel had some help in writing these stories. I know she did not have help, except for her electronic dictionary, because she wrote just as well in her many writing assignments in class. As Vivian Zamel stated in her July, 2002

presentation for my SIT Four Skills class: “One way to subvert the possibility of plagiarism is to require students to write the whole semester.” In other words, teachers who have their students write extensively and often will be intimately familiar with what their students are capable of writing.

The third-grader, Robert, wrote just two or three lines in his first entry soon after his arrival in the U. S. By the end of the semester, he had, among other things, educated me on many aspects of Dragonball Z, Pokemon and Yu-Gi-Oh, and kept me informed on the progress of his soccer team. Here, three months after his arrival in the United States, he tells me about playing with his cousin in Korea:

*Robert: No his not lives here he lives Korea. Jun Sik is very fun for me. Before in Korea in Every weekend I play with Jun Sik a lot a game like hide and seek, korea game, store game, time Mashin, dog play, plain [airplane] game...
Store game is owner sell the things and customer buy a things.
And time mashin is we ride something and we go anywhere.
And dog play is dog in home and we around and play and owner give them bone.
But is not real plain game is ride something move Africa, north America...
So every game is fun!
I hope hes come here and play with me.*

I would never have predicted that these two students would have been able to write so much and so well just a few months after their arrival in Chapel Hill. The dialogue journal played a big part in their development as writers by allowing them a forum in which they could write freely and without worrying constantly about correctness.

CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION

My experience using dialogue journals with my elementary age ESL students was an overwhelmingly positive one. My students and I communicated with, learned about, and cared about each other over the course of the entire semester that I taught them. They themselves saw the value in the interaction, as most told me over and over. In fact, several of my older students have continued their dialogue with me via email.

By the second month, most of my students were producing a large amount of writing that was clear, understandable, and appropriate, and they were doing it happily. Many told me they had lost their fear of writing in English due to writing in the dialogue journal.

In addition to writing, each student read and comprehended from one to five challenging texts per week that were custom-written just for them.

My students came to understand that there was an adult in their school who would listen to them, understand them, respond to them, and try to help or comfort them when they needed it.

Not only did my students benefit, but I benefited as well; I felt my own writing became more fluent, expressive, and varied. I grew to be much more at ease with my writing skills, and now find that I want to write for personal pleasure for the first time in my life.

I have become such a believer in dialogue journals that I can see uses for them in other aspects of my life, such as with my own children. Indeed, my sister, after reading a draft of this thesis, became so excited about them that she began using them with her two older children. I know that I cannot imagine not using them in my teaching practice from this point on.

The most important part of using dialogue journals, to me, was the sense of connection and closeness I felt to my students. Other teachers have found this to be a valuable side effect of using a tool they had originally thought would be primarily a way of teaching writing to their students. Paul Jones said it best (1991, 128):

Beyond being compelling, the interaction can be deeply rewarding. For me, the connection to the students as people is so powerful, the feeling so gratifying, that it can give whole new meaning to my daily work in teaching. It renews a sense of value in my classroom work and strengthens my knowledge that I am there both to grow myself and to participate in the growth of others.

My experience using dialogue journals with my elementary school ESL students has been rewarding to my students and to me personally. There is no single better way to help students improve their writing, reading, and cognitive skills, while at the same time bolstering the connection between teacher and student and fostering an atmosphere of respect and understanding in the classroom. Few tools in the teacher's toolbox offer so much in one package. Dialogue journals will continue to be a mainstay in any ESL classes I teach in the future, no matter what my teaching context.

APPENDIX A

PARENT NOTIFICATION FORMS

- 1. Original parent notification letter in English**
- 2. Original parent notification letter in Spanish**
- 3. Modified parent notification letter sent to parents of students who arrived later in the semester**
- 4. Student release form in English**
- 5. Student release form in Spanish**

1. Original parent notification letter in English

January 22, 2003

Dear parents,

I am really enjoying getting to know the children and the other teachers here at Ephesus. The children are a pleasure to work with.

Today your child is bringing home a dialogue journal. Dialogue journals are for communication between me and each individual child. Writing in the dialogue journal will help your child with reading and thinking as well as writing.

Your child and I will write back and forth each week in this book. It will be like having a written conversation. I will not correct grammar or spelling in the dialogue journals, because we work on grammar and spelling in class. It is important that the children feel they can write freely in the dialogue journal, without worrying about mistakes. They will get practice reading proper English when they read my replies. My replies will be at a level the children will be able to understand. If I don't understand something a child has written, I will ask the child.

The important thing is for the children to write what they want and to bring the dialogue journal back to me at the proper time. Children will take the journals home on the last day of ESL class each week. If your child has class on Tuesday and Thursday, he/she will take it home on Thursday and bring it back on Tuesday. Children who meet me five days a week will take it home on Friday and bring it back on Monday. Please help your child remember to write in it and to bring it back on time.

I have found that dialogue journals help me get to know my students and help them get to know me. I am eager to begin using them here at Ephesus.

Thank you for helping and supporting your child's education. Please call, write, or email me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Mimi Collins
ESL teacher
929-8715 x224
mcollins@chccs.k12.nc.us

2. Original parent notification letter in Spanish

El 22 de enero, 2003

Estimados Padres,

Es un verdadero placer empezar a familiarizarme con sus niños y con los demás maestros de la escuela Ephesus. Me encanta trabajar con estos alumnos.

Hoy, su niño(a) trajo a casa un diario de diálogo. Estos diarios de diálogo son una manera para mí de comunicarme con cada alumno individualmente. El hecho de escribir en este diario de diálogo ayudará a su niño(a) en lectura, reflexión y escritura.

Su hijo(a) y yo vamos a comunicarnos por escrito cada semana en este cuaderno. Será como tener una conversación en forma escrita. No voy a corregirles los errores gramaticales u ortográficos en estos diarios de diálogo, porque trabajaremos en clase sobre la gramática y la ortografía. Es importante que los niños se sientan libres de escribir en su diario sin preocuparse de hacer errores. Practicarán la lectura del inglés correcto cuando lean mis respuestas. Escribiré respuestas que tomen en cuenta el nivel de inglés del alumno para que éste pueda entenderlas. Si no entiendo algo que escribió un alumno, se lo preguntaré personalmente al alumno.

Aquí, lo más importante es que los alumnos escriban lo que quieren y que me entreguen su diario el día indicado. Los alumnos se llevarán sus diarios a casa después de la última clase de ESL de la semana. Si su niño(a) tiene clase de ESL los martes y jueves, se llevará su diario a casa los jueves y tendrá que entregármelo los martes. Los que tienen clases conmigo cada día, se llevarán su diario a casa los viernes y me lo entregarán el lunes siguiente. Por favor, ayude a su niño(a) para que recuerde que debe escribir en su diario y entregármelo a tiempo.

En mi experiencia, estos diarios de diálogo me ayudan a conocer mejor a mis alumnos y les ayudan a ellos a conocerme mejor también. Me siento impaciente de empezar a utilizarlos aquí en Ephesus.

Gracias por ayudar a sus niños y apoyarlos en su aprendizaje escolar. Por favor, no duden en llamarme o escribirme si tienen cualquier pregunta o preocupación..

Atentamente,

Mimi Collins
Maestra de ESL
929-8715 x224
mcollins@chccs.k12.nc.us

3. Modified parent notification letter sent to parents of students who arrived later in the semester

April 11, 2003

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Kubota,

I am really enjoying getting to know Aki. He is a pleasure to work with. I am sure he will learn English quickly.

Today Aki is bringing home a dialogue journal. Dialogue journals are for communication between me and each individual child. Writing in the dialogue journal helps ESL students with reading and thinking as well as writing.

Aki and I will write back and forth each week in this book. It will be like having a written conversation. I will not correct grammar or spelling in the dialogue journal; we work on grammar and spelling in class. It is important that he feel he can write freely in the dialogue journal, without worrying about mistakes. At first, we will draw pictures and not do too much writing. He will get practice reading proper English when he reads my replies. My replies will be at a level he will be able to understand. If I don't understand something Aki has written, I will ask him.

The important thing is for Aki to write or draw what he wants to and to bring the dialogue journal back to me at the proper time. He should write in it the day he takes it home and bring it back the next school day. Please don't help him with the dialogue journal. If he feels it is too difficult he can tell me, and I will help him at first. Please help him remember to write in it and to bring it back on time.

I have found that dialogue journals help me get to know my students and help them get to know me. I use them here at Ephesus with all my students.

Thank you for helping and supporting your child's education. Please call, write, or email me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Mimi Collins
ESL teacher
929-8715 x224
mcollins@chccs.k12.nc.us

4. Student release form in English

Student Release Form

Dear Parents:

As many of you know, I am pursuing my Master's in Teaching English as a Second Language from the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont. I have completed my coursework and have been writing my thesis this semester. The subject of my thesis is Dialogue Journals.

In my thesis, I would like to include excerpts (short segments) from the dialogue journals of my students. The focus of the excerpts will be on showing how the dialogue journals have helped in teaching certain aspects of English. I will not include any child's or family's first or last names. All photocopies will be kept confidential. The form below will be used to document your permission to use these excerpts.

Sincerely,

PERMISSION SLIP

Student Name: _____ School: _____

Teacher: _____

Your Address: _____

I am the parent/legal guardian of the child named above. I have received and read your letter regarding using excerpts of my child's work in your thesis and agree to the following:

(please check the appropriate box below.)

☐ **I DO** give permission for excerpts of my child's work done at Ephesus Road Elementary School to be used in Amelia M. Collins' master's thesis. No children's names will appear in the thesis.

☐ **I DO NOT** give permission for excerpts of my child's work done at Ephesus Road Elementary School to be used in Amelia M. Collins' master's thesis.

Signature of Parent or Guardian: _____ Date: _____

5. Student release form in Spanish

Autorización para uso de extractos

Estimados padres:

Como muchos de ustedes sabrán, yo estoy tratando de obtener mi Master como profesora de inglés como segunda lengua de la Escuela para Capacitación Internacional de Brattleboro en Vermont. Ya he completado todas mis asignaturas y este semestre me encuentro escribiendo mi tesis académica. El tema de ésta es el uso de las Libretas de Comunicación (*Dialogue Journals*).

En mi tesis, yo quisiera incluir algunos extractos (diálogos cortos) de las libretas de comunicación de mis alumnos. El enfoque de los extractos será demostrar cómo las libretas de comunicación han ayudado a enseñar ciertos aspectos del idioma inglés. En este trabajo no incluiré los nombres ni los apellidos del alumno ni de su familia. Además, todas las fotocopias se mantendrán en forma confidencial. La hoja de permiso, a continuación, se usará para documentar su autorización para que yo pueda usar estos extractos.

Les saluda atentamente,

HOJA DE PERMISO

Nombre del alumno(a): _____ Escuela: _____

Maestra(o): _____

Su dirección: _____

Yo soy la madre/el padre/el tutor del alumno mencionado arriba. Confirmo que he recibido y leído su carta acerca de su deseo de utilizar algunos extractos de las tareas de mi hijo(a) en su tesis académica, y mi respuesta es la siguiente:

(favor de marcar la casilla apropiada a continuación)

☐ **YO DOY** mi permiso para que se usen ciertos extractos de las tareas realizadas por mi hijo(a) en Ephesus Road Elementary School en la tesis que está preparando Amelia M. Collins para obtener su Master. Entiendo que en dicho trabajo no aparecerá el nombre de ninguno de los alumnos.

☐ **YO NO DOY** mi permiso para que se usen ciertos extractos de las tareas realizadas por mi hijo(a) en Ephesus Road Elementary School en la tesis que está preparando Amelia M. Collins para obtener su Master.

Firma de la madre, padre o tutor: _____ Fecha: _____

APPENDIX B

SAMPLES FROM DIALOGUE JOURNALS

- 1. Example of the back cover of a completed dialogue journal**
- 2. Sample dialogue journal pages of Amie, kindergarten student from Korea**
- 3. Sample dialogue journal pages of Debbie, beginner second-grade student from Korea who arrived in the U.S. in February**
- 4. Sample dialogue journal pages of Nina, second-grade student from Mexico**
- 5. Sample dialogue journal pages of Helena, second-grade student from Portugal**
- 6. Sample dialogue journal pages of Jessie, second-grade student from Korea**
- 7. Sample dialogue journal pages of Robert, third-grade student from Korea**
- 8. Sample dialogue journal pages of Susie, fourth-grade student from Korea**
- 9. Sample dialogue journal pages of Rachel, fourth-grade student from Korea**

B-1: Example of the back cover of a completed dialogue journal



B-2: Sample dialogue journal pages of Amie, kindergarten student from Korea

Dear Amie May 2, 2003

We have some of the same favorite foods! I like carrots, lettuce, and ice cream, too. Right now my family and I have lettuce ready in our garden. It's delicious. Here are some more of my favorite foods:



corn-on-the cob



mangos

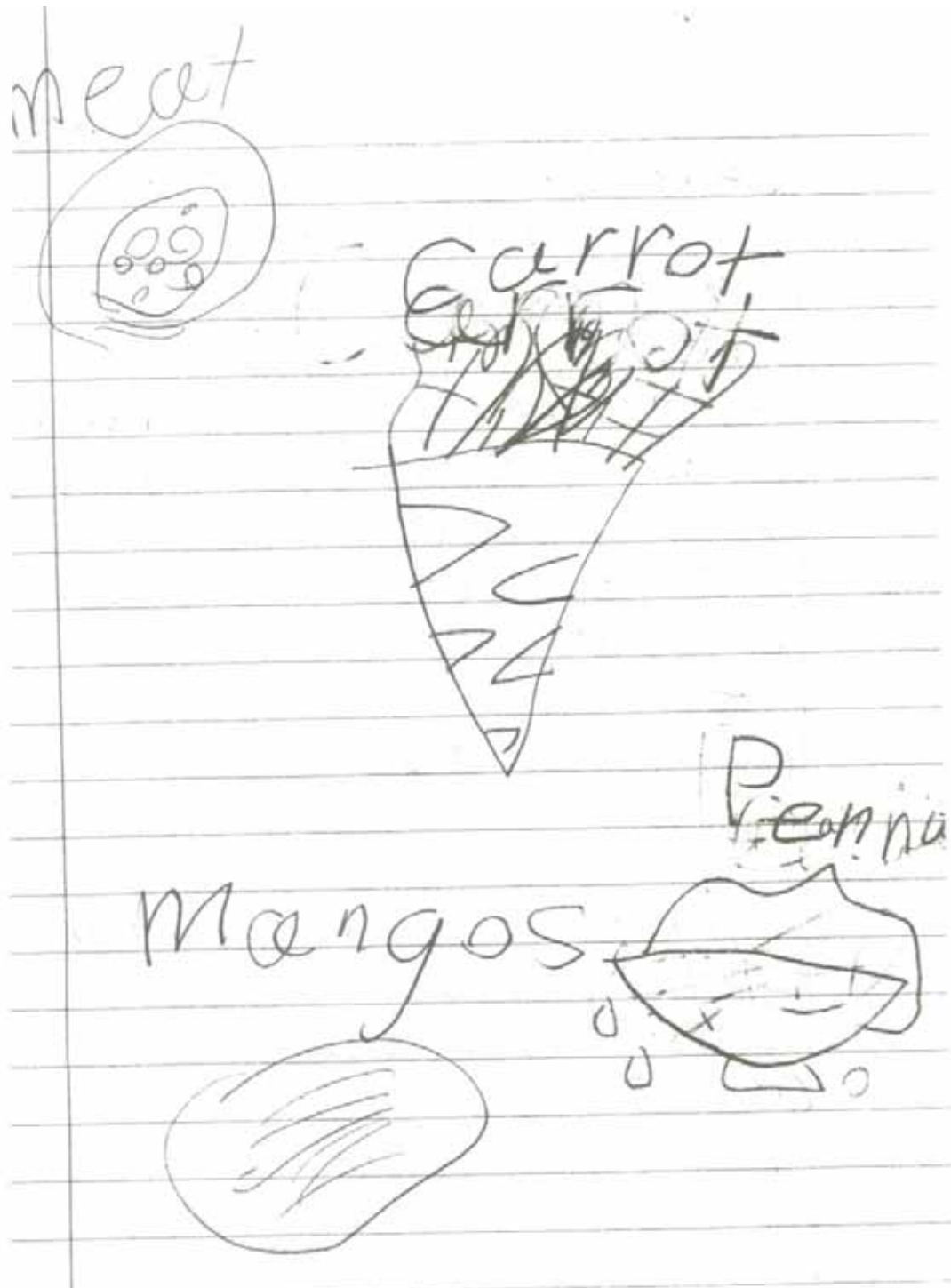


peaches

Now can you draw some pictures of foods you don't like?

Your teacher,
Ms. Collins

B-2: Sample dialogue journal pages of Amie, kindergarten student from Korea
(cont.)



B-2: Sample dialogue journal pages of Amie, kindergarten student from Korea
(cont.)

Dear Amie

May 6, 2003

Wait a minute! I thought you liked carrots! I do. They are my favorite vegetable. I like mangoes, too, but they aren't good unless they're ripe.

Here are some foods I don't like:



meat



jello

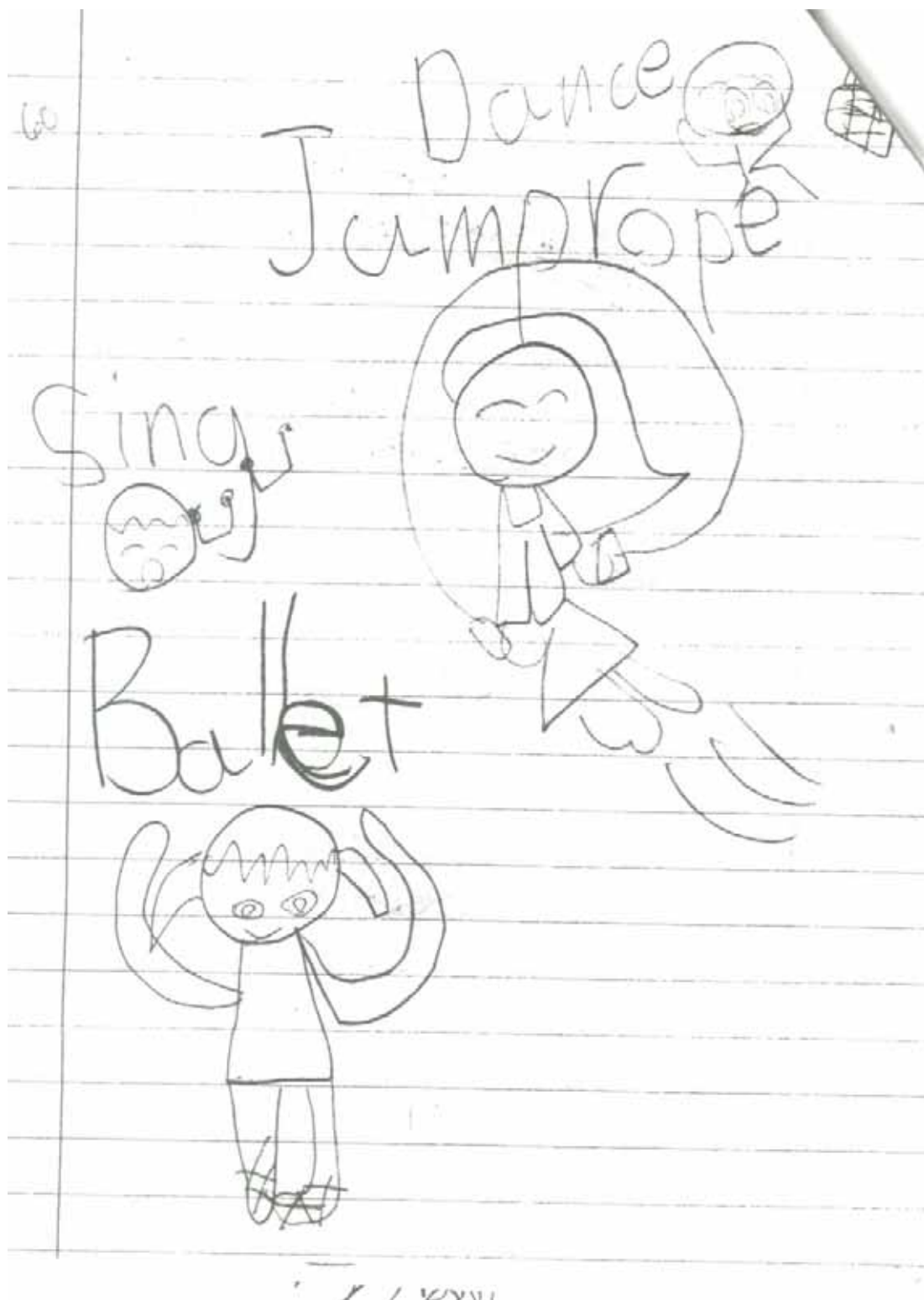


marshmallows

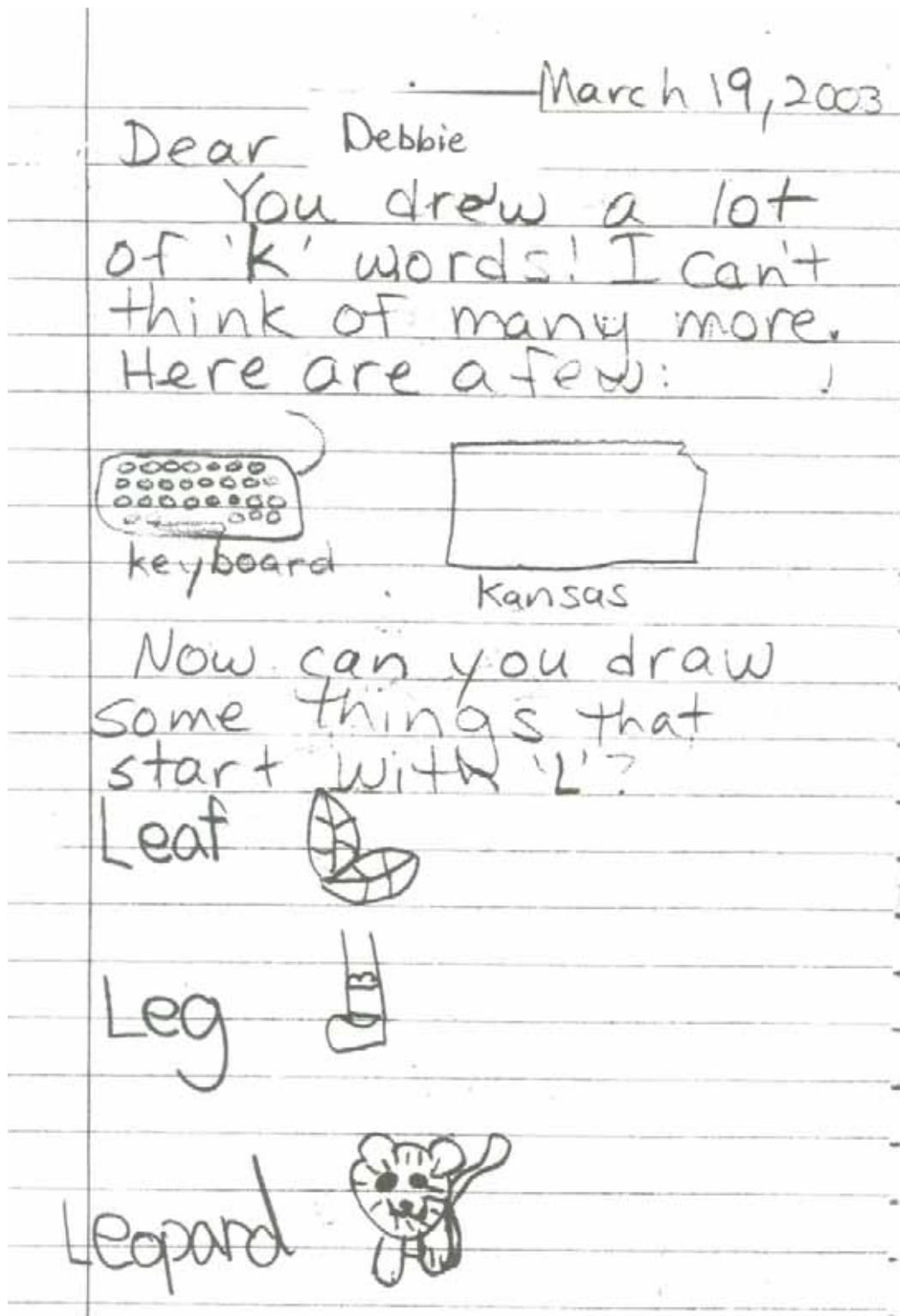
Now can you draw some pictures of you doing your favorite activities?

Your teacher,
Ms. Collins

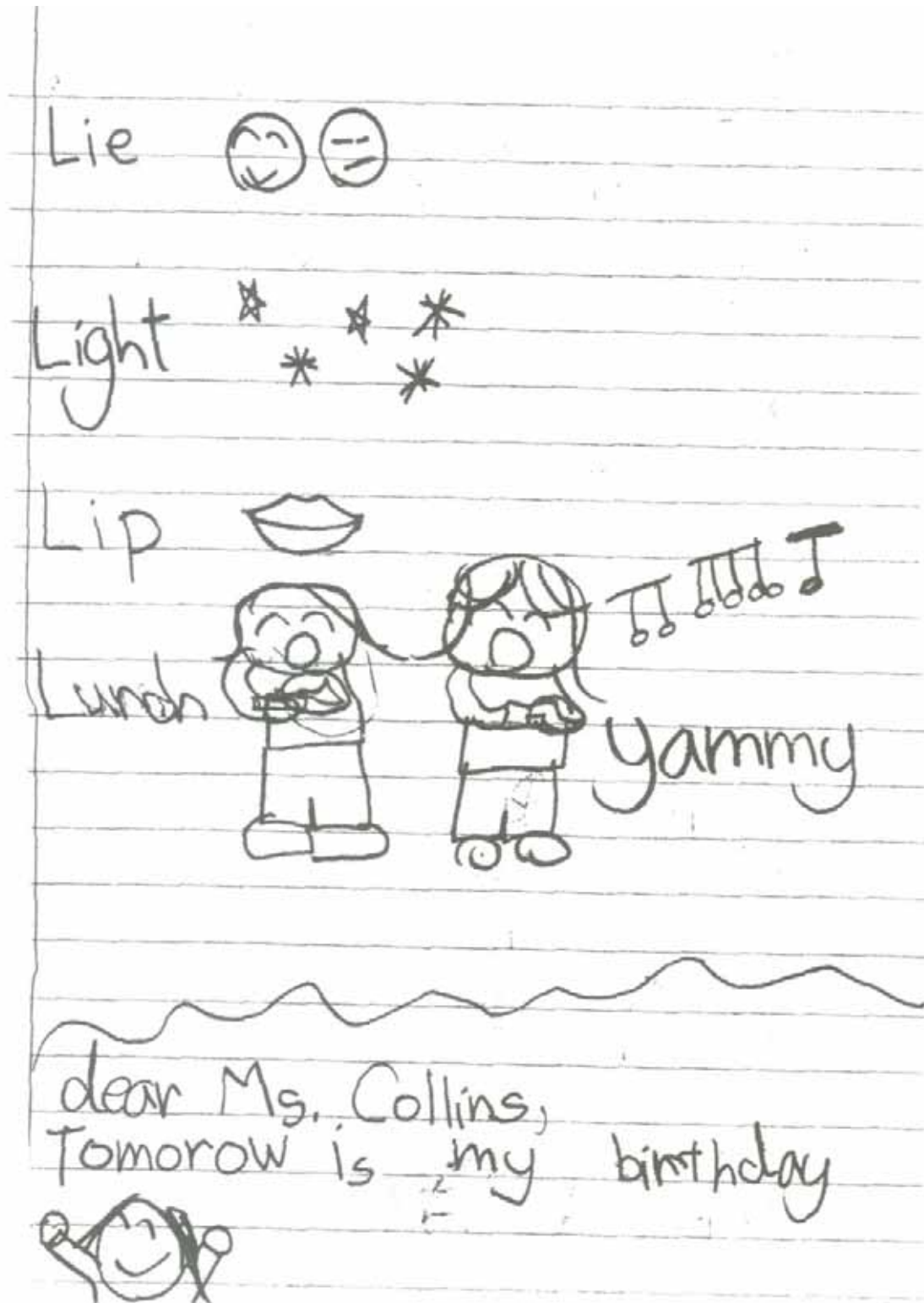
B-2: Sample dialogue journal pages of Amie, kindergarten student from Korea
(cont.)



B-3: Sample dialogue journal pages of Debbie, beginner second-grade student from Korea who arrived in the U.S. in February



B-3: Sample dialogue journal pages of Debbie, beginner second-grade student from Korea who arrived in the U.S. in February (cont.)



B-4: Sample dialogue journal pages of Nina, second-grade student from Mexico

I like posole is a mexican
Food and enchiladas that's my
favorite one and my brother
eat chocolate cake and
it's cool all the people I now
they like mexican food.

Feb. 10, 2003

Dear Nina

You're right - a lot of
people like Mexican food. I
don't eat all kinds because
I am a vegetarian. That
means I don't eat meat. I
like to make my own Mexican
food without meat. What

B-4: Sample dialogue journal pages of Nina, second-grade student from Mexico
(cont.)

do you eat at lunch?

I like to bring my lunch
to school.

Your teacher,
Ms. Collins

In some of the mexican
food use lot of meat

I love the meat because

I am Mexican and all the

people of mexico likes

meat I eat in lunch

diferents Food sometimes

B-4: Sample dialogue journal pages of Nina, second-grade student from Mexico
(cont.)

I eat sandich I love
the sandich and some
times my mom cook
meat with chesse and
other things all my live
I eat meat some time
my dad said I can't live
'with out meat bye bye
see you next week.

B-5: Sample dialogue journal pages of Helena, second-grade student from Portugal

Dear ms. Collins
I don't have
any picture of
pioga but I'm
gonna find one
becoase I'm gon
say to may mom
If I can take of
from my folder
and If I can I'm
gonna bringet I
Love the Pictures
of how yout dog.
Spmtimes wen
she do a Paw
I give et a
snack and one
day shedid a
fetc he and I
give her 10
snack your friend
Helena

B-5: Sample dialogue journal pages of Helena, second-grade student from Portugal
(cont.)

February 23, 2003

Dear Helena,

I hope you can find a picture of Pioga. You are a good dog trainer. You're smart to reward Pioga with snacks when she fetches the ball.

My dog Lou lived to be 14 years old. She was a good dog. She always had a lot of energy and loved to fetch balls. After she had fetched balls for a long time, I would let her chew on one. She would chew them to pieces! A friend who played tennis would give me old balls, so I had a big supply.

What kind of balls does Pioga like to fetch?

Your teacher,
Ms Collins

B-5: Sample dialogue journal pages of Helena, second-grade student from Portugal
(cont.)

03/6/03

Dear Ms. Collins

Pioga likes to fetch
all kinds of balls.
She likes to
fetch soccer balls
and tennis balls.
Thos Lou likes
to play with
balloons?

Because Pioga likes
to play with balloons.
Sometimes when
I'm riding on the
bicycle Pioga runs
beside me and
when I get back
home I give her
a reward, to Pioga
and the reward is
a little bone but
a snack, you fried.

Helena

B-6: Sample dialogue journal pages of Jessie, second-grade student from Korea

Dear Ms. Collins,
Today is Nina's birthday.
My family like a Nina
So my family like it.
She invite me on her birthday
party. I am so happy.
Do you know how we now
Nina. Well when my dad
was going to a E.S. of
U.N. @ and Nina's mom
was same class with
my dad so we know is
Nina. Nina is
my best friend in the
note ward. My mom said
I have to play with her.
Do you know why? Because
My dad and Nina's mom
are same class. so I
like that my best friend are same
class we are same class with Nina

B-6: Sample dialogue journal pages of Jessie, second-grade student from Korea
(cont.)

April 23, 2003

Dear Jessie

I didn't know your dad
and Nina's mom were
in the same ESL class.

You know her through
Ephesus and through your
dad's class.

It was fun seeing
everyone's dresses today.
They were all beautiful!
I'm glad it wasn't too
hot outside today, aren't
you?

When do you wear
that dress in Korea?
Do you wear it on special
days only?

Your friend,
Ms Collins

B-6: Sample dialogue journal pages of Jessie, second-grade student from Korea
(cont.)

April 24, 2003

Dear ms. collins

I found a catrpillrer today.

I am so happy that I have
a catrpillrer. Do you know what.

My catrpillrer is dead.

My catrpillrer name is kally.

It is so cute. **Nina** help

me to find a catrpillrer. I am so

Sad. When I was a catrpillrer

I will not dead. I hate it. X

My dad said "It is ok."

but I am not ok. It is to hard

to find a caterpillrer. So I am

Sad Did you find a catrpillrer

?. This is my first time.

Your friend,

Ms. **Jessie**

B-6: Sample dialogue journal pages of Jessie, second-grade student from Korea
(cont.)

May 1, 2003

Dear Jessie,

I am sorry that your caterpillar died. My daughter Carson found a caterpillar last week and had it in a plastic bin. When she was at school, our cat killed the caterpillar. She was sad, too.

Every year we collect a few caterpillars and feed them and watch them make a chrysalis and turn into a moth. I will try to find some that we can watch in the classroom, okay? We have to find the right kind of leaves to feed them. They like cherry leaves.

Your friend,
Ms. Collins

B-7: Sample dialogue journal pages of Robert, third-grade student from Korea

Lion King is not ride. is movie but
people come out to on the stage
and sing.

I give mom the vanilla cake.
at night my family sit together and
on cake my mom blow candle and
sing a song the happy birthday.
we went to restaurant and we eat
chicken and B-B-Q.

April 21, 2003

Dear Robert,

I see! You saw a play
or a musical of The Lion King!
I didn't see the word 'movie'
earlier.

When your mom blew
her candles out, did she
make a wish? That's
what we do; we make a
wish, and if we blow all

B-7: Sample dialogue journal pages of Robert, third-grade student from Korea (cont.)

the candles out, we are supposed to get our wish.

Which restaurant did you go to to celebrate your mom's birthday? Have you been to many restaurants in town?

Your teacher,
Mr. Collins

my mom said "I wish my son healthy and study hard."

and we go ~~my mom~~ birthday we go Eastern Light.

I went restaurants is Outback, T.J. Friday, Eastern light, Indian restaurant, El Rodeo and Mama Dip's kitchen

B-7: Sample dialogue journal pages of Robert, third-grade student from Korea (cont.)

April 23, 2003
Dear Robert,

I think your mom
made a good wish.

I've never been to
Eastern Light. Is it good?

You asked me today
about tutoring. Ms. Gardner
and I are trying to
organize it for next week..
The high school students
are very busy now. I hope
they can come.

You are reading
difficult books now. Which
ones are your favorites?

Your teacher,
Ms. Collins

B-7: Sample dialogue journal pages of Robert, third-grade student from Korea (cont.)

Eastern Light is Korea restaurant.
It have Korea food is jang jang myer.
my favorite book is Star Wars!
and Pokemon, and Harry Potter!
Star Wars is fight game and I person
fight bad guys. is interesting!
and Pokemon is fun story. before I don't
like Harry Potter but now is so
fun! so I like Harry Potter. I read
in Korea so I wanted read Harry
Potter so today I see Harry Potter
book in library but is very diffic-
ult to me.

April 25, 2003

Dear **Robert**,

I know about Star Wars, Pokemon, and Harry Potter. What I know about Pokemon I learned from my students, including you! →

B-7: Sample dialogue journal pages of Robert, third-grade student from Korea (cont.)

I really like Harry Potter, though. Since you have read it in Korean, it would be great if you can try to read it in English. I would like for you to get the tapes or CD's from the public library and listen to them. You can read along in the book sometimes, too. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone is on 7 CD's, I think. The man who reads it speaks very clearly and is easy to understand. You can check tapes and CD's out for 3 weeks, so that is plenty of time to listen to the book.

Your teacher,
Ms. Collins

B-8: Sample dialogue journal pages of Susie, fourth-grade student from Korea

Dear Ms. Collins, Feb-11-03
Do you want my story? Ok. I went
first Europe is Eastern Europe.
and I went Poland. I went Poland's
capital Warsaw. Next place is Hungary.
and capital Budapest too!
every place is fun. I like walk the
world! Next place is Austria and
I went to capital Vienna too.
Hu! So many... and I went
Czechoslovakia. and last is
Germany. every place is pretty
cool. and Next letter writing a
Northern Europe. your student,
Susie

B-8: Sample dialogue journal pages of Susie, fourth-grade student from Korea
(cont.)

Feb. 12, 2003

Dear Susie

You've been to so many places in Europe! I've never been to Poland, the Czech Republic, or Slovakia, but I've been to Budapest, many places in Austria, and Germany. My husband and I also lived in Yugoslavia for a year, and we traveled all over Yugoslavia.

My very favorite place in Europe is a small town in Austria. It's called Hallstatt, and it's on a beautiful big lake with mountains all around.

I can't wait to hear what you've seen in northern Europe!
Your teacher, Ms. Collins

B-8: Sample dialogue journal pages of Susie, fourth-grade student from Korea
(cont.)

Feb-19-03

Dear Ms. Collins,

Today is Northern Europe turn.
I wait for this. First place is
Norway and capital Oslo.
We are went Viking Museum.
Very cool. and I met Emma.
Second place is Sweden and
capital Stockholm. we are saw
basah Museum. Third place
is Finland and capital helsin
ki. we are went church. pretty
Cool. fourth place is Russia
and capital Moscow. We saw
many thing. last is Denmark
and Copenhagen. I saw Mer
maid bronze statue. fun ever!
your student,

Susie

B-9: Sample dialogue journal pages of Rachel, fourth-grade student from Korea

Dear Ms. Collins

I watched several kinds of dogs at the Community Center park. Some of them were fighting, and some of them were just sitting on the grass. Some of them were walking.

Rachel

March 17, 2003

Dear Rachel,

On the first page you mentioned a dog. Does your family have a dog in Korea? Tell me about it.

It sounds like you like to 'dog-watch' when you are outside. I like to watch dogs, too.

B-9: Sample dialogue journal pages of Rachel, fourth-grade student from Korea (cont.)

They are so funny.
Your teacher,
Ms. Collins

Dear Ms. Collins

We had one little dog named 'comy
She was five-year old Yorkshire
terrier.

She was so cute, hairy and amiable
Especially **Debbie** really liked.

We could not carry her to America.

Now she lives with my mother's friend
Whenever we see dogs.

We miss her very much.

Rachel

B-9: Sample dialogue journal pages of Rachel, fourth-grade student from Korea (cont.)

March 20, 2003

Dear Rachel

I bet Comy is cute!
Bring in a picture of
her if you have one. I
like Yorkshire terriers, too.
My daughter Carson would
like to get a little dog
like that. She wants
a dog, but we can't get
one. Instead, she walks
our neighbor's dog. He's
a Sheltie (a small Collie).

When you grow up, are
you going to have a pet?

Your teacher,
Ms. Collins

B-9: Sample dialogue journal pages of Rachel, fourth-grade student from Korea (cont.)

Dear Ms. Collins

I want to have a pet

When I'm adult.

Unfortunately I don't bring a picture of my.

I forgot bring that America.

We had brought many pets.

For example rabbits, chickens, hamsters, cat and gold fishes.

I wonder had you ever had a pet when you were a child?

Rachel

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