Using "Track Changes" in Microsoft Word® to Correct Student Writing

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Primarily to help students realize that writing is a process and that it can become a collaborative and enjoyable activity by sharing written work with peers, who might utilize the opportunity to contemplate on own work, students have been asked to write their paragraphs using a word processor and send their work to the teacher/peer as an electronic document. Corrections to these student paragraphs were made using 'Track Changes' and several other features of Microsoft® Word. Readers will see two examples of such paragraphs and the results of a short questionnaire reflecting students' feelings about different correction schemes, peer-feedback and revising/editing.

Purpose in Using a Word-Processor

The purpose of using Track Changes to correct student writing is to engage students in the computerized writing process and encourage them to examine, add, change, and rearrange their ideas. Finally and hopefully, students will consider writing as a multi-step process during which their product transforms and improves.

Stages of Correction and the Microsoft® Word Features Used

At the beginning of the semester, the students were asked to use Microsoft Word (versions 2003/2007) when writing their paragraphs and a few hours were spent in the 'Smart Room' (with an interactive white board and computers) to talk over the basics of using Microsoft Word and how to name and format documents.

After receiving students' paragraphs as a Word document[*], the teacher first checked the format and made sure they were in Times New Roman, 12 points, double-spaced, justified paragraph format as prescribed. Next, one or two of the three forms of correction was used:

1. Correcting minor mistakes while "Track Changes" is on thus letting the student see the original and the corrected version side by side (For example: He has gone …) by using the "Track Changes" button under the "Review" tab.

   > **Deleted:** have

2. Marking the error with a specific color (yellow: language, green: content, blue: organization) by using "Text Highlight Color" under the "Home" tab.

3. Inserting notes in the margin of the document on the same line of an error and with an explanation of the error, by using the "New Comment" button under the "Review" tab.

Different correction types depending on the level of the students were made use of. Whereas intermediate students might quickly comprehend their mistake once highlighted, beginner students may need a little more assistance to gather what is wrong; therefore, notes were inserted informing them of the nature of the error and/or why it was not correct.

Hence, a paragraph corrected in these ways may look like Figure 1. and 2.

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[*] Microsoft Word 2007

Children with siblings are different from an only child in two ways. To begin with, children with ~~siblins~~ siblings are more responsible people than an only child. Because, they have to take care of their younger siblings. A child ~~which~~ who has a younger brother or sister has to grow up earlier and share the attention of his/her parent's. However, an only child receives more of their parent's attention. Therefore, an only child ~~can~~ may think that he/she is the only person on the world. Secondly, an only child can feel alone sometimes, although he/she has friends. For example when he/she has a serious illness, friends can't help and support like siblings. On the other hand, siblings help each other when there is a problem or illness. To sum up, in order to ~~beter~~ better understand the differences between an only child and children with siblings, they can be contrasted.

Language	A couple of spelling and s-v agreement mistakes. There's a fragment.
Organization	Very good.
Content	The minors of the second solution is repetitive.
OVERALL	Good. Please edit and re-send.

Figure 1. Student paragraph corrected using track changes and highlighting

There are two main differences between being an only child and having siblings. The first difference is economic advantages. An only child has more economic advantages th~~an only child~~ children with siblings. For example, an only child can go to a private school or ~~an only child he~~ can have a lot of money ~~for buying~~ to buy new clothes. The second difference is in personality development. An only child can be selfish because he/she doesn't have any siblings. However, children with siblings learn sharing at early ages. ??? To sum up, there are differences between being an only child and children with siblings in terms of economic advantages and personality development.

Zeynep Akşit, 3/3/2009 8:55:00 PM deleted: an only child

Comment [ZA1]: Is this an important outcome of having a lot of money?

Comment [ZA2]: No new info here!

Comment [ZA3]: A Supporting sentence missing?

Figure 2. Student paragraph corrected using track changes and notes in the margin

Student responses to an end-of-term questionnaire on different correction schemes were as follows:

	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I examine the **'colored lines'** to find my mistakes	53 %	18 %	15 %	3 %	12 %
I learn from the corrections made by **'Track Changes'**	65 %	15 %	6 %	6 %	9 %
I read my teacher's **'comments'** and correct my mistakes	64 %	21 %	6 %	0 %	9 %

Table 1. Student responses to three different forms of correction

Peer Feedback

Students were also asked to read and comment on their classmates' paragraphs. They sent their paragraphs first to a classmate (Figure 3, Arrow 1). The classmate read the paragraph and marked a checklist (Appendix 1) provided by the teacher according to the discourse and sent it back to the writer of the paragraph (Arrow 2). The writer examined the markings, reads the peer's comments if there were any, revised the paragraph accordingly, and sent it to the teacher (Arrow 3). The teacher read the paragraph and the peer's comments, made the necessary corrections, and sent the corrected document to both the writer and peer (Figure 3).
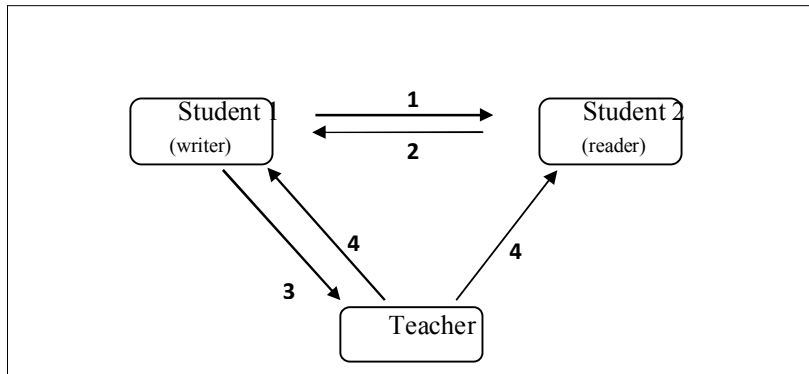

Figure 3. Peer feedback cycle

When the students were asked whether they thought they benefited from reading and thinking about a peer's paragraph, they answered as follows:

	Always	**Very Often**	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**	**Never**
I learn more when I give feedback	13 %	42 %	13 %	13 %	19 %

Table 2. Student responses to peer feedback

Finally, students were asked whether they understand that they need to revise and edit their written work before it is finalized, they responded as follows:

	Always	**Very Often**	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**	**Never**
I see the need to revise and edit	52 %	18 %	21 %	3 %	6 %

Table 3. Student responses to revision and editing

The objective of asking students to use Word to write their paragraphs and to revise their writing after peer and/or teacher feedback was to raise awareness about the process of writing. A short questionnaire using the Likert scale given at the end of the term illustrated that over 70 % of the students stated that either "always" or "very often" they paid attention to the different correcting schemes. From their responses (Table 1) it can be inferred that they prefer the use of "Track Changes" and inserting notes in the margin (over 70%) rather than "colored lines." About peer feedback, although more than 50 % of the students stated that they "always" or "very often" learn by giving peer feedback, they have stated orally that peer feedback was "boring." Finally, the percentage of the students who "rarely" or "never" see the need for revision is only 9 %. More than 50% of the students state to have understood that revision is a necessary step in writing.

As a tentative evaluation of this small-scale preliminary questionnaire, it can be asserted that students understand that they need to revise and edit their work before it is finalized, which is a rewarding outcome of this study.

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Appendix 1

A peer-feedback checklist for a problem solution paragraph

	PEER-CHECK	YES	NO
1	An introductory sentence is present.		
2	Topic sentence presents the problem and the solutions.		
3	Solution #1 is present and has a sequence marker. (Firstly, To begin with..)		
4	The solution is explained (and is related to the causes)		
5	The strengths and weaknesses of the solution are given.		
6	Solution #2 is present and has a sequence marker. (Secondly, ..)		
7	The solution is explained (and is related to the causes)		
8	The strengths and weaknesses of the solution are given.		
9	The concluding sentence is present with a reference to the problems and solutions.		
10	The transitions from weaknesses to strengths and vice versa are made appropriately.		
11	The paragraph has an academic style: A variety of vocabulary and expressions exist		
12	The paragraph has an academic style: A variety of grammatical structures exists		
13	The solutions presented are convincing and applicable.		
	Comments:		