

TRAINING EFL STUDENT IN THE USE OF STRATEGIES FOR PEER RESPONSE (A PEDAGOGIC PROPOSAL)

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Abstract:

Key words:

In response to the impact collaborative learning theory and a shift in the teaching of composition from an emphasis on process, peer response has gained its popularity in writing classes (Nelson and Murphy, 1993). Peer response as one way to help students focus on writing as a process and on revision has become a common feature in English as a second language (EESL) classrooms, where the process approach to teaching writing is used (Berg, 1996b, Lane and Potter, 1998). Various issues concerning peer response in first and second language settings have to date been examined. The studies have attempted to examine the impact of peer response on students' revision and quality of writing (Connor and Asenavage, 1994; Mendonca and Johnson, 1994; Nelson and Murphy, 1993), to investigate the effects of training student for peer response (Berg, 1999b; Lane and Potter, 1998; Stanley, 1992), or to report on students' perceptions, attitudes, and benefits (Carson and Nelson, 1996, Lane and Potter, 1998; Tsui and Ng, 2000, Zhang, 1995). However, studies into the success of peer response in ESL contexts present a mixed picture (Hirvela, 1999; Zhu, 2001). The inconclusive findings show that studies of peer response need further exploration and that more studies are needed.

Studies on peer response have shed considerable light on several aspects of peer response. As surveyed by Zhu (2001), the aspects include how groups function, how students perform peer response and comment on peer writing, what characterizes successful peer response groups, and

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what factors may affect peer interaction. Few studies, however, have been done in the Indonesian context. As Krapels (1990) suggests, so much more about second language writing process lies undiscovered. Similar studies are thus still worth conducting in different contexts to contribute to our understanding of the issue of processes and pedagogy of composing.

At the Department of English, State University of Malang, Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), the process approach has been put into practice quite recently by some of the lecturers. The introduction of the approach has been generated by a lot of reflection about our teaching practice after observing a number of English primary classrooms implementing the approach and after reading theoretical and empirical evidence from studies on ESL writing. However, since at the Department the writing-as-a-process approach is adopted by only some of the lecturers, students taking writing courses where the approach is implemented by the lecturers are not yet accustomed to peer response activities as a common feature of the approach. They often appear perplexed as they might have come to the writing classroom looking for expertise from their teacher, but found that they are expected to revise their writing in the light of feedback from their classmates.

Personal observation and interviews with the students in writing classrooms revealed that many of them had doubted the value of peer response because of lack of English Proficiency of their classmates. Encouraging students to make revisions is another challenge. For our students, who have struggled to produce a piece, it is painful to go back to what they have written. In addition, based on personal experience, the practice of students responding to the writing of other students might be considered culturally unusual. Students generally view the teacher as the possessor of all knowledge and the one who is responsible for responding to their work. This discussion of language proficiency and culturally-related roles forms the background of the present study based on experience and observation. These perceptions are then compared with the results of the attitudinal survey carried out at the beginning of the semester. A questionnaire was administered to 61 students of the Department taking Writing III, belonging to three classes which had been randomly selected from the six classes of Writing III offered. Table I summarizes the students' responses to the questionnaire which measured their attitudes toward peer response

and teacher respons and self identification of English writing quqlity. As shown in Table I, the survey implies that attempts still need to be made to create a context conducive to involving students in the process of writing and more specifically in working collaratively in the form of responding to each other's texts.

Table I. Summary of Response to the Attitudinal Survey

1 = none/not at all/poor 2 = little/fair 3 = some/good 4 = a lot/excellent

Pre-study Questionnaire (<i>N</i> = 61)	Means	SD
1. Enjoy working with other student	2.34	.964
2. Like it when classmates read and comment on their writing	2.57	.903
3. Like to read other students' writing	2.28	.609
4. Think having peer response will be helpful	2.43	.644
5. Think classmates' comment will help them enrich the content	2.38	.682
6. Think classmates' comment will help them improve the organization	2.21	.451
7. Think classmates' comment will help them improve the language	2.26	.631
8. Think they need some help in reading and responding to others' work	3.18	.695
9. Think they need some help in reacting to others' comments	3.18	.646
10. Think teacher's comment will help them enrich the content	3.84	.416
11. Think teacher's comment will help them improve the organization	3.85	.358
12. Think teacher's comments will help them improve the language	3.84	.373
13. Think teacher's comments are more useful than those of classmates	3.80	.401
14. Quality of writing in English	2.11	.608

Meanwhile, theoretical and empirical evidence from studies on writing has indicated the need preparing the students – irrespective of the contexts of writing classes, whether EFL, ESL, or L1 – to participate in peer response activities, that is to provide extensive preparation and direct instruction in ways of evaluating other students' writing (e.g., Benesch, 1984; Berg, 1999b; Lane and Potter, 1998; Kuswando, 2001; Lockhart and Ng, 1995; Stanley, 1992). The studies have shown that students need to be appropriately prepared in order to participate skillfully in peer response and perform appropriate revision of their texts. Thus, the problem here lies in how to prepare EFL student for effective peer response. For a revision to be effective, as Faegley and Witte (1981) assert, it should in some way improve the quality of the text because, while students can be forced to revise their work, revision in itself does not necessarily improve the content of the writing.

This study then focuses on training students in the use of strategies for effective peer response in a EFL writing classroom. The training itself functions as an intervention which is implemented to create the conducive context for peer response activities. The main goal of the training is to encourage students to believe that they can trust their peers' responses and that peer-response activities are an important way to improve their writing skills.

Once such a context is established, the next purpose of the study is to investigate the ways in which it affects students' ability to respond to someone else's writing, and the ways in which it supports or not students' writing development.

METHOD

Research Design

The design employed in this study is classroom action research, involving the writing instructor and the researcher working collaboratively for one cycle. Cohen and Manion (1990: 226) explain that action research is appropriate whenever specific knowledge is required for a specific problem in a specific situation. The theoretical and empirical knowledge in the areas of peer response has motivated the need to provide intensive

preparation for peer response to EFL students, who are not yet accustomed to peer response activities, and to improve the current practice of teaching writing at the Department.

Following Calhoun (1993), the procedures of this one cycle action research is conducted in three stages, namely, the preliminary diagnostic act, the treatment/intervention act, and the reflection/re-diagnostic stage has already been carried out both empirically and theoretically to form the background of the study. In the intervention act, the steps range from planning, to implementation, observation, and then reflection. At this stage, the action research is used as a therapeutic component (Blum in Cohen and Manion, 1990). The four steps involved are not discrete, sequential processes, but are likely to overlap (Kemmis and Mc Taggart, 1988). In the re-diagnostic act, the overall action is evaluated to make a decision about whether the intervention given to the students has been found effective or whether further intervention necessary in planning the following cycle.

Subjects

The students participating in the study are 20 students of the Department of English taking the Writing-III Course. The selection of these students as the subjects of this study was based on two reasons. First, when the data are collected, there are two writing-courselevels offered at the Department, Writing I and Writing III. Students taking Writing I were not selected because this course focuses on developing sentence-building ability, which for purpose of data collection and data analysis of this study is considered less fruitful. Second, in addition to having access to the Department, the researcher knows that one of the writing instructors, with implement the strategy training for peer response, adopts the process approach to teaching writing. Thus, the student participants are drawn from this collaborator's class.

These 20 students are divided into six groups, that is, four groups of three students and two groups of four students. The grouping of peer-response sessions remains the same throughout the semester for effective and consistent collaboration within the groups.






Strategy Training for Peer Response

Training strategies for peer response is meant to prepare the students for more effective ways to use peer-response activities in the process-writing course. The procedures for strategy training in this study have been developed based on the works of Berg (1999a), Hafernik (1983), Lane and Potter (1992). More specifically, the training has the following chief goals: to convince EFL students that peer response is a worthwhile activity, to help them focus discussions on particular aspects of writing, to suggest appropriate language to use in their responses, and to help them constructively react to a response to their own writing from a peer.

The training, during which time the students are expected to discover rules for effective peer response, spanned five weeks at the beginning of the 16-week course. At the same time, the students also learned about writing English academic essays and received specific instructions about their assignments. The review of peer-response principles are still offered in the remaining weeks of the semester, during which time the students put the strategies they have learned in the training into practice when writing the essays assigned for Writing III. The training was divided into a set of 10 guidelines, which are summarized in two charts, one for the teacher (Appendix 1) and the other one for the students (Appendix 2). These procedural guidelines are accompanied with a detailed description of the specific activities in the strategy training for peer response. The description of the overall plan of the semester is illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Overall Plan of the 16 week Semester

Week	Session	Activities
1	1	Introduction to the semester program Training Strategies for Peer Response
	2	
2	3	
	4	
3	5	
	6	
4	7	
	8	
5	9	
	10	
6	11	Assignment I (Examples Essay)

	12	 Review of peer response
7	13	
	14	
8	15	Assignment II (Comparison and Contrast Essay)
	16	 Review of peer response
9	17	
	18	
10	19	Assignment III (Cause and Effect Essay)
	20	 Review of peer response
11	21	
	22	
12	23	Assignment IV (Process Analysis Essay)
	24	 Review of peer response
13	25	
	26	
14	27	Assignment V (Argumentative Essay)
	28	 Review of peer response
15	29	
	30	
16	31	General review
	32	General review

The introduction to peer response began during the first week, in which the idea of peer response in a writing-as-a-process approach was briefly introduced in the form of short lecture with examples of how peer responses have been given and used. The training activities are from then on in the form of discussions and demonstration. The sample peer response sheet used in this study can be seen in Appendix 3. The peer response sheet is provided both in an English version and in Indonesian one, which is meant to prevent the students from being unable to offer suggestions because of language problems. This sheet is to be used by the students are required to make copies of their writing for group members.

Collection of Data

The data for this study are collected in Semeseter II of the 2001/2001 academic year. The data are in the form of attitudinal surveys, tape recordings of peer response activities, and collection of students' writing drafts.

The surveys are carried out during week 1 and week 14 of the 16-

week semester to measure the attitudes of the students toward peer response before and after the training by using questionnaires. Each of the two questionnaires which are administered to the 20 students consists of 30 items, which can be grouped into five constructs.

The peer-response group discussions on the first draft are audio-taped. The sessions average about 90 minutes in length to be distributed evenly among the members in the group to respond to each other's writing. The recordings make up total of 24 tapes for six groups for the four assignments.

The drafts collected from the students are first drafts, first drafts with comments, and revised drafts. The overall drafts used for the data of this study are then 240 pieces of the students' composition.

Analysis of Data

The students' responses to the two questionnaires are analyzed to find out the overall mean score for each of the questions. Comparisons are made between the survey administered at beginning of the semester and the one administered near the end of the semester to measure whether there are some changes in attitudes toward peer response. The changes are assumed to be an indication of the students' reaction to the strategy training for peer response in the class, either negative or positive.

The recordings of peer response sessions are transcribed using standard orthography. The interactions that occur during peer response sessions are coded to find out what types of negotiations are being used and later to determine whether the writer or the reviewer initiates each type of negotiations. Analytic induction procedures (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992) is employed in the analysis of the tape recordings. Similar to the constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967 in Lockhart and Ng, 1995), the procedures allow categories to emerge from the data, rather than imposing preconceived categories on the data. However, at the initial analysis, Mendonca and Johnson's (1994) coding categories of negotiations are used as preconceived categories. In other word, in the analysis of the analysis of the transcripts, the procedures involve generating descriptive categories that encompass all types of negotiations found in the peer response sessions in addition to the preconceived ones. The coding categories of negotiations and their definitions which have been

developed by Mendoca and Jonhson (1994) are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Coding Categories of Negotiations and Definitions

No	Coding Categories	Definitions
1	Questions	
	a. Request for explanation	Reviewers try to get further explanation of what writers have said or what is not clear to them in the essays (e.g. an unknown term, an idea). This request can be either an explicit question or a statement saying that something is not clear.
	b. Comprehension check	Writers ask reviewers if they have understood the meaning of a term or idea in the essay. Also, writers and reviewers ask each other if they have understood what has been said.
2.	Explanation:	
	a. Explanation of an unclear point in the text	Writers explain the meaning of a term or idea that is not clear to reviewers
	b. Explanation of opinion	Reviewers or writers explain why they think a given term or idea is or is not clear and should or should not be used in the essay
	c. Explanation of the content	Writers explain the subject of their essay to reviewers, that is what their essay is about
3.	Restatements	Reviewers or writers restate (summarise or rephrase) what has been written or said to show understanding or re-read sections of the essay
4.	Suggestions	Reviewers or writers suggest ways to change the words, content, or organisation of the essay
5.	Grammar Correction	Reviewers or writers correct grammatical structures in the essay. Grammar correction can be related to subject-verb agreement, verb tense, singular-plural, etc.

The students' first drafts and the revised drafts will be compared to examine the extent to which the students revise their first drafts based on

responses from peers. Using the adaptation of Faigley and Witte's (1981) taxonomy of revisions, each revision made by the students is categorized as either a surface change (formal change or meaning preserving change) or meaning change (microstructure change or macrostructure change), with the unit of analysis of their graphs, lexicon, phases, sentences, or multi-sentences. A more detailed description of the taxonomy of revisions is presented in table 4.

Table 4. Taxonomy of Revision Change Faigley and Witte (1981)

- I. Surface Changes**
 - A. Formal Changes (Editing)
 - 1. Spelling/Capitalisation
 - 2. Tense/number/modality
 - 3. Abbreviations/contractions
 - 4. Punctuation
 - 5. Formatting
 - 6. Morphological changes
 - B. Meaning-preserving Changes
 - 1. Additions
 - 2. Deletions
 - 3. Substitutions
 - 4. Permutations
 - 5. Distributions
 - 6. Consolidations
- II. Meaning Changes**
 - A. Microstructure Changes
 - 1. Additions
 - 2. Deletions
 - 3. Substitutions
 - 4. Permutations
 - 5. Distributions
 - 6. Consolidations
 - B. Macrostructure Changes
 - 1. Additions

2. Deletions
3. Substitutions
4. Permutations
5. Distributions
6. Consolidations

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Appendix 1

Training Strategies for Peer Response

Chart 1: 10 Procedural Teacher Guidelines Preparing EFL Students for Peer Response

1. Create a comfortable classroom atmosphere that promotes trust among student.
2. Have a reason for peer response in the writing process which is explain and evident to the students by emphasising the benefits of having peers, as opposed to just the teacher, respond to their writing.
3. Highlight the common purpose of peer response among professional writers by examining the acknowledgments in textbooks and other publications.
4. Conduct a collaborative, whole class response activity using a text written by someone unknown to the students and stress the importance of revising the clarity and rhetorical-level aspects rather than sentence-level errors.
5. Address the “how-to-say-it” aspect of evaluation to enhance the students’ ability in communicating their perceptions of the text to the writer.
6. Have specific tasks and question to familiarise the students with the peer response as a tool designed to help them focus on important areas of writing assignment.
7. Give student editors a time limit and have them tell their comments and suggestions to their peers as well as write them.
8. Allow time for rewriting the drafts incorporating what the students have learned through the peer response session.
9. Provide revision guideline by highlighting good revision strategies and explaining how peer response helps writers understand the difference between intended and perceived meaning.
10. Add a self-evaluation component to the peer response session.

Modified from Berg (1999a) and Hafernik, (1983)

Appendix 2

Chart 2: 10 Procedural Student Guidelines For Peer Response

1. Read your classmate's writing carefully several times
2. Focus your attention on the meaning of your classmate's text.
3. Because it is difficult for writers to separate information they wish to express from the actual words on their page, you can help your classmate discover differences between his or her intended meaning and what he or she has actually written.
4. Avoid getting stuck on minor spelling mistakes or grammar errors unless they prevent you from understanding your classmate's ideas.
5. Keep in mind that peer response is used by writers of all ages and types, including student and professional writers who want to know if their writing is clear to others.
6. In responding to writing, try to be considerate of your classmate's feelings, and remember that it is very difficult for most writers to write clearly.
7. Realise that you have the opportunity to tell you classmate what you do not understand about his or her writing, to ask questions about it, and to point out what you like about it. This is important information to the write.
8. When a peer responds to your writing, remember that you, as the writer, have the ultimate responsibility for making final changes.
9. The peer response activity provides several sourees of ideas for how to improve your writing, including your classmate's comments about your writing ; your classmate's texts, from which you may learn new words, expressions, and ways of organising writing, as well as discover errors you may have made in your own text; and discussions of issues you may not have thought about before.
10. If you have any questions or do not know how to respond to your classmate's writing, be sure to ask your teacher for help.

Taken from Berg (1999a:22)

Appendix 3

Peer Response Sheet (English version)

Assignment : _____
Written by : _____
Responded by : _____
Date : _____

The purpose of peer response is to help each other write better. As your answers and comments will be used by the writer to rewrite his or her draft, please be as detailed and helpful as possible in answering the following questions.

1. What is the focus/point of this essay?
2. Can you find the thesis statement?
3. Do all the paragraphs support the thesis statement?
4. Please read the essay carefully and underline everything you don't understand.
5. Would you add more details in the paragraphs? Put an "A" where you would add details.
6. What are the best aspects of this essay? What do you do you think is especially well done?
7. What questions, comments, and/or suggestions do you have for writer?

After you have answered the questions, discuse your answers and the essay with the writer. Remember that you are trying to help your classmates improve their writing, so it is very important that they understand your answers.

Lembar Penyuntingan Sejawat

Tugas : _____
Penulis : _____
Penyunting : _____
Tanggal : _____

Kegiatan penyuntingan sejawat ini dimaksudkan untuk saling membantu di antara teman sekelas dalam memperbaiki kualitas esai. Jawaban dan komentar Anda akan dipakai sebagai salah satu bahan acuan oleh penulis dalam proses revisi. Oleh karena itu, usahakan untuk menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan berikut dengan rinci dan jelas.

1. Apa gagasan utama/pokok pikiran esai ini?
2. Adakah kalimat tesisnya?
3. Apakah seluruh paragraf mendukung kalimat tesis?
4. Bacalah esai tersebut dengan seksama dan garisbawailah segala sesuatu yang tidak Anda Pahami.
5. Akankah Anda menambah informasi dalam paragraf-paragraf itu?
Tandailah dengan "A" pada bagian-bagian yang akan Anda tambah.
6. Sebutkan aspek-aspek yang menyebabkan esai ini baik.
7. Tuliskan komentar, saran, atau pertanyaan Anda terhadap penulis.

Setelah selesai, diskusikan hasil penyuntingan ini dengan penulis.