

COLLABORATION IN A PEER RESPONSE GROUP



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4.2 Enhanced Executive Summary

Collaboration amongst students helps to promote team co-operation through the sharing of ideas amongst students within the group. Peers can provide scaffolds to assist their group members to improve their writing. This is because effective learning entails learners' active role throughout the learning process rather than depending on the traditional teacher evaluation of the final products (Alesandrini & Larson, 2002). As such, peer response session provides students the opportunity to take leadership of their own decisions through meaningful dialogue and feedback. According to Shor and Freire (1987), "[voice] is a means to transform social relations in the classroom and to raise awareness about relations in the society at large" (p. 11).

Thus, this research intends to identify the types of scaffolds utilised by the peers during the peer response sessions and to investigate how the student-student interactions during the peer response sessions help students to revise the first drafts of their compositions. This qualitative case study involved a group of four mixed-proficiency level students from a Diploma Programme in Universiti Teknologi MARA Sarawak, Samarahan Campus. The data were collected through audio-taping of student-student interactions during peer response sessions, students' written first drafts and final drafts of their compositions, as well as interviews with students. The findings indicated that both the high and intermediate-proficiency level students provided numerous scaffolds during the peer response sessions to help their peers in the revision of the first drafts of their compositions. The findings also revealed that peer scaffolds played a significant and exemplary role in facilitating learning amongst the students.

4.3 Introduction

Writing is a complex task which students frequently encounter much difficulty in not knowing how and where to begin to write. Despite the paradigm shift, most teachers still cling to their traditional belief of assigning a topic and leaving students to write the composition on their own. They fail to understand that writing is a process in which 'scaffolding' is much needed from an adult and even peers to help student writers to explore and discover meanings.

Through a review of the related literature, it was found that a number of first language (L1) and second language (L2) research done by Bhajan (1995); Cumming and

So (1996); Ferris (1995); Ferris (2004); Leki (1991); Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura & Valdés (2004); Sim (1997); Taylor (1981); and Zamel (1985) have focused on how teachers responded to students' compositions but little emphasis has been placed on how student-student interactions during peer response session can assist English as a Second Language (ESL) student writers in Malaysian institutions of higher learning to revise the individual first drafts of their compositions.

The importance of English in a globalised world was stressed by the Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin when he calls for efforts to strengthen the teaching and learning of the English Language at all school levels (The Star, 2009 July 8). Thus, through understanding and knowing how student-student interactions work during peer response sessions will help educators engage students in a more meaningful dialogue to discover meanings in order to gain more direction and ownership of their writing.

As such, this present study aims to identify the types of scaffolds utilised by the peers during the peer response session, and to investigate how the student-student interactions during the peer response sessions help students to revise the first drafts of their compositions.

Specifically, this study addresses the following questions:

- (a) What are the types of scaffolds utilised by the peers during the peer response sessions?
- (b) How do the student-student interactions during the peer response sessions help students to revise the first drafts of their compositions?

4.4 Brief Literature Review

4.4.1 Scaffolds during Peer Interaction

The use of scaffolds is related to Vygotsky's (1978) construct of "zone of proximal development". Cazden (1988) defined scaffold as temporary support given to learners to help them undertake a given task. With this support given by either an adult or more competent peers, ultimately the learner will be able to function independently at a higher level.

Applebee and Langer (1983) stressed the importance of 'instructional scaffolding' which can be conveyed individually to students or through group work. Bejarano, Levine, Olshtain and Steiner (1997) advocated the use of Skilled Use of Integrated Strategies (SUIS) to facilitate peer interaction. These strategies include checking for comprehension and clarification, requesting for assistance, giving assistance, elaborating, facilitating, agreeing or disagreeing, seeking information or opinion and paraphrasing.

DiCamilla and Anton's (1997) study revealed that repetition provided the means for students to attain 'intersubjectivity' (shared perception between the learner and speaker). In addition, Hyland's (2000) study revealed that students valued the support of their peers during peer interaction which included seeking peers' help in comprehending task, solving language problems, issues of genre and academic conventions.

An earlier study conducted by Sim (1998) found that the pragmatic functions of repeating, questioning, elaborating and suggesting ideas during peer interaction resulted in amendments made to the sentences constructed by the subjects in the study. Writers benefited from the assistance given by their peers.

A recent study conducted by Sim (2008) revealed that mixed-proficiency level students have the potential to provide multiple peer scaffolds to assist their peers to improve their writing. A previous study carried out by Villamil & De Guerrero (1996) found five different mediating strategies to enhance the revision process amongst students. These five mediating strategies included employing symbols and external resources, using the L1, providing scaffolding, resorting to interlanguage knowledge and vocalizing private speech.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory emphasizes internalisation which is crucial to learning. Cazden (1988) recognized that differences in opinion among learners may not result in instantaneous change of decisions. This is because learners will process the feedback given by the peers and then make their own decision as to whether to accept the idea or not in their writing.

4.4.2 Collaboration through Peer Interaction

Peer collaboration plays a central role in the process of writing. It helps to foster team co-operation and sharing of ideas among students of different proficiency levels