



# The effects of a wiki-based collaborative process writing pedagogy on writing ability and attitudes among upper primary school students in Mainland China

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## ABSTRACT

This study mainly explored the effects of a *Wiki-based Collaborative Process Writing Pedagogy* (WCPWP) on writing ability and writing attitudes among Primary Four students in Shenzhen, China. Besides, this study also investigated students' collaborative writing process with the WCPWP. Students wrote their compositions in a MediaWiki platform ([www.joyouswriting.com](http://www.joyouswriting.com)) named Joyous Writing Club (JWC) developed by the first author. By using a quasi-experimental design, two groups (classes) of Primary Four students participated in this study. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected including writing ability composition tests (pre-test and post-test), writing attitude tests (pre-test and post-test), online wiki documents, and observations. The results provided a general picture of the students' collaborative writing process and showed that the WCPWP had a positive but not significant effect on students' writing ability. Importantly, the results indicated that the WCPWP had a significant positive effect on the writing attitudes of students. The study further discussed the reasons related to the positive effects of the WCPWP on writing ability (not significant) and writing interests (significant). Implications and recommendations for primary school educators and Chinese language teachers are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Previous research on Chinese writing (Chinese written composition) at the primary school level has indicated that a significant number of students have low writing abilities (B. Dong, 2005; J. Dong, 2008; Huang, 2008; Ren, 2003) and negative attitudes towards writing (Wang, 2007; Yi, 2009; Zhang, 2009). Traditional Teacher-centred Individual Writing Pedagogy (TTIWP) has been criticized for being one of the reasons for this phenomenon (Liu, 2009; Xiong, 1995).

In most primary schools in Mainland China, the approach to the teaching of Chinese writing is TTIWP, which is product-oriented (Gu, 2004) and teacher-centred (Cui, 2007; Sun, 2008). In this approach, students usually write their compositions using pen and paper (Cui, 2007; Sun, 2008). Teachers do not usually emphasize students' writing processes, but are simply concerned with students producing acceptable compositions (Gu, 2004). Typically, at the beginning of the lesson, the teacher gives a writing topic to the class. The teacher spends some time discussing the key points and provides some useful expressions and model essays. After that, the teacher may ask some students to talk about their writing ideas. Finally, students are given the rest of the lesson time to write and are then required to hand in their compositions for marking and grading (Cui, 2007; Sun, 2008). Since teachers usually guide students in writing compositions following the same model essay, some students' compositions tend to be mechanical and stereotyped, and lack original thinking and unique individual character (Cui, 2007; Xia, 2009). Moreover, students seldom have opportunities to share their writing ideas with their peers, which is very important for writing (Xia, 2009) because, while interacting and sharing points of view, students can develop critical thinking and thus gain a better understanding (Pozzi, 2008).

In recent decades, studies on innovative approaches to teaching Chinese written composition have flourished (Huang, 2008; Wang, 2004; Wu, 2009; Xiong, 1995), and researchers and educators have begun to focus on the benefits of collaborative learning in Chinese

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writing (Wu, 2009; Xia, 2009). Since 2003, the New Standard of Chinese Curriculum has emphasized group interactions in Chinese language learning (“New Standard”, 2003).

However, some scholars have pointed out that unless collaborative activities are carefully orchestrated by the teacher, students may not take group work seriously, socializing instead of working, assigning most of the work to one member, completing the activity superficially, and generally not engaging fully in the collaborative process (Clark, 2003). For instance, Spigelman (1998) adopted the collaborative writing approach in face-to-face English language writing classes. His study indicated that students did not develop ideas collaboratively as they were not able to claim individualized ownership of ideas in their writing. The problem was that students appropriated other group members’ ideas, which was often interpreted as a form of cheating or plagiarism. With the rapid development of information technology, a technology tool named wiki has been used to help resolve this problem. The history function of wikis can help students and teachers trace and reflect on the progress of a project and the contribution of each participant (Lamb & Johnson, 2007), thereby enabling students to maintain individual ownership of their texts (Hewett, 2009).

With the use of a wiki to facilitate collaborative writing, it is necessary to develop wiki-enabled pedagogies that can help teachers to equip themselves with the knowledge necessary to make successful connections among wiki, pedagogy, and Chinese writing. Li, Chu, Ki, and Woo (2012) designed and orchestrated a Wiki-based Collaborative Process Writing Pedagogy (WCPWP), to investigate students’ Chinese writing process on a MediaWiki, and explore students and teacher’s perceptions of and attitudes towards the WCPWP. However, the effects of the WCPWP on students’ writing ability and writing attitudes need further investigation. This study mainly aims to address this research problem.

## 2. Literature review

With the rapid development of wiki technologies, wikis have been widely applied to encourage learners to participate in collaborative learning (Cheng, 2009; Choy & Ng, 2007; Chu, 2008, 2009; Mak & Coniam, 2008; Wheeler, Yeomans, & Wheeler, 2008; Zorko, 2009). For example, Woo, Chu, Ho, and Li (2009) investigated the effect of collaborative English writing with a PBworks wiki among Chinese Primary Five students in Hong Kong. Their study found that the students enjoyed writing with the wiki, and their overall perceptions were that it helped foster teamwork and improved writing. There have been various wiki projects, such as the National Writing Project (NWP), which includes 200 university-affiliated sites across the United States, that were initiated to improve the teaching and learning of English writing. The Writing for Integrated Teacher Education (WriTE) Project was established in 2002 as the NWP’s first site for English language learning in Asia. It is managed by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and its mission is to enhance the learning and teaching of English in Hong Kong. The WriTE project has been successful in boosting Year 7 secondary school students’ confidence in writing, as well as tapping into their creative skills (Mak & Coniam, 2008).

Wikis have been associated with affordances that can provide a collaborative workspace for students, and allow them to be actively involved in their learning process (Neumann & Hood, 2009; Rick & Guzdial, 2006). According to Kirschner, Strijbos, Kreijns, and Beers (2004), education is a unique combination of technological, social, and educational contexts and affordances. While technology mediates social and educational contexts such that their properties induce and invite specific learning behaviours, we speak of technology affording learning and education. With the adoption of the wiki as a technological tool, the matching affordances of the wiki with social and educational affordances have been classified as media, spatial, temporal, navigation, emphasis, synthesis and access-control affordances (Bower, 2008; Woo, Chu, Ho, & Li, 2011; Woo et al., 2009). Among these affordances, temporal affordances involve the ability to access anytime anywhere (accessibility), ability to record the editing history (“record-ability”) and to play back (“playback-ability”). Such affordances can help students and teachers to trace and reflect on the progress of a project and the contribution of each participant. Spatial affordances include the ability to resize elements within an interface (“resize-ability”) and move and place elements within an interface (“move-ability”). Such affordances can help students to revise and edit their writing contents within an interface.

In recent several years, wiki, which is an easily accessible and editable website, is becoming more common, its use in education is patchy and pedagogical reasoning and evaluation of such use is under explored. Wong, Chen, Chai, Chin, and Gao (2011) suggested an adaptable collaborative writing approach employing a wiki for teachers in order to address the typical weaknesses of Singaporean Chinese students in learning Chinese as a second language (L2) with respect to Chinese writing. The collaborative writing approach (V.S.P.O.W.) is characterized as a recursive, bottom-up writing process that requires students collaboratively to carry out wiki-based “word/phrase pooling” (V), “sentence making” (S), “paragraph writing” (P), and “outlining” (O); and eventually individual essay writing (W). The V.S.P.O.W. is highly adaptable in helping younger L2 (Chinese language as the second language) students to write compositions, which requires the most complex and cognitively demanding linguistic skills, always a great challenge for language researchers and teachers. However, the V.S.P.O.W. was not appropriate in the case of the students in the present study. Since students of this study were all native speakers of Chinese, and at least three sessions of class-wide discussion to select V.S.P. (vocabulary, sentences and paragraphs) respectively would have been unnecessary and time wasting. Similar to Wong et al.’s (2011) study, there is a need to suggest effective pedagogy for primary teachers in Mainland China in order to prepare them for the effective teaching of Chinese writing.

According to Wu and Li (2013), in Mainland China, currently, people’s understanding of wiki technology is only in its infancy, and the application of wiki technology in the field of teaching of writing is still at the trial stage. However, it’s unique advantages and potential power in teaching of writing have been widely claimed, which makes the in-depth exploration by educators and researchers become imperative. It is also necessary to help teachers to enrich pedagogical knowledge of capitalizing on wiki to support Chinese writing.

Li et al. (2012) designed and orchestrated a WCPWP to help teachers with their teaching of Chinese writing in Mainland China. The design of the WCPWP is mainly based on social constructivist theory and the social view of writing process theory. The collaborative writing task for each group was divided into nonlinear and recurrent cyclic series of four stages: group prewriting, group drafting, revising and editing. The progressing of the four stages was monitored by the group members (see the bottom part of Fig. 1). Students can be better prepared to write independently once they have learned how to go through these writing stages and have developed their own writing strategies (Tompkins, 2008).

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