

PEER RESPONSE
AND
SECOND LANGUAGE WRITERS

by

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Abstract

This study explored the value of peer response groups with second language students learning writing. It was conducted in a small university college with 12 international students from Asia, most of whom were in Canada to improve their English in order to enroll in university and college programs.

The study specifically investigated a) the perceptions of students with regard to peer response b) whether those perceptions changed over the length of the study c) what students actually did during the response sessions and finally d) how they changed their essays as a result of participating in the sessions.

Students were asked to submit three journal entries during the course of the semester describing their views of the peer response sessions. During one peer response session the groups were audiotaped and those tapes were transcribed. Draft essays and final copies were also collected. Throughout the course of the semester I kept a journal of my observations and thoughts.

Journal entries, and transcripts were analyzed and discussed. Drafts of essays and final copies were compared

to ascertain what changes had been made by the writers. Finally, the changes were analyzed to determine if they were the result of comments made by peers during the sessions.

An analysis of the data revealed that the students, although Asian and from cultures where classes are traditionally teacher-centered tended to be positive about peer response and became somewhat more positive as the semester progressed. They appreciated the benefits of peer response but did have some concerns, mainly centered around peer feedback. During the sessions students engaged in a variety of social, cognitive and linguistic activities as they worked to accomplish the assigned task. Students did revise their essays using peer comments although not as much as I had hoped. Comments by some of the students indicated they reserved the right to decide whether to follow the advice given by their classmates or not.

Results suggest that it is important for teachers to continue to use peer response sessions even with students from cultures where teacher-centered classes are the norm since benefits seem to outweigh disadvantages.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore, through action research, the value of peer response groups as they function in one second language classroom. More specifically the study investigates whether or not and to what extent students benefit from responding to the writing of their classmates and from receiving the responses of their peers to their own work. This study addresses a real concern on the part of both writing instructors and their students regarding whether peer response sessions promote writing development in the classroom. The understanding gained from the results of the study will inform teaching and improve learning conditions for students (Elliott, 1991).

The study seeks to obtain information in response to the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of students involved in peer response sessions?
2. Do students' perceptions of peer response change over the course of a semester?

3. What do students do during peer response sessions?
4. What will I learn about peer response sessions that will inform and improve my teaching?

Background to the Study

Post-secondary institutions in the United States and Canada are actively recruiting international students to their campuses. The reasons for this are both political and economic. The result is that enrolment of students for whom English is a second language (ESL) students is steadily increasing even in small university colleges away from major urban centers. At this university college, the University College of the Cariboo, for example, there are approximately 400 international students and 20 full-time ESL instructors which represents a fourfold increase in the past decade.

International students, mainly from Asia at this college, are in North America to complete certificate, diploma and degree programs. Their tuition fees are high as are their living expenses, and they find themselves under considerable pressure to finish their education as quickly as possible. However, their facility with English for academic purposes varies considerably from student to

student, and some individuals need additional language instruction and support before they are able to enroll in mainstream courses and programs.

Typically, these students are placed in ESL classes to improve their English. Clearly, there are advantages to being in a supportive environment where all the students have experiences that are similar and where instructors are trained to assist students with their language development. International students are, however, anxious to proceed as quickly as possible towards their goals and finding they must take preparatory ESL courses is often disappointing for them. Acknowledging the sense of urgency that is an ever-present fact of life for many of these students, writing instructors are concerned that classroom approaches and activities promote language acquisition, and, indeed, are perceived to promote language acquisition.

Peer Response Groups

One approach to promoting language acquisition is the use of peer response groups in the writing classroom. The use of such groups has increased with the shift to the process approach to writing and the consequent emphasis on

helping students to acquire strategies "for getting started...for drafting...for revising...and for editing (Silva, 1990, p.15).

My interest in peer response was kindled by Urzua's (1987) study of four South-East Asian children as they shared their writing with each other and their teacher. The benefits they gained were real: an increased awareness of audience, a sense of voice and a sense of the power of the language. Her findings so impressed me that I wondered if older ESL students would respond and benefit in a similar way to the opportunity to talk about their writing with their peers.

In searching the literature for studies conducted with college students, I found several qualitative reports. These focused on the benefits of peer response as reported by the students, yet noted a number of concerns as well (Obah, 1993; Jacobs, 1987; Davies and Omberg, 1988). It was not surprising to read that "practitioners are deeply divided as to the efficacy of the small group approach" and that "the conflicts felt by practitioners are paralleled in the small body of research so far conducted on response groups" (Dipardo & Freedman, 1988).

Continuing to investigate the literature of response groups I found that researchers turned their attention to specific aspects of peer response. Nelson and Murphy (1992), for example, investigated whether four students who worked together used peer comments in revising their drafts. Students were given guiding questions and "wrote responses on other students' drafts" (p.136). The researchers also investigated the factors that contributed to the students using or not using peers' suggestions. Similarly, Mendonca and Johnson (1994) studied the negotiations that occurred in the peer reviews and their effect on revisions, and in their discussion, they recommended the inclusion of peer response in second language writing instruction.

Manglesdorf (1992) in a study of what students thought of peer response discovered that Asian students looked less favourably on this activity than students from other countries. Thirty-three percent of the Asian participants in her study had negative opinions of peer response sessions. These findings were startling to me since my students came mainly from countries in Asia.

As a result of reading the literature on peer response groups, I concluded that I needed to conduct my own study of

peer response groups as they functioned in my classroom. Through planning to use the groups, taking action to implement them and monitoring their progress as comprehensively as possible, I would come to understand what my students' perceptions of peer response were, I would ascertain what students actually did during sessions, and I would see what students revised as a result of the feedback from peers. Only when I had this information would it be possible to improve my practice and, as a consequence, improve learning conditions for my students.

My purpose then in conducting this research, to improve my practice in my writing classes, made the choice of action research a logical one since it "aims to feed practical judgment in concrete situations" (Elliott, 1991, p.69). It was my hope the results of this study would support other studies in a positive way. Mainly, however, I expected that with a better understanding of the peer response process that I would be able to determine whether the advantages outweighed the concerns and whether concerns might be mitigated and student perceptions changed by changes to the process.

Significance of the Study

This study was based on the assumption that participating in peer response sessions is a worthwhile, enriching activity for students in the second language writing classroom. I expected that examining the process in a comprehensive manner would provide reasons why this is so. I also expected that this exploration would explain what problems or concerns exist with peer response groups and suggest ways to improve the conduct of peer response sessions in writing classrooms and consequently, improve learning conditions for students.

Scope of the Study

The study was based on data collected in one ESL writing class with twelve students of Asian origin. These students in three groups of four worked throughout the semester sharing and responding to each other's essays. Writing ability varied considerably within each group.

I collected journal entries for analysis, journal entries concerning students' perceptions of the peer response process. The peer response sessions focusing on

the fourth essay of the semester were recorded, and the recordings transcribed for analysis. Finally, first and second drafts were compared to each other and then in turn, compared to the peer talk during the session. In this way the impact of the sessions on essay revision was determined.

Limitations of the Study

Because this is an exploratory study of a small number of participants, the results cannot be generalized to apply to all peer response sessions with ESL students at a similar point in their writing development.

It is expected, however, that the results of the study will support other research in this field, adding to the understanding of how peer response groups function and how they are viewed by post-secondary ESL students of Asian background.

Organization of the Thesis

In the following chapter, Chapter Two, the professional literature pertaining to peer response groups in second language writing classrooms is reviewed.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used in the study. It describes the context of the study, the participants, details the collection of data and explains how the data were analyzed.

The fourth chapter presents the findings of the study. Since this was an exploratory study, these findings are more accurately observations and are so designated in this chapter.

Finally, Chapter Five discusses the observations and considers the implications of the study for teaching and for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Peer response groups are an increasingly frequent feature of second language writing classrooms. Peer response groups stand at the center of a fortuitous convergence of theories of language development, and theories of language learning and teaching in second language classrooms.

To explicate the theoretical positions of which peer response groups are the embodiment, the review of the literature examines first the process approach to writing, an approach initially put forth by first language researchers (Flower & Hayes, 1981) and later investigated by second language writing scholars and teachers (Raimes, 1985; Zamel, 1983). The process approach to writing has at its heart, evaluation (Hilgers, 1986; Samway, 1993). When writers reread, change text, gather more information, they do so because they have evaluated their work. Peer response groups provide an opportunity for peers to develop criteria

for evaluation and to practice evaluating their own written text and that of others.

In the communicative language classroom, the focus is on student-centered learning as opposed to the more traditional teacher-fronted class (Savignon, 1991). While certainly instruction by the teacher is still a significant part of classroom activity, opportunities to use groups are seized when the contribution to learning of those groups is evident to practitioners. Peer response groups allow the writing instructor to move towards a more equitable balance between teacher-centered instruction and student-centered activities.

The main advantage of student-centered activities, if they are correctly structured, is the increased opportunity, indeed the necessity, on the part of students to negotiate meaning. "Negotiated interaction" (Gass and Selinker, 1994, p. 217) is a crucial factor in second language acquisition. When members of a peer response group converse in order to make meaning comprehensible and to accomplish the task they have been given, they experience increased opportunity to acquire language.

Cooperative language learning in its various forms employs structures and tasks which require students to work together usually on a group project. The benefits of using cooperative learning strategies are well researched and numerous. They include academic achievement, improved social relations, increased self-confidence and language development, for both first and second language students (Coelho, 1992; Slavin, 1991).

Finally, with the translation and popularization of Vygotsky's (1986) theories of language development, more researchers and practitioners are becoming cognizant of the importance of speech in learning a language. For Vygotsky learning comes about as a result of social interaction. His concept of the "zone of proximal development" presupposes two persons working together, one more capable who provides assistance so that the other can accomplish more than he might alone. Peer response groups formed so that they are heterogeneous in ability afford less proficient writing students an opportunity to be assisted by more capable peers and thus accomplish more than they might accomplish alone.

Before examining the research into peer response groups, their functioning and their impact, therefore, this chapter will review the literature of:

1. The process approach to writing,
2. Cooperative learning,
3. Groups and language learning, and
4. Theories of language learning.

The final element of the literature review is an explication of the use of journal writing as an evaluative tool. For students, assessing the peer response sessions completes the circle as set forth by Vygotsky (1986). In journals, public speech (conversation) becomes thought and writing, making that speech public once more and therefore available as the subject for further conversation. It is fitting, then, for this chapter to conclude with literature which illuminates evaluation -the central feature of peer response.

The Process Approach to Writing

The process approach to writing claimed the interest of teachers and researchers in the late 1970's and early 1980's as an alternative to a focus on form (Raimes 1991).

Researchers Flower and Hayes (1981) articulated a cognitive process theory of writing based on protocol analysis. The cognitive process theory stood in stark contrast to "the traditional paradigm of stages" (p.367). In the traditional view, the writer completes one stage towards the desired written product and then in a linear fashion moves on to the next stage. However, in the process model, "the major units of analysis" (p.367) are not viewed as stages but as "mental processes, such as the process of generating ideas" (p.367). For Flower and Hayes (1981), the act of writing involves the task environment, the writer's long term memory and the writing process: planning, translating, reviewing.

Planning is comprised of generating ideas, organizing and goal setting. In translating, thinking (which according to Vygotsky is private speech) transforms into written language. Finally, reviewing in the process model has two parts: evaluating and revising. When a writer reviews previous work, that review may lead to further written text

or to evaluation and revision. The process of writing then is clearly non-linear and recursive.

The research into the process approach in first language (L1) composition prompted second language (L2) theorists to also investigate the writing process. Zamel (1982) studied proficient ESL writers and determined that they "use strategies similar to those used by native speakers of English" (p.203). Zamel discussed the implications of the research for teaching in some detail: students need to talk prior to writing to generate ideas; topics for writing should be compelling; time for writing multiple drafts is important; revision becomes the focus of the writing course; and students need the opportunity to share their writing with peers so that they may see "their writing with the eyes of another" (p.206). Raimes (1985) in a similar study, this time of unskilled ESL writers, found that students with a limited proficiency in English were able to view writing as a process of discovering meaning and were able to generate language and ideas. There were differences, however, between the unskilled L2 students in Raimes' study and unskilled L1 writers. "What they need is "more of everything: more time; more

opportunity to talk...more instruction and practice in generating, organizing and revising ideas" (p.250).

Finally, the students in Raimes' study were anxious to get ideas down on paper. In their writing, students were aware of the teacher as 'the only audience' and were unable to address the audience suggested in the writing prompt. As a consequence of the study, Raimes suggested that teachers employ think-aloud techniques as "a teaching tool to provide an opportunity for the writer to verify an audience and engage in a creative dialogue" (p.252). She also speculated in her discussion that students who establish an audience for themselves and "view the task as one of negotiation with a reader might ultimately make more progress than those who see the task solely as a linguistic problem" (p.251). These comments regarding the importance of audience for developing writers support the current use of peer response groups in ESL classrooms.

In a later study, Zamel (1987) in a comprehensive survey of research in writing pedagogy encouraged teachers to assume a less controlling role in the classroom and "adopt a pedagogy that recognizes who our students are...[and] acknowledges these students' attempts at

creating and negotiating meaning" (p.709). She talked of allowing students to behave like scholars, making knowledge and stated:

This investigation into what our students do, what we do as teachers and how the two interact would involve us in ...description that takes into account the full context of human event" (p.710).

Zamel urged teachers to take up the challenge of this kind of inquiry.

Adopting the process approach to writing in the second language classroom, as advocated by Raimes and Zamel, leads instructors naturally into the realm of cooperative learning and peer group response (DiPardo and Freedman, 1988).

Members of a group, through conversation, help each other generate ideas; they support and encourage each other during the composing process and provide an increased sense of audience for each other (Urzua, 1987). Through interaction, writers become aware of the reader for whom the text is composed. Writing, once thought of as silent, solitary and secret becomes the focus of conversation for a community of peers in the process classroom (Obah, 1993).

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning has a long history in the western world and was "described in the Talmud by Quintilian in the first century" (Olsen and Kagan, 1992, p.3). Cooperative learning has been extensively researched since 1960 and has been shown to result in academic achievement, social and personal development and language learning (pp.4-5) and these gains extend to second language learners as well as native speaking students (Kessler, 1992). Bejarano (1994) summarizes cooperative learning from Johnson and Johnson (1987).

Cooperative learning encourages individual accountability in groups that are heterogeneous in ability and personal characteristics, recognizes that students need to be taught social skills, lets the teacher observe group interaction and intervene only when necessary, and incorporates opportunities for groups to process their effectiveness (p.200).

One of the key features of cooperative learning is positive interdependence, which occurs when the achievements of one individual benefit the entire group. Once positive interdependence is established, all group members become interested in helping all the others. "Group goals and individual accountability" (Slavin, 1990, p.53) are crucial

to the success of cooperative learning with younger students. However, some question remains about whether these features are necessary with college level students. Slavin (1990) cites a study by Dansereau (1988) which "provides examples of successful approaches to cooperative learning at the college level without group goals or individual accountability" (p.53). Various forms of cooperative learning exist, and their effectiveness depends upon the suitability of the approach. One model of cooperative learning is the structural approach (Kagan, 1990). Structures are "content-free ways of organizing social interaction in the classroom" (Kagan, 1990, p.12). Because they are content-free they can be used repeatedly with different subject matter. Various structures have various functions. In 'Roundrobin' for example, each student in turn shares something with his or her teammates. According to Kagan, this sharing is particularly useful when the teacher wants students to express ideas and opinions, or to create stories. When students use this structure, they participate equally in the task (p. 14). The structure, 'roundrobin', is particularly well suited to the writing process classroom where students in response groups share

their essays with each other for the benefit of all.

Elbow's (1973) model of peer response groups illustrates how the structure 'roundrobin' is employed.

Groups and Language Learning

Cooperative learning approaches have increased in popularity in second language classrooms. Within the group setting, students have the opportunity for increased interaction with their peers. Working together to complete a task, language learners negotiate meaning: asking procedural questions, seeking clarification of groupmates' statements, checking for understanding, explaining and so on. A real need to communicate compels members of the group to expend the effort required to make themselves understood and to understand. Long and Porter (1985) set out pedagogical and psycholinguistic arguments for group work. The former are similar to the benefits which accrue to cooperative learning: increased opportunities for language practice; improved quality of student talk; opportunities for individualizing instruction; a positive affective climate and increased motivation (Long & Porter, 1985, pp. 208 - 212). The psycholinguistic arguments for group

work are of at least equal, if not greater, importance to second language teachers contemplating group work in the classroom. In heterogeneous groups, more fluent speakers will adapt their language to be comprehensible to those less proficient in the language, by asking more questions, giving a place of prominence to the topic of the sentence, and by employing devices for clarifying. Long and Porter (1985) contend that "the more language that learners hear and understand and the more comprehensible input they receive, the faster and better they learn" (p. 214). Krashen's (1980, 1982) explanation for acceleration in learning, cited in Long and Porter (1985), is the Input Hypothesis in which he states that a language learner needs to encounter new features of the language in a context which makes them comprehensible. Comprehensible input, however, is no longer deemed sufficient for language acquisition and recent second language acquisition studies have focused on output. Producing comprehensible output, it is suggested, "may force the learner to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing" (Swain, 1985, p.249 in Gass and Selinker, 1994, p.213). The Interaction Hypothesis combines these concepts and is set out in Gass and Selinker (1994) as follows:

There are three parts: (1) comprehensible input is necessary for acquisition, (2) conversational interaction (negotiation) makes the input comprehensible (3) comprehensible output aids learners in moving from semantic processing to syntactic processing (p.219).

Negotiation is a crucial step and "requires attentiveness and involvement both of which are necessary for successful communication" (p.219). Second, negotiation raises learners' awareness of the deficiencies of their speech, and in order to make their speech comprehensible, they must first determine what the problem is for the listener and then make repairs to their output. This ability to think about language "this metalinguistic awareness" is thought to be "associated with increased ability to learn a language" (p.220).

Theories of Language Learning

Finally, theories about how people learn language and generate knowledge support the use of group work in the second language classroom. Vygotsky's theories emphasize the importance of social interaction in learning. He claims that "good learning is that which is in advance of development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.89 in DiPardo and Freedman,

1988, p.129). Learning takes place in the students' "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1986, p.187). This zone represents the difference between what a student is able to accomplish independently and what s/he is able to accomplish with the assistance of adults or more capable peers in a cooperative setting. Vygotsky sees the development of thought or thinking as a direct result of speech or speaking. Thought is for him internalized speech and is borne from the interaction with others in a social setting. Knowledge then is generated by a community of peers; meaning is created by social interaction (Vygotsky, 1986). Instructors are becoming increasingly convinced of the importance of speech in the classroom and are devising means of integrating cooperative groups into their classroom instruction. In the second language writing classroom, peer response groups rich in talk about the activity of writing are the antithesis of the traditional solitary, silent and secret writer (Obah, 1993).

In summary, peer response groups are supported by general theories of language learning, principles of cooperative learning, the cognitive process theory of writing and theories of second language acquisition. It is

not surprising that peer response groups have become the focus of considerable study, and it is to this research we now turn.

Peer Response in the ESL Writing Classroom

In the past decade, peer response groups have become increasingly popular in ESL writing classrooms since many teachers are shifting the emphasis of their instruction from the product of writing to the process of writing. In addition, theories of language acquisition support the use of groups in second language classrooms. Research into peer response groups has become increasingly important and is designed to further understanding of the complexity of these groups so that students might benefit as much as possible.

Research is focused on a number of aspects of peer response: peer talk or the interaction that takes place during the activity; the revision of essays that is the result of peer interaction; preferences for types of feedback; and finally, the perceptions of students toward peer response sessions.

Peer Interaction. Investigation into what actually occurs during peer response sessions is just beginning. Mendonca and Johnson (1994) explored types and frequencies of peer negotiation during response sessions. Twelve advanced nonnative speakers of English worked in dyads to review each other's essays. Students read their peer's essay and gave oral feedback guided by questions. In addition, students were told to focus on any points in the text that were unclear or difficult to understand. The researchers, in considering the transcripts of the peer response sessions, categorized five types of negotiation and calculated the frequency of each type. Then, the authors determined what percentage of each type of negotiation was writer-generated and what percentage was reader-generated. Mendonca and Johnson (1994) concluded that peers were able to focus on local and global discourse issues; peers became "aware of how their writing affected readers...and could share knowledge about written texts" (p. 756). The researchers also concluded that "reviewers tended to initiate all types of negotiations except explanations of content" (p. 756).

Villamil and De Guerrero (1996) also investigated peer interactions during response sessions. Fifty-four students, homogeneous in terms of language proficiency, native language, length of time in an English speaking country and previous ESL courses were the participants.

Students worked in pairs, read their compositions aloud and then, using a Revision Sheet helped their peers to revise their compositions. By discovering and classifying behaviour that aided revision, the authors of this study attempted to reveal "a sense of the intricacy and totality of the whole revision process as [they] observed it" (p. 69). To this end, Villamil and De Guerrero (1996) identified seven social-cognitive activities related to revision, five mediating strategies students employed to facilitate the revision process and four significant aspects of social behaviour evident during peer interaction.

This study was a more comprehensive look at "what actually occurs when two L2 learners engage in a joint revision and how they manage to assist each other" (p. 54).

While these findings were of considerable interest, the participants in Villamil and De Guerrero's (1996) study were very carefully selected. Further research is needed to

determine if results could be replicated with a group of students more representative of the ESL population with whom most teachers work. In my study, I was interested to see if Villamil and De Guerrero's (1996) results could be duplicated with the students who enrolled in my composition class. I wondered if my results might be more limited as seemed to be the case in Mendonca and Johnson's (1994) study. It appeared as if the types of negotiation noted by Mendonca and Johnson (1994) were similar to the scaffolding sub-strategies found by Villamil and De Guerrero (1996).

Stanley (1992) investigated whether coaching students to be better peer evaluators would improve student interactions. Transcripts were analyzed and a code developed for evaluators' responses and writers' responses. This was similar to Mendonca and Johnson's (1994) writer-generated and reader-generated types of negotiations. Stanley's code, however, more closely resembled the scaffolding substrategies identified by Villamil and De Guerrero (1996).

The participants in Stanley's (1992) study were enrolled in a freshman composition course and had TOEFL scores of 547 in one section, 549 in a second section. Age

of the students was similar as was the mean length of residency in the United States. Students were from a variety of language backgrounds. One section was given extensive coaching before participating in peer response sessions; the other section was more typically prepared using a demonstration of a peer-evaluation session. Types of responses were analyzed over six audiotaped sessions. Stanley's (1992) findings point to considerably more conversation when students receive coaching and "substantially more specific responses to writing" (p. 226).

Impact on Revision. In the same study referred to above, Stanley (1992) examined drafts and the transcribed peer evaluation sessions which immediately preceded them for evidence of response to the evaluator's comment in both coached and uncoached sections. Results indicated more revisions followed from peer evaluations in the coached group. Pointing remarks appeared to result more often in revisions than other types of remarks. Stanley concluded that peer-evaluation groups were worth the effort with coached students. "Among the uncoached groups, the level of revision in response to evaluators' comments was quite a bit

lower" (p. 229). Without coaching one might question the effectiveness of peer response. Further research needs to address this issue.

Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1992) conducted a study in the foreign language (FL) context. A control group received written feedback from the instructors only, first on content and then on grammar. In the experimental group, groups of three with a written protocol, carried out peer response orally, using photocopies of their peers' written text. "In a second review session students...focused on formal features of text, such as grammar and lexical choice" (p. 261). The researchers noted particularly the fact that the students who participated in peer feedback performed as well as those who received teacher feedback. Secondly, teacher feedback resulted in improvement in the area of grammar while the peer group members made revisions to content, organization and vocabulary. "The oral/aural review procedure did not produce astoundingly better L2 compositions in this study, but, the data suggest that the technique...does not result in grammatically inferior writing" (p. 264). Fathman and Whalley (1990) had similar results. Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1992) concluded that

evaluation in the FL classroom resulted in satisfactory revising behaviour. This study encouraged me to use oral feedback with the peer response groups in my study. I believed that using peer response sessions would not cause the students' writing to suffer in terms of accuracy. As a teacher/researcher it was my responsibility to ensure that my research did not disadvantage my students. Consequently, I was pleased to read of Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1992) findings.

Mendonca and Johnson (1994) described three patterns of revision revealed when students first and second drafts were compared with tapescripts of peer response sessions. Students used peer comments to revise; students did not change their essays even though suggestions had been made; students changed their essays for reasons other than peer comments. The researchers found that in 53% of the instances of revisions, students incorporated their peers' comments. These results need to be replicated in further studies.

Connor and Asenavage (1994) approached revision in a different way. Using Faigley and Witte's (1981) taxonomy of revisions, the researchers determined whether student

revisions were surface changes or text-based changes. The study was conducted with two peer response groups of four students each from an ESL freshman writing class.

The source of each revision was noted (group, teacher, self/others) and revisions were categorized. Results were somewhat surprising. The authors reported that students made numerous revisions but relatively few of those were the result of peers' comments. The type of comments made during the session determined the type of revisions made. Overall "5% of the revision resulted from peer comments, 35% could be described as resulting from teacher comments and 60%...as a result of self/others" (p. 267). These results seem to correspond to those reported by Stanley with uncoached groups. Also mentioned by the researchers was the fact the "revisions based on teacher comments were primarily surface level: formal changes such as spelling, tense, punctuation and meaning-preserving changes such as additions and deletions" (Faigley & Witte, 1981, p. 403). Connor and Asenevage (1994) substantiated the findings of Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1992) who reported that "the revisions made by the control group which received only teacher feedback were positive in the area of grammar" (p. 263).

Finally, Nelson and Murphy (1993) examined why students were not consistent in using peer comments to revise their essays. Four students were the subjects in this study, each from a different country. In analyzing the transcripts of the drafts the researchers noted two major patterns of behaviour on the part of the students which they labelled: a) interactive/noninteractive and b) cooperative/defensive. The results of the study by Nelson and Murphy (1993) point to the importance of cooperation and negotiation in bringing about revision to essays as a result of peer response sessions.

Preferences for Types of Feedback. A third focus of studies into peer response sessions is the preferences for types of feedback. Using a questionnaire, Saito (1994) inquired of students in three classes their opinions of the usefulness of different kinds of feedback. Student attitudes to each kind of feedback were categorized as positive, neutral or negative. Results indicated that students tended to favour teacher feedback over peer feedback or self correction" (p. 60). Responses (80%) in one class, however, indicated acceptance of peer response as

useful. This class was composed of advanced students enrolled in a university credit course. "These students' attitudes and motivations probably differed from the other two classes because they were in a credit course and required to take the class" (p. 49). Acceptance of peer feedback might depend, it seems, on language proficiency and motivation and attitudes.

Zhang's (1995) study into the affective advantage of peer feedback with second language classes was also designed to determine if students preferred teacher, peer, or self feedback. When questioned directly "93.8% of the 81 participants chose the traditional teacher feedback over non-teacher feedback" (p. 216). Connor and Asenavage (1994) did not directly question students regarding their preferences. Teacher feedback (after a second draft) was combined with peer feedback (after a first draft). Results as previously noted indicated the "effect of peer comments in both groups was small, only about 5% of total revisions" (p. 266). In addition, "revisions made as a result of teacher comments were primarily surface changes" (p. 265). Although I did not plan to explicitly ask my students to indicate a preference for a particular type of feedback,

these studies alerted me to a concern that I would need to watch for.

Student Perceptions. The final focus of peer response research is on the perceptions of students, and their reasons for those perceptions. Manglesdorf (1992) found that "for most of the students...in the study, peer reviews were perceived as a beneficial technique that helped the students revise their papers" (p. 278). Students pinpointed content, organization and style as areas where peer response sessions helped them improve. "Negative views on peer reviews focus on limitations of the student reviewer and the task itself" (p. 277). One fact stood out. In Manglesdorf's study "almost all of the students with totally negative views came from cultures that stress teacher-centered classrooms" (p. 280). These results were of interest to me since my students are mostly of Asian background and I wondered if the results would hold true for my classes and peer response sessions.

Obah (1993) investigating the perceptions her students had of peer response found them to be quite positive and appreciative of the social contact in groups, the

opportunity to speak English and share ideas, and the chance to learn from other people's mistakes. These students did have concerns mainly regarding feelings of inadequacy when asked to critique another's paper. There were also concerns about the fact that some students were apathetic and less hard working than other members of the group. Obah noted a "visible increase in confidence, more fluent writing and a growth in mutual respect between teacher and students" (p. 13).

My study was prompted by a number of concerns. First, I wondered if my students would benefit as students seem to have in many studies (Obah, 1993; Manglesdorf, 1992; Mittan, 1989). Would they, because they were Asian, have negative views of peer response sessions? These questions prompted me to conduct my study on the topic of peer response. It seemed necessary to conduct my own study in my own context since results regarding revision and peer interaction appeared to depend on the design of the study. In Villamil and De Guerrero's (1996) study, in particular, students were very carefully chosen. Would results be the same with a class composed of students who were heterogeneous in background, language proficiency and education? The

literature investigating peer response sessions and their complexity prompted me to explore peer response in my classroom through action research.

Journal Writing

Evaluation of peer response activities has taken the form of both interview and reflective journal writing. In both types, when teachers/researchers asked students to reflect upon the peer review process, they were asking the students to engage in what Gere (1987) refers to as debriefing. "By discussing the issues that have arisen in the group, explaining what they have learned, and exploring unresolved issues, participants learn to monitor their own thinking and evaluate their own progress" (p.111). This debriefing or evaluation in my study took the form of a journal entry, a metacognitive instrument to assist students to integrate all that they had experienced, this time in written form.

Many second language instructors are having students keep journals as part of course requirements. The journals are variously referred to as 'learning logs' (Myers, 1990) 'diaries' (McDonough, 1994) 'academic journals' (Carswell,

1988), 'dialogue journals' (Carroll, 1994; Holmes and Moulton, 1995,). The name the instructor uses to identify the type of journal required depends upon the purpose for which the assignment of journal writing is given. Learning logs, for example, are generally for the purpose of exploring responses to classroom activities, reflecting upon the learning that took place and noting any confusion that resulted. Students reflecting upon the classroom may make suggestions regarding teachers' classroom practices if they see their teachers as willing "to consider ways of sharing the power" (Myers, 1990, p.77). In my view, diaries imply a more personal, expressive approach to the reflection contained therein. In McDonough's study of four experienced teachers' "personal - professional" (p.57) diary entries, there is evidence of considerable reflection about individuals and the teachers' feelings about those individuals and their presence in the classroom. Academic journals seem to presuppose that the students' submissions will be of a more theoretical orientation while the dialogue journal suggests the development of a conversation between instructor and student over the length of the course. This is indeed what resulted in Newman's (1998) experience. She

began participating in the journal writing herself when she realized her students' journal writing was "guarded and cautious" (p.134). She began a dialogue with her students that established an atmosphere within which students could share their ideas without concern.

Journals in writing classes have become increasingly popular for a number of reasons. First, they provide an opportunity for extensive writing and the ensuing benefits of "improved facility with syntax and vocabulary" (Casanave, 1994; p.185). Because the number of traditional assignments students are required to submit in a semester is limited, journal writing provides additional writing practice. Topics are generally open, although often students are encouraged to write about issues and readings discussed in the class. Teachers focus on the meaning of the text and usually give only minimal feedback on grammar problems. Research has shown that the writing of many students does improve even if only minimal feedback on form is given to students (Robb, Shortread and Ross, 1986). Writing improves through journal writing at least to the extent that it becomes easier and faster to write over time (Casanave, 1994).

In addition to extending writing practice, journals provide a means of communication between students and teacher, a private forum for discussing issues surrounding classroom events, activities, interactions which the students prefer not to bring to the instructor's attention during class time. Rapport is established and the teacher has the opportunity to evaluate classroom practices and make changes if appropriate. In some cases, individual instruction may result from a journal entry to assist a student with a particular problem (Carswell, 1988).

In journals assigned by instructors for the purpose of thinking about the classroom activities, the readings and the learning that is taking place, teachers hope for evidence of reflective thinking. Surbeck et al, (1991) examined journal entries to determine the kind of thinking students did. They established three broad categories, each divided into subcategories to clarify the journal entries. The 'Reaction' category included affective responses of both negative and positive feelings, descriptions of the activities and personal concerns that affected the student's involvement in class. The category of 'Elaboration' was used to identify statements of explanation and that

Elaboration was classified as concrete, comparative or generalized. The third category was designated 'Contemplation'. A journal entry was not rated contemplative unless it included statements from the previous two categories and "thinking about personal professions or social/ethical problems" (Surbeck, Park Han and Moyer, 1991, p.27). The researchers found from their analysis that only a few entries could be labeled contemplative although many journal entries contained evidence that the sequence leading to contemplation was partially developed. To help students write reflectively, this sequence should be encouraged, the authors concluded.

Carswell (1988) in working with teachers in a graduate course also hoped "to encourage the process of reflective description, explanation and reflection" (p.105). In this study, Carswell noted that the journals provided evidence that students were beginning to "investigate the nature and source of their professional actions although much of the writing is still at the descriptive and explanatory level" (p.111).

Journal writing is not without problems. First, as already noted in the above discussion, encouraging

reflection in writing is not easy. Students are not used to extending their thinking in this way and consequently need to be given models to examine and perhaps questions to guide their writing. A second problem with journals is that when the teacher is the final authority in the classroom situation, students are placing themselves in a vulnerable position if they write honestly of their feelings about classroom activities, and the reasons for those feelings (Jarvis, 1992). Students must be able to trust the teacher, or the journals will be "lacking in spontaneity and offer little insight" (Newman, 1988, p.134). Jarvis (1992) suggests some students make evaluative comments without justifying them in order to simply be "pleasing the teacher" (p.137). She recommends asking students why they have made such comments. Finally, some students may dislike journal writing. Holmes and Moulton(1995) document the case of Dang who "enjoyed and benefited from formal writing...[but] resisted and disliked the informal writing of the dialogue journals" (p.223). One final note, because so many teachers are using journals, students may be resisting the practice. Often, students are asked to simultaneously keep

writing journals, reading journals and even talking journals.

The popularity of journals is understandable. Journals do give instructors insight into student perspectives on classroom instruction and this is "foundational first-order knowledge we need to do good work as teachers" (Brookfield, 1995, p.94). With the information we receive from our students' journal entries, we can monitor our practice and formulate plans for action that may improve that practice.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Chapter Three describes the conduct of the research study. It provides information regarding the context within which the research took place, describes the participants in the study and presents the peer response model chosen for use in the study. Specifics of the study including language training, the teacher's role and the first and subsequent peer response sessions are presented later in the chapter. A discussion of the analysis of the data concludes the chapter.

The Context

This study was undertaken in a small university college in the interior of British Columbia. For a number of years this institution, like many others in the province, has been active in international education. Students have been recruited from various countries, mainly Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Since 1985, the number of students in the English as a Second Language program has steadily grown until currently there are approximately 400 hundred students and

20 full time ESL instructors. Some students are in Canada to improve their English and to experience another culture and will return home after one or two semesters. Others are preparing for academic work in certificate, diploma or degree programs in North America.

Some of the students have finished degree programs in their own countries, while many of the students, particularly those from Japan, have completed two years of junior college in their home countries.

Most have studied English for a number of years in programs with an emphasis on grammar. An increasing trend is becoming evident, however, for the students to have had some "conversation" classes at a private school in Canada or in their native country.

Placement of Students. Students at the university college are enrolled in appropriate writing classes based on their scores on a placement exam developed in-house. This placement exam consists of multiple-choice questions on vocabulary, grammar and reading; a composition; and an oral interview. During the exam, the students have forty-five

minutes in which to complete a writing sample based on the prompt given. The composition is marked by two experienced teachers, and if they are not in agreement about placement, a third instructor evaluates the writing sample.

The CESL Program. The College English as a Second Language (CESL) program at the university college has five levels. The first two levels are for "high beginner" and "lower intermediate" students, and these levels roughly correspond to a 360 - 395 TOEFL score for Level 1 and a 400 to 450 score for Level 2. Students placed in Level 3 are considered "intermediate" students with a TOEFL equivalency of 455-495. Level 4 is considered "upper intermediate" or "lower advanced" with a TOEFL equivalency of 500-540. Level 5 "advanced" has a TOEFL equivalency of 550 to 575, and consists of two courses - a reading and a writing course; these combined form the prerequisites for first year university composition and literature courses. The participants in this study were "upper intermediate/lower advanced" students of English as a second language.

The Participants in the Research

The twelve participants in the study were students in my Level 4 writing class in the winter (January through April) of 1997 semester. Students had been placed in Level 4 writing on the basis of their results on the writing section of the placement test, or completion of the Level 3 writing course and the Level 3 grammar course both with marks of 65% or better. With the exception of one student, who was taking the Level 3 grammar class concurrently with the Level 4 writing, all the students in my class had the appropriate prerequisites. The participants were two males and ten females - all originally from countries in Asia. Their backgrounds, interests and strengths varied considerably. A brief sketch of each of the students makes the heterogeneous nature of the group evident. All names in the study are fictitious.

Bill was from Hong Kong. He had spent five years studying in Canadian high schools in both Kamloops and Vancouver. Initially, Bill's family had planned to emigrate from Hong Kong, but Bill's father developed cancer and the family could not move to Canada. In class, Bill was an

independent, cheerful student whose speech was fluent. His listening skills were also very good. Bill's weaknesses were in spelling, punctuation and grammar. His essays were always interesting and well-organized but riddled with errors. His problems in writing were somewhat unique in this class.

Sukjivan was a landed immigrant from India. She was married with three children. She had attended college in India although she had not graduated. Her pleasant nature and enthusiasm for the work made her an asset to the class. Sukjivan's English development was similar to Bill's in that her speech was fluent, and she understood conversational English. In writing, however, she had some difficulty avoiding run-on sentences and sentence fragment errors, and was fairly typical of unskilled L1 writers preparing for college programs. The content of her essays, though, reflected her maturity and her interest in the themes studied in class.

Jaesun was from Korea where she had been working as a teacher. Her goal was to finish ESL and then go to a university in the United States to train for a position in

tourism. Upon entering the class, Jaesun had a good command of the English language and had chosen to take the writing course for her own interest. When I suggested to her early in the semester that she move to Level 5 writing, she indicated that she preferred to remain in Level 4.

Also from Korea, **Sun** was a university graduate in business. Before coming to study at the university college, Sun had been enrolled at a private college in the city to improve her conversational skills. After one semester when she realized she was no longer learning new vocabulary and structures, she came to the university college. In her prior courses, the focus had been on conversation, so Sun had not done very much writing in English and initially was not certain that the writing course would be particularly helpful. She enjoyed, however, "*thinking hard about important ideas*". Although her syntax was very irregular, the content of her essays was always thoughtfully presented in an interesting manner.

Seven of the young women in the class were from Japan. All of them had been at the university college for approximately one year. **Yukiko** was an enthusiastic ski

boarder - and class participant. She tackled her assignments with energy, accepted suggestions and was a competent writer.

Riyoko, the second of the seven, had been given permission to take the Level 3 grammar prerequisite concurrently with the Level 4 writing class. She was not as confident a writer as some of the others although her work was certainly acceptable. When her ESL program is finished, Riyoko will enroll in the Tourism program. In Japan, Riyoko worked as a secretary and saved money to come to Canada. She was a very motivated student in my class and had a clear goal towards which she was working.

Like Riyoko, **Kyoko** also saved money to attend college in Canada. This summer she returned to Japan to work. If she can save enough for tuition and living expenses, she will return for one more year and take Tourism courses. In this course, Kyoko approached a writing task in much the same way as a skilled native speaker would do. She gathered ideas about her topic, wrote drafts, re-read what she had written, made numerous changes and finally, edited for surface errors before handing in her essay for evaluation.

Satoko, another young Japanese woman, had graduated from university and was also perceptive and careful in her written assignments. Her knowledge of the language was precise and her work thoughtfully crafted. Most of Satoko's assignments were creative in terms of content. Syntax was still at times difficult for her, particularly when she was trying to express complex concepts.

Like Satoko, **Naomi**, too, was a careful, competent writer. She planned to remain in Canada in order to take Tourism courses. Naomi had graduated from university in Japan, and so she worked diligently at any task presented to her. She was quiet and careful in her contributions to the work of the class.

Terumi's weakest subject, she said, was writing. At the time of the study, she was in Level 5 reading, concurrently with Level 4 writing, and her reading teacher had noted the difficulty she had writing about literature. Terumi had been at the university college for three semesters and had progressed from Level 2 to Level 4 writing in three semesters. While she was a conscientious worker, her vocabulary was not sufficiently developed for academic

writing. Consequently, she had problems with assignments other than personal, expressive writing activities.

Another less proficient student, **Chie**, was taking Level 4 writing for a second time. She had not developed her own voice and in order to produce the work she felt would please the teacher, she used a thesaurus to "improve" her vocabulary. Because she sprinkled these newly-found content words throughout her essay, at times her sentences were incomprehensible. Chie had for several semesters written mainly expressive, journal entries and had received relatively little feedback on her writing. As a consequence, she found it difficult to accept the fact that her work did not meet the standards expected at this level of the ESL writing program. Nonetheless Chie was hoping to be admitted to Computer Aided Drafting in September of 1997 and, therefore, must complete Level 5 writing in the summer.

George was a student from Taiwan who began his studies in Level 1 ("high beginner") at the university college. George had progressed successfully from one level to another each semester. While he was to be commended, he had progressed almost too rapidly, particularly for a language

program. In the peer response sessions, George had great difficulty reading aloud because many words were unfamiliar to him. He worked very hard to complete his writing assignments, synthesizing reading he did in the library. His writing , however, did not resonate with his voice.

Grace, another Taiwanese student, wrote in a similar manner. If she needed information for an essay, rather than use her own experience, she read in the library and then incorporated that information into her assignment. Again her writing lacked a sense of voice and for that reason her essays were often not as well developed or coherent as I would have liked.

There were four other students in this class, Asako, who was auditing and whose attendance was irregular; Tom, who returned to Korea at mid-term; Ho Chung who withdrew in order to travel; and Nao who was not well for a significant part of the last month of class. These four students were not included in the research. For this study, the twelve students described above, those who participated faithfully in the peer response sessions, constituted the participants.

The Course

The Level 4 writing course, (CESL 048) entitled "Advanced Composition Skills" is based on the course outline approved by the Educational Policy and Planning Review committee at the university college. The goal of the course is to assist students to demonstrate their ability to write well-organized, thoughtful compositions of approximately five hundred words in length, in readiness for the composition course in Level 5. The course is sixty hours long spanning a twelve week period.

Course objectives are more detailed and outline for the students what instructors want them to achieve. Attention is directed to increasing control over grammar in English, improving vocabulary and using a variety of sentence patterns to express complex ideas. Techniques such as free writing and brainstorming are practised. The main emphasis of the course is on developing a logical coherent essay with a thesis and with adequate supporting detail.

The course outline for CESL 048 becomes the instructor's contract with the students, and teachers of CESL 048 are obliged to follow this document. Within these

parameters, however, there is considerable freedom; teachers choose their own texts, for example, and select approaches to the teaching of writing which are consistent with their values and beliefs.

The Class

In the winter semester, I taught CESL 048 section 03. For this course, I chose to use the text, Communication and Culture (Gregg, 1993). The author describes the text as follows:

The text...integrates reading, writing, and composing skills with rich content material from a well-known freshman anthropology textbook. The broad subject of human culture has proved stimulating to both students and instructors, and it provides a useful springboard for classroom discussion and college-level expository writing (p. vii).

For each chapter in the text there is a reading selection on a specific theme related to culture, a focus on vocabulary; sentence level writing exercises such as sentence combining; small group assignments; and a section dealing with aspects of composition development.

I supplemented the text where necessary with materials to assist students with aspects of writing that were

problematic for them. Often these materials were designed to help them practise difficult grammatical patterns or to present additional information on the theme of the particular chapter under study.

At the beginning of the semester students were given an overview of the course outlining my expectations and assignments they were required to complete. The focus of the course was on the essay. For each of the five chapters covered during the semester, students were required to write an essay of approximately five hundred words on the theme of the chapter being studied. Themes are "Culture and Human Behaviour" in Chapter 1 and "Culture and Food Habits" in Chapter 2. Themes of the next three chapters are reproduction and family, a cross cultural view of economics and the cultural patterning of time. Composition topics are given in the text; however, students were permitted to write on any aspect of the theme which was of particular interest to them. The only requirement was that they secured my approval of the topic selected. The essays were prepared mainly at home while brainstorming, outlining, free writing and discussions of the reading selections pertaining to the themes were activities conducted with the whole class.

In addition to essays, students were required to write journal entries once every two weeks. These entries were to describe and then reflect upon an experience from students' daily lives. For certain entries, the students were directed to reflect upon their course work, the classroom activities and the progress they were making in their writing. The journal entries were not marked for spelling, grammar or punctuation. I read and responded to the entries, asking questions, suggesting reading material, encouraging further reflection. Students received a mark of 5 out of 5 if they completed the task with evidence of care and attention. No student received a mark of less than 3.5 out of 5 unless the journal was not handed in. The mark then was 0.

Past Approaches to Revision

In previous semesters I had approached revision primarily through teacher-student conferences. Students brought their drafts to individual conferences at appointed times, and together we discussed issues of meaning, organization, coherence, adequate development of ideas and a clear focus for the composition. Some attention was given

to sentence structure and grammar, particularly when such problems obfuscated the meaning the student wished to convey. In class, for revision purposes I had previously given students prompt sheets which directed attention to both content and mechanics so that students were helped to self correct their essays. When this class activity was taking place, I monitored individual students' progress.

At times in the past, I had used peer response groups to help students work together to evaluate each other's writing, but not with any consistency or satisfaction. While the theory in support of peer response groups in second language classrooms is substantive, (Samway, 1993; Mittan, 1989; Urzua, 1987; Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger, 1992), I had found managing such groups problematic. Problems of organization often undermined the potential value. First of all, I found it difficult to group students into productive units. My writing classes had been generally composed of students from many language backgrounds, who possessed varying degrees of facility with English. In addition, they brought to writing groups their diverse personalities and their differing attitudes toward working in groups. While many students were comfortable

with group work, some were reluctant to participate in the process and one or two even exhibited outright resistance. A second problem I experienced using peer response groups was that dominant students tended to direct the proceedings and shy, quiet students participated very little. The lack of commitment on the part of students posed yet another problem. Some of the students arrived unprepared to contribute to group sessions or were absent without good reason on the day of the peer response session. The lack of commitment to the other members of the peer response group rendered the group ineffective or at least limited what could be achieved.

In spite of these problems which are also documented in the research (Bell, 1991; Mittan, 1989), peer response groups still appealed to me. First, in the literature on communicative language teaching (Savignon, 1994; Coelho, 1992), the use of groups is encouraged. The interaction which takes place has been found to aid in language acquisition. Cooperative learning theory also advocates the use of groups for improved social relations, academic achievement, increased motivation, among other benefits. (Kagan, 1989/1990; McGroarty, 1989; McDonell, 1992.) Last

semester, therefore, when one of my colleagues reported the success she had had with peer response groups based on a video available in our university-college library, I was interested. This video also has been used by the university instructors from whom she learned of it, and she tried the approach to peer response sessions demonstrated on the video with her Level 3 writing students. She was amazed at comments she heard. For instance, students in her class noted the repetition of particular words in their classmates' writing as they listened to the essays being read aloud. Encouraged, I determined to investigate the video, described in full below, and after doing so, decided to use this model of peer response sessions with my writing students during the Fall 1996 semester. The procedure seemed to work reasonably well, but due to pressure of time, I managed only one session. It was interesting for me to note, though, that at the end of the semester, in a discussion of activities the students felt had been useful, several stated that they had wanted to participate in the peer review sessions more frequently. Consequently, for the winter semester with CESL 048-03, I prepared to have peer response sessions based on the video presentation.

The Peer Response Model

In the winter semester of 1997, for the peer response work, I used as a model the video entitled Student Writing Groups: Demonstrating the Process (1988). The peer response session on the video is based on "the teacherless writing class" described in Writing Without Teachers (Elbow, 1973). Elbow describes the teacherless writing class as follows:

It tries to take you out of darkness and silence. It is a class of seven to twelve people. It meets at least once a week. Everyone tries to give each writer a sense of how his words were experienced. The goal is for the writer to come as close as possible to being able to see and experience his own words through seven or eight people. That's all (p. 77).

The peer response group in the video consists of four members. The group demonstrates the process to a group of students and to us, the video audience. First, the group member reads her essay through from beginning to end while the others attentively listen. During the first reading, no one in the group takes notes. Once the first reading is complete, those who have been listening take the time to write one or two sentences which state their general impression of the essay as they have understood it. At this point, if the reader/author has noticed anything in his/her

text that might need to be changed later, he/she should jot it down. Then, the same essay is read a second time. During this reading, the other three group members "write constantly noting specific responses" (Elbow, p.9) It is helpful if students note key words under three columns as shown: features they like, things that do not "work" for them and areas of confusion (Figure 3.1).

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Figure 3.1. Sample of notes taken during peer response session.

After the second reading, the group members comment orally on the notes they have taken. The author/reader listens to and writes down all comments, positive as well as those that suggest possible revisions. Later, when the author sits down to revise the text, decisions can be made regarding which comments to act upon and which comments to

set aside. In this model it is important that during the oral feedback part of the process, the author not converse with the other group members. It is very tempting to explain or defend the writing but the author's task is to listen and take notes for revision (Elbow, 1973). Once all three listeners have reported orally to the author, it is then the next student's turn to present his/her writing for response.

Reasons for Choosing the Model. As I prepared to implement peer response sessions as an integral part of my classroom practice in the winter semester, my experience as a writing instructor and my reading of the literature combined to reinforce the decision to use the oral model of peer response groups illustrated in the video. As a writing instructor, I have often asked students to read aloud their drafts during the student-teacher conferences about their writing. When they did so, it was as if they saw their writing in a new light, at a distance from themselves - objectified (Zamel, 1983). When they stumbled over a word or looked puzzled at the end of a sentence, they were indicating an awareness of a problem - unconscious perhaps-

to which I, as the teacher, drew their attention. Often writers effected their own repairs at this point.

My experience was echoed in Freedman's study of peer response groups in an L1 setting. The teacher structured the sessions so that students read their work aloud, explaining, "I want kids to HEAR their own writing" (DiPardo and Freedman, 1988 p.135). The authors linked the value of reading aloud to Vygotsky's views of speech, a "self-monitoring, or thinking aloud which is intermediate between public utterances and inner speech" (Vygotsky 1986, p.94). In addition to the benefits of students hearing their work, oral/aural interaction during peer response sessions is also an efficient means of providing feedback, much more efficient in terms of time than student-teacher conferences or written feedback from the instructors.

I also chose this model because the groups do not use written prompts to guide the revision process even though some instructors find that response sheets are helpful in structuring peer response (Freedman, 1992; Mittan, 1989). With group work in the past, however, I have found that if students were given a sheet to fill out, the sheet became

the focus of the group's activity. For students who were used to working individually, the temptation to isolate themselves with their sheet to fill in was very inviting.

In addition, if students had copies of each other's essays, the types of revisions discussed and consequently the types of revisions they made, were more likely to focus on form rather than on content (Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1992, p.260). In my classroom response sessions, I wanted students' attention directed to more global matters of content and organization with attention to form delayed until the editing of the final draft.

My concern for the focus on oral peer feedback rather than on written feedback using a revision sheet stems also from my 'intuition' that language acquisition requires the integration of speaking, listening, reading and writing (Manglesdorf, 1989). My reading in preparation for the implementation of peer response groups confirms that intuition. In In Other Words for example, Bialystok and Hakuta (1994), emphasize the role of society in integrating speech and thought:

Although language, thought and action are distinct psychological functions that (as far as we can read.

Vygotsky's theory) might as well be innate, the role of society was to bring about their integration and thus make possible the creation of new levels of thinking. (p.183)

The peer response group as structured in the model I adopted was a "social institution bringing together" (p.183) language (peer talk), thought (writing made public) and action (revising) to make it possible for the group members to create new levels of thinking.

Moreover, oral feedback in the writing class is important for yet another reason. Peer response groups in which the focus is on speaking about writing give students further opportunities for practice in the target language for negotiation of meaning (Manglesdorf, 1989). "The voices that speak in the classroom can empower the voices struggling to be heard in the papers" (p.134). The speaking voices provide a crucial dimension in integrating the voice of the thought with the voice of the writing.

Another reason for choosing to use an oral/aural model of peer response sessions was to create a context where groups could function in a semi-autonomous way. Although students are under the authority of the teacher and need a passing grade to progress to the next level, teachers need

to remain aware that students need encouragement and a sense of control as much as possible (Gere, 1987; Myers, 1990). Asking students to participate in peer response sessions without directing their activities with a revision sheet, I hoped, would help students to feel in control of the activity.

Conduct of the Study

When the first essay was assigned in the winter semester, students were made aware that peer response sessions would be a feature of the class. They were alerted to the fact that they were obliged to come with a draft of their first essay to read aloud in peer response groups. The first essay that students were assigned in CESL 048 was based on one of the following prompts.

1. The well known anthropologist Margaret Mead stated that the culture of the United States does not value highly people who are aged sixty-five and older. Yet according to Mead, many elderly people have the wisdom, energy, and interest in life to make significant contributions to their families, neighborhoods, and larger communities.

Compose an essay of about 500 words in which you support Mead's view. Use as your illustration an actual older person whom you personally know. Provide some introductory physical details to bring this person to life for your reader.

Present some of his or her most admirable characteristics and/or actions. Compose a suitable conclusion that restates your idea on the topic in a different way from your introduction.

2. At certain times in our lives we come under the influence of a person who affects us in important and beneficial ways. Write an essay of 400-500 words in which you identify such a person in your own life. Explain how that person came to influence your life. Give a clear and detailed illustration of a specific change or specific change(s) that resulted because of that person's influence on you (Gregg, 1993. pp. 26-27).

These topics are popular with the students and are generally well presented. Consequently, this was a good essay with which to begin peer response sessions.

Language Training. In preparation for the first peer response session, students discussed suitable language to use in their comments about features that were puzzling or problematic in group members' compositions. From the video, students transcribed the appropriate facilitative phrases (Figure 3.2) and created others they felt would be helpful.

"I was wondering..."

"That doesn't work for me..."

"I think..."

"I am confused about..."

"I don't understand what you mean when...."

"I was worried about..."

Figure 3.2. Facilitative phrases in peer response sessions.

As the list of introductory phrases illustrates, students were encouraged to use "I" statements in their feedback to writers and to avoid the modal auxiliaries "should", "must", "need to" and "have to" since these modals indicate obligation and compulsion, and give authority to the speaker. Students also were cautioned against using the modals which express prohibition: "can not", "may not", "are not allowed to", "should not", "had better not" (Leech and Svartvik, 1975 p. 143-145).

Consequently, statements which would not be deemed appropriate in the context of peer response sessions include, among others, those listed below (Fig. 3.3). These introductory phrases all begin with 'you', unlike those in

Fig. 3.2 which begin with 'I', and they include modals that carry obligation thereby giving the speaker the command in the interaction.

"You should have more..."

"You have to change..."

"You cannot use that..."

Figure 3.3. Inhibiting phrases in peer response sessions.

A discussion of suitable language is essential before peer response sessions begin; my past experience and the research have revealed the reluctance of both first and second language students to offer negative evaluations to their classmates (Freedman, 1992). However, if students have ways of being "gracious, courteous and gentle" with each other (Zander, 1983, p. 7 in Carson and Nelson, 1994, p. 23), they will feel less uncomfortable and venture to comment on negative features of the texts being shared.

The Teacher's Role. In the peer response sessions, I desired that the groups be as autonomous as possible. In

keeping with my goal of student autonomy, I encouraged students to form their own groups. Because students, however, seemed reluctant to do so, I placed students in groups taking into account issues of gender and language background. Since I knew little about students' writing abilities when I met them at the beginning of the semester, their writing skill was not a factor in the creation of the initial groups.

Particularly at the beginning of the semester, I monitored group work during the peer response sessions, mainly to assist students in following the structure of the task. Often at first, students forgot to take a moment or two after the first reading to jot down a brief general impression of the essay which had been read. At times the reader forgot that he/she was not to defend the essay but simply to note how the writing affected those who listened. Finally, I monitored the language students used when giving their group members feedback on writing. Monitoring the language was particularly important at the beginning of the semester when peer response was new, and students were unfamiliar with polite ways to make what might have seemed

to them rude, negative remarks about the work their classmates had done.

Most important, though, my role was to encourage students' commitment to their response groups. This I strove to achieve by attempting to convey my belief in the students' ability to generate knowledge through interaction in the group. I felt that if I could convey to them that knowledge is "a social artifact established and maintained through normal discourse" (Bruffee, 1986, p. 648), then the students would also realize that the teacher's authority lay not in "godliness, nearness to the mind of God", as in the traditional view (Bruffee, 1986 p. 649) but in his or her membership in an established community of proficient writers of English.

The First Peer Response Session. Students arrived with completed drafts and were placed in peer response groups. The classroom we were in was large with movable desk/tables, and the groups were able to spread out into different parts of the room. Many of the students were very anxious, and laughed and chatted nervously while seating arrangements

were being made. Before students actually began to read, we quickly reviewed the structure of the task and the suggestions for language use, and I made notes on the blackboard of appropriate facilitative phrases (Figure 3.2). Then it was time to read. Groups determined who would go first. In some cases a group member was eager to read to "get it over with". In other groups, students played the children's game "paper, scissors, stone" or tossed a coin to determine the lead participant. Then the reading began.

My task at that point, as I saw it, was to monitor procedure and language and to encourage students where necessary. Because this task was so structured, and it was amply clear how and when each student was to participate, there was little difficulty with domination by one student of the group. Similarly, the shy students who were often passed over in whole class activities were required to make some contribution to the response sessions.

I did need to monitor language use, however. One particularly vocal student in the enthusiasm of the moment had many suggestions to make, all of which were phrased as

statements of obligation and compulsion, "You have to...", for example.

I remained with this group for a few minutes and reminded the student to use the phrases on the board, coaching him when necessary. The exchange was good humored, and this individual was quickly self-correcting. Later, whenever he slipped into the old pattern, he was reminded by the other group members to re-phrase his comments appropriately.

It was also necessary with one group to remind the members that they were to give general impressions after the first reading, and then the author was to read his/her essay a second time. Finally, I remained available to answer questions and to encourage students as they completed the task. One student, for example, was quite puzzled when she realized her essay was different from the essays of the others in her group. She was convinced she had not done the assignment properly. Before she could concentrate on the task at hand, she needed reassurance that no two essays, even on the same topic, would ever be developed in exactly the same way and that her essay although different from her

classmates' was an acceptable approach to the topic. For part of the class I simply observed; in addition, I took some time to write in my journal since I wanted to document as much as possible about how these groups functioned.

This first session went quite smoothly although it took the entire two hours of class time, somewhat longer than I had expected. At the end of class, students were asked to revise their drafts and prepare final copies for marking. In addition, I requested a journal entry in which the students were to describe their thoughts on the experience of taking part in this first peer response session.

The journal entry after this first session was an opportunity for the students to consider what they had learned and to articulate their views about the classroom activity in which they had participated. Hence, the journal entry became the instrument of evaluation for the session. Evaluation of the process, I considered essential to the study. Gere (1987) states, that "it is evaluation that transforms the work of writing groups into the kind of learning that enables participants to 'negotiate' their way, as Kenneth Bruffee describes it into the normal discourse of

knowledgeable peers" (p. 111). Making their views concrete in the journal enabled students to move towards new insights.

The evaluation of peer response sessions in a journal entry stimulated the kind of reflection described as "metacognitive experience" (Flavell 1979, p. 908), for in order to write a journal essay in response to the peer group session, students needed to question themselves, to wonder about, to puzzle over the various events which took place, or to articulate the feelings they experienced during the task. As a result, some students determined to behave differently during the next response session or to spend more time developing a focus for the next assignment, or to study new vocabulary encountered during the peer response session. Metacognitive experiences according to Flavell can lead an individual to establish new goals, can affect a person's metacognitive knowledge base and can activate cognitive strategies (pp. 908-909). This reach in metacognition was in part what I envisioned the journal entries accomplishing.

Subsequent Peer Response Sessions. For the remainder of the semester, peer response groups met together to review the first draft of each essay assigned. The structure of the task remained the same, and my participation in the task continued to be one of "nurturing students' natural abilities, trusting them...trying to give them authority over their own learning" (Tebo-Messina, 1989, p.9).

Group membership was fixed until mid-term at which time groups were reorganized, this time according to the results of the mid-term mark. This mark was based on all the essays, journal, and quizzes done by the students to that point in the semester, plus the results of an in-class essay. For the regrouping, in order to create "maximally heterogeneous teams", I followed steps outlined by Olsen and Kagan (1992, p.11). I ranked the marks in order from the highest to the lowest and assigned the best student, the weakest student and the two middle students to the first group. The second group was formed by the student with second highest mark, the student with the second lowest mark and the two students with marks in the middle of the rankings. The four remaining students were grouped together. For the rest of the semester, these new peer

response groups had the task of evaluating each other's writing.

Changing the composition of the groups appeared to have very little effect on the execution of the task. Indeed, many students commented, as discussed in the findings, how "comfortable" the new groups felt and how the "atmosphere" in the class had not changed. Since the class was a cohesive unit, perhaps the students knew each other well enough that working with new group members was more interesting than it was threatening.

Data Collection

To collect data for this study, I employed a number of strategies. First, I kept a journal in which I wrote my personal observations of classroom activities and students' behaviour. My journal contains questions I had about particular situations, a record of conversations with students, reflections upon my practice, plans for upcoming classes and my emotional journey through the study. In addition, I tried to relate my reading to the study and to the situation as it was revealing itself in the classroom.

Time to write in my journal was not always easy to find, and I was not always faithful. Brief interludes during class, at times gave me the opportunity to make notes. Most entries were written, however, at the end of the day. In writing the journal I tried to keep in mind that the journal should "help one to reconstruct what it was like at the time" (Elliott, 1991, p.77).

The students in the class also kept journals in which to reflect upon classroom learning or events of significance in their lives. After the first peer review session, I requested that the students recount in their journals their initial reactions to the process as they had experienced it in their group. This journal entry was collected and photocopied as were similar entries after essay three and essay four. Because of the timing of these major writing assignments, the first journal was written near the beginning of the class, the second at approximately mid-term and the final entry close to the end of the semester.

Additional documents relevant to the study were collected and photocopied for analysis. These documents included drafts and final versions of the fourth essay the

students wrote during the term of the study. This essay was selected for analysis because by this time, students were familiar with the peer response process and no longer nervous and embarrassed about sharing their work. This essay was not the last one required of the students and consequently, I felt the assignment, unlike a final assignment, would still command the students' full attention. It has been my experience that, given the pressures of imminent examinations and the fact that many teachers assign substantial end-of-term assignments, attention to ESL writing assignments is sometimes perfunctory by the last week or so of class. As well as the essays, notes taken during the fourth peer response session were collected and copied.

Finally the fourth peer response session was audiotaped by placing a tape recorder with each group. These tapes were transcribed and the transcripts checked for accuracy. The entire peer response session was taped although I instructed students to tape only the first reading of the essay under discussion along with the resulting feedback session. The second reading of each essay is omitted from the tape.

Together the various data, I hoped, would give me an accurate picture of the peer response session as it operated in my context with my students.

Analysis of the Data

As noted the data collected for analysis consisted of draft essays and final versions from the fourth peer response sessions and of tapescripts of those sessions, as well as journal entries written by the students over the semester. Throughout the semester, I too kept a journal.

Perceptions of Peer Response Sessions. To determine the students' attitudes towards the peer response sessions, I turned to the journal entries. First I read and re-read each journal entry and holistically rated the entry as positive, mixed or negative as described in Manglesdorf (1992). A student whose journal is categorized as positive makes only positive comments. So, for example, Jaesun's first journal is categorized as positive. (All journal entries italicized and are presented as they were written. No corrections have been made.)

I think the feedback activity in last class was useful. First, it was helpful to understand the structure of an essay. Second, we had a chance to discuss appropriate choice about vocabulary and expressions. Finally, I could realize what I hadn't recognize in my essay and vice versa (1-#16).

Nothing in Jaesun's journal hints at a problem or concern, and consequently her journal is considered positive.

A journal entry labelled "mixed" would contain both positive and negative comments about the peer response session. Bill's first journal is an example.

I think that is fun to listen to other's writing but it's kind of hard for me to read in front of the group. Maybe because I'm a shy person so it wasn't easy to me to read it out loud. I like the feedback from my group member since they are all gentle. Personally I like teacher teaches thing directly instead lead the student puzzle and find their own way. But this is only my personal feeling on that is what I use to learn from other courses (1-#4).

Clearly Bill has some reservations regarding the peer revision activity, and he is concerned about the teacher's use of this strategy in the classroom. He does, though, indicate he is enjoying hearing the work of others and isn't threatened or intimidated by his classmates. This journal is categorized as mixed.

To be categorized as a 'negative' journal entry, all the student's comments had to reflect a negative view of peer response sessions. Yukiko's entry which follows is a good example.

I really didn't like my essay so I didn't want to read it. After two people read their essays, it was my turn. When the time people give me a feedback. One of my groupemate just couldn't say anything about the first impressions of my essay. I was shocked not by him but by myself who couldn't write good essay. Giving feedback for each of them is not so easy. What makes it hard is that the person who read the essay can't talk or explain. Also, time is little bit short for me to have enough talk (1-#2).

This entry indicated the difficulties this student had with the first peer response session and the journal was deemed negative.

Once the journal entries were rated overall as positive, mixed or negative, the totals in each category for each journal were calculated and then expressed as percentages.

Analysis of Student Comments. After categorizing the journal entries holistically as described, I returned to the

journals to examine the comments made by the students. In an iterative fashion the entries were read and re-read to determine what students discerned as benefits of the peer response sessions and what issues concerned them.

First, there were comments regarding the way in which the peer response sessions were structured. For example, one of the features of this activity as it was set up in my classroom was that students read their essays aloud. Student comments about this aspect of the process might be positive as was Jaesun's, *"Our group process is beneficial to my listening skills"* (3-#16). Student comments might also deal with concerns regarding this aspect of the task. For example, Kyoko stated, *"I sometimes don't understand what they say because of their pronunciation"* (3-#12). A second focus of student comments was feedback received during peer response sessions; students' opinions about its usefulness and its deficiencies were numerous.

Yukiko, for example, states a benefit for her in terms of the feedback she receives. *"My group members point out what is not clear and what is a weakness of my essay so I can revise my essay in better ways"* (3-#2). On the other

hand, in Riyoko's first journal entry, she expresses her concern that she will "give them useless feedback" (1-#3).

A third focus of comment in the journals, became evident through analysis. Students had noted an increased awareness of their writing and its effect on others. They believed they had learned ways in which to improve their writing. To illustrate these perceived gains, Satako made a comment in one of her journals about her peers' essays as comprehensible - and comprehended input (Gass and Selinker, 1994).

In last semester I didn't have chance to read my classmates' writing. I can see a lot of article of magazine or newspaper but these are too difficult to use for my writing. I found some good sentences in my classmates' writing and I can use it next time (1-#8).

Finally, through analysis of the content of the journals, it was clear, students had concerns regarding peer response sessions. At least one student felt little had been gained or even nothing as a result of participating in the sessions.

Analysis of Changes in Students' Perceptions. To determine whether student preferences changed over the semester as students became more familiar with the peer response sessions, I compiled the three journal entries for each of four students: Kyoko, Naomi, Yukiko and Terumi. These students were selected because I felt their views regarding peer response sessions were representative of those held by the class as a whole. Yukiko at the end of the semester had made it clear to me that she had positive views of peer response sessions while Naomi held somewhat negative views. Kyoko and Terumi, I intuitively felt, were mixed in their attitudes towards the sessions. Each student's journals were compiled and comments were examined for any changes in attitude that might be discernible.

Peer Response Interaction. To discover what students actually do during peer response sessions, I transcribed the tapes made of the peer response sessions in which students presented their fourth essays, which were based on the theme of Economics. The tapescripts were examined "repeatedly and in detail" (Silverman, 1993, p.117) in the light of research conducted by Villamil and De Guerrero (1996).

Because I was interested in the peer response session and the interaction engaged in by the students, the whole tapescript of a group's session constituted the unit of analysis. I carefully reviewed the tapescripts for each of the three response groups for activities, strategies and aspects of social behaviour presented by Villamil and De Guerrero and defined as follows:

Social-Cognitive Activities: activities displayed during peer interaction which were thought to be the basis for cognitive processes related to revision.

Mediating Strategies: semiotically encoded actions which facilitated the achievement of task goals, that is, revising text.

Significant Aspects of Social Behaviour: salient behavioural issues that indicated how peers handled their mutual interaction regarding the text (p.56).

In my study I determined which of the activities, strategies, and aspects of social behaviour were evident in the transcripts of peer response sessions conducted in my classroom. Because of the structure of the task I set my students, I expected that categories occurring in the research conducted by Villamil and De Guerrero (1996) would, for the most part, be applicable to my study.

Effects of Peer Response on Revision. Using the drafts of the essays presented to the peer response groups, the tapescripts of the groups' interaction and the revised essays, I determined what suggestions were used by the writers to revise their drafts. Comparing the drafts and the final copies illuminated how the suggestions had been employed. Examining the tapescripts along with the final versions of the essays indicated which suggestions were ignored. Finally, I noted those revisions made which had not been suggested by the response groups.

This analysis gave me a comprehensive look at the activities that took place during the peer response sessions, the impact those activities had on the revisions students made to their writing, and the perceptions of the students with regard to the peer response sessions.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results of the Study

This chapter presents observations that were collected upon a thorough analysis of the data. Because this study is a small scale exploratory study of classroom practice, the results of the study are more appropriately referred to as observations rather than as findings.

Observation 1: Students' perceptions of peer response sessions varied from student to student.

Students' journal entries were read and reread and rated overall as positive, mixed or negative. The number of journal entries in each category was totaled and then expressed as a percentage. Results are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Holistic Ratings of Journal Entries

<u>Journal</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Mixed</u>	<u>Negative</u>
1. (n=12)	6 (50%)	4 (33.3%)	2 (16.6%)
2. (n=11)	3 (27.2%)	7 (63.6%)	1 (9%)
3. (n=9)	4 (44.4%)	5 (55.5%)	0 (0%)

In the first journal entry, the largest percentage of students expressed positive attitudes towards the peer response sessions. The next largest group consisted of students who appreciated the benefits of participation in the peer response groups but who also found they experienced some concerns regarding the use of peer response sessions. Two students (16.6%) did not feel the peer response groups were beneficial to them.

For the second journal, results were quite different. This time, by far the majority of journal entries was rated as mixed - 63.6%. Having had more experience with sharing writing with peers, students were apparently more cognizant of some of the problems associated with these peer response

sessions as they were used in this context. Interestingly enough, however, this time, only one student journal entry was deemed negative. Presumably, with familiarity, one of the students whose journal was formerly categorized as negative had determined there were some benefits to the process.

By the end of the semester, the perceptions of the students had apparently changed again. They became more balanced between positive and mixed attitudes with the larger percentage of student journals in the mixed category. No one wrote a third journal of entirely negative comments. It appears that the student who had written the negative journal in the middle of the semester began to see some benefits to participating in peer response sessions.

Observation 2: Students' perceptions of peer response sessions changed over the course of the semester.

Individual student's journals indicated changes in perceptions towards peer response sessions over the length of the semester. These changes in perception are best illustrated by examining the journal entries.

Terumi's entries typified the way perceptions changed. Her three journals documented the modifications in her attitude towards peer response sessions. Initially, her comments were mixed. She noted, *"working as a group was very helpful to me because the other students told me my bad points or good points in my essay"*. In this first journal, however, she also pointed out the difficulty she had when she had *"to tell the other students my comments"*.

Terumi's second journal was rated as positive. This second journal reported the process of the peer response sessions and reiterated the comment made in journal one:

This way is effective for us to progress my writing skill because the listeners give us their opinions that I didn't notice at all and also I can add the good opinions to my essay (2-#15).

The focus in this second journal was on positive aspects of the peer response sessions.

In her third journal entry, Terumi had both positive and negative comments; consequently, her journal was once again deemed mixed. Although Terumi in this final journal again mentioned that her classmates *"give me my good points,*

so I can recognize how I can write essay in a good way", she went on to make the comment that the listening was difficult since she had to understand long passages of text and in order to do so had to concentrate. In spite of her difficulty listening, she thought the peer response process "helps [her] in a listening way too".

While the changes in perception on Terumi's part were not great in magnitude, the third journal indicated a more thoughtful assessment of the peer response sessions, and her attitude toward the third session was mixed.

More dramatic changes were evident in Yukiko's views of peer response sessions than in those of other students. In her first journal entry, all the comments she made were negative, and consequently her journal was holistically rated as negative. She revealed her lack of confidence in her ability to write a good essay and her embarrassment at having to read her work to her classmates. Additional concerns in her first journal had to do with how difficult it was to give feedback to her classmates about their writing.

In her second journal, rated mixed, Yukiko was still nervous about reading in front of her class, but she focused more on the helpful aspects of the process. She stated:

The reason why I think it's helpful are easy to find your weakness in my essay, good practice for speak out, and can develop my hearing skills (2-#2).

By the third journal entry, which was rated positive, Yukiko's enthusiasm for the peer response sessions was clearly evident. She noted that she fixed her essay using her group members' advice and believed her "speaking and listening skills have improved since we started doing this work". Her final comment reflected her changed attitude.

People in my group including me don't hesitate to say both positive and negative parts so we all can be encouraged and know what is wrong with our essays. I think I am, or we are all helping with our essays (3-#2).

Over this semester, Yukiko became increasingly more confident about participating in peer response sessions and more positive about the benefits of such sessions.

Most students did not undergo as dramatic nor as evident a change in perception as Yukiko. A number of

students wrote initial journals and final journals rated as mixed but had second journal entries evaluated as either positive as is Terumi's second journal, or negative as is the case with Naomi's second journal entry. Other students wrote positive initial evaluations of the peer response process and then wrote further journal entries rated overall as mixed. These students became aware, apparently, of concerns regarding peer response sessions once they had some experience with the sessions and made those clear in their second and third journal entries.

Observation 3: Students saw the benefits of Elbow's (1973) model of peer response sessions but had concerns about certain aspects as well.

The model of peer response sessions used for this study is based on Elbow's (1973) writing groups. In this model, students read their essays aloud while their peers listened and took notes in order to respond to the authors' texts. Feedback, then, was oral; authors were not allowed to argue over their writing nor defend their work. They simply listened and took notes of their peers' comments on

strengths, suggestions for improvement and queries regarding meaning. Aspects of the peer response sessions which were beneficial yet posed concerns for students were the oral/aural nature of the task, and the sharing of essays.

The Oral/Aural Nature of the Task. A number of students commented on the fact that they felt their listening skills improved as a consequence of the way in which the peer response sessions were structured. Students needed to concentrate on the text being read in order to "*catch the thesis*" and "*in order to give good feedback*". Speaking skills improved in the opinion of at least one student because of the necessity to give feedback to classmates orally. The main benefits perceived by the students, however, derived from the reading aloud. Numerous comments by students expressed the idea that reading their essays aloud helped them to find mistakes on their own, and helped their peers recognize "*something unnatural*".

Concerns regarding the oral/aural aspect of the process ranged from complaints about finding it difficult to understand the pronunciation of others in the group to

finding it difficult to fully comprehend the meaning of a long piece of text without a written copy. One student complained, interestingly enough, that because there were three Japanese students in her group it was too easy for them to understand one another, and they all made *"the same mistakes and couldn't find it"*. Another student in her journal was adamant that her listening and speaking skills had not improved as a result of participation in peer response sessions.

Sharing Essays. Almost all of the students enjoyed listening to the essays written by their classmates. They appreciated the opportunity to *"find out how others are using different words"*, and to discuss those words and expressions. They found it *"helps to hear others' ideas"* and *"to compare different approaches to the same topic"*. Some students stated that they paid attention to structure and noted *"good sentences"*. One particularly insightful comment suggested that students found their peers' writing useful models for their own work.

In last semester I didn't have chance to read my classmate's writing. I can see a lot of article of magazine or newspaper but these are too difficult for

my writing. I found some good sentences in my classmates' writing and I can use it next time (1-#8).

Concerns regarding the practice of sharing essays were evinced in two comments both made by Riyoko. These concerns need to be considered when assessing the effectiveness of sharing writing in peer response sessions. Riyoko in her first journal wrote:

To tell the truth, I was getting confused as we discussed about our essay. Because our style of essay was different. One of our group wrote about a kind of story that she had experienced with him whom she described. But mine is totally just a description with some example (1-#3).

Finally, Riyoko's distress with the sharing of essays in peer response sessions was evident in a comment from her third journal, *"Mostly, I'm disappointed at mine [my essay] when I listen others"*. For her, these sessions were a mixed experience at best.

Working Together. While each of the two previous aspects of the task resulted in both gains and concerns for students, there were no concerns articulated with regard to working with classmates to accomplish the task set for the

group. Several comments were made, however, regarding gains students recognized as a result of group work. A number of students reflected on the fact that they felt comfortable with the members of their peer groups, even after the composition of the groups changed following mid-term examinations. In addition, Sukjivan wrote that she "learned how to say someone politely that she/he need some changes in their essay or this is right and this is wrong". Her comments were echoed by others. Students were also aware that they had to "respect group member's writing".

There were no negative comments from students directed at their fellow classmates. No one was deemed apathetic or lazy. Indeed, indirect corroboration of the commitment of the students to the peer response process was revealed in my journal entry of April 1, 1997. I wrote the following:

My sense is that these students are working harder than others have and the work is sustained. Nobody seems to be slacking off. Attendance is good. No one has come without his/her essay done and students comment on how "comfortable" they are in groups - even the new groups (01-04-TJ).

Observation 4: Students had problems with the concept of peer feedback.

'Feedback' is defined as "referring to the process whereby the sender of a message obtains a reaction from the receiver which enables a check to be made on the efficiency of the communication" (Crystal, 1991, p.134). Comments made by group members during peer response sessions enable writers to assess how effectively the essays carry their message. While students did make some appreciative statements about the feedback from their peers, they still had problems with several aspects of peer feedback.

The first benefit mentioned by several students was the opportunity to explore what peer group members "could understand, and how they felt" in regard to the essays presented. A number of students mentioned making use of peers' comments to "revise essays in better ways" while at the same time reserving the right to reject suggestions they do not agree with.

It was evident, however, from the journal entries that some students had difficulty accepting the idea of actually giving feedback to their peers. Several times in the

journals, students expressed feeling inadequate to do so. Riyoko was worried about "giving them useless feedback" while Naomi felt she didn't "know how to advice properly about their essays [since] their essays sound perfect".

Worries about criticizing classmates and their work pervaded some of the references to giving and receiving feedback.

It's very difficult to give right suggestions about something negative. Also sometimes it is very hard to tell the person who wrote the essay negative things frankly because I don't want to hurt his or her feelings (2-#16).

The quote above summarizes the most common sentiments expressed by the students on the issue of giving negative feedback. One student, however, was clearly worried about the lack of negative feedback in her group.

I do not think that to tell good point is not helpful but do think to tell bad points is very helpful to my writing. Just to say 'I like your essay,' or 'Your essay is good,' is easy and make our relationship better, but what we need now is point out or discuss bad points more to improve our essay (3-#8).

The issue of peer versus teacher feedback was directly addressed by two students. They reflected on their preferences for teacher feedback. One student stated:

Personally, I like teacher teaches thing directly instead lead the student puzzle around and find their own way (1-#4).

Clearly this student was anxious for the teacher in particular to comment on his work.

As previously noted, participants in the peer response sessions stated that sometimes they used the feedback given but made the choice of what to accept and what to reject themselves. One student described feeling irritated when "some opinions are wide of the mark, that is someone is misunderstand what I want to say in my essay".

The students expressed their appreciation for the opportunity for peer feedback but had concerns about the usefulness of feedback from peers.

Observation 5: Students engaged in five sociocognitive activities:

1. Reading
2. Evaluating
3. Pointing to troublesources
4. Writing comments
5. Discussing task procedures

Sociocognitive activities are the activities which enable students to become aware of deficiencies in their text and, in turn, to make revisions (Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996).

Sociocognitive Activities

Reading. The peer response sessions in this study were structured so that group members each read their essays aloud to the others. This activity was the initial step in the peer response session. After the first reading, the listeners in the group took several minutes to write a sentence or two summarizing their general impression of the

essay and relating the impression to the writer. Then, a second reading followed while students made notes to remind them of more detailed comments they wanted to make to the writer.

In listening to writers read their texts aloud on the tapes, I identified several instances of what Villamil and De Guerrero (1996) call "self response revisions...comments or asides made by the writer as he/she read the text aloud" (p.57). First, Sukjivan in the midst of her reading stumbled "a powerful, a power, [aside] oh no, this is not right, something's wrong."

Bill, too, as he was reading the text he had written, stopped and interjected indicating he was aware of a problem, stating "there, they may not using cash [aside] what?" and he continues, "since there may not using cash after the year 2,000 [aside] 'oh', 'ah'".

Finally, Grace, as she was reading, interjected the comment "It's boring right?" as an aside. It was possible that Grace was responding to non-verbal responses on the part of the listeners, but the comment could equally have

been prompted by her own awareness of the uninspiring nature of the essay.

Interestingly, there were a number of comments in the journals about the benefits of reading aloud, about distancing themselves from the writing. Satoko commented,

"While I read my essay carefully so that the listener can understand easily, I find some grammar mistakes or wrong sentences" (2 - #8).

Sun echoed this remark,

"After finishing reading my essay, I could find lots of mistakes from it which I didn't realize before" (1 - #1).

The reading clearly enabled students to become aware of deficiencies in their work.

Evaluating. In the peer response sessions, students made general statements evaluating the writing, generally after they had listened to the first reading "Your essay was very interesting" was a typical comment. More detailed evaluations followed the second reading, such as "I like your introduction very much. I think the introduction grab the audience". Statements of evaluation did not imply that

revision would take place, in part because evaluative statements directed toward peers in this study were most often of a positive nature.

Pointing to Troublesources. Problems recognized by students were called "troublesources" (Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996). These troublesources were areas of confusion the students identified while they were listening to the essays being read. Troublesources might include words which students did not understand, grammar problems (real or perceived) or inconsistencies in the text. For example, Chie said to Riyoko "I'm not sure last paragraph did you say, something about negative thing about credit card?". This was a troublesource for Chie because Riyoko's essay was about the advantages of credit cards and consequently the negative comment confused Chie.

Writing comments. As previously described, students in the peer response groups made notes as they listened to essays of three features: points they felt were good; ideas, phrases that "didn't work"; and, confusing passages. These notes were in addition to the sentence or two stating the listeners' first impressions of the text being presented.

Authors too, were required to take notes of the comments made by the others in their group, comments which applied to their essays. These comments could then be reviewed when revision to the essay was being considered and deficiencies in the text could be remedied.

Discussing task procedures. There were few instances of the students discussing task procedures on the tapescript. Examples of this type of peer talk included brief statements, "finished", "that's enough" and "so...general expression?". There was one reference to the tape recorder when Jaesun said "It bothers me actually; I can't speak". It was possible that more of this sort of discussion took place before the tape recorder was turned on. However, the group task had a basic structure, and the students were by this time in the semester quite familiar with their roles in the process. The procedural comments evident in the tapes helped keep students on-task and revealed their understanding of and commitment to the process.

Observation 6: Students provided scaffolding in peer response sessions.

The term scaffolding is a metaphor for the assistance provided by a teacher/adult or a more capable peer to the child, or less capable peer so that the two together are able to accomplish the task they have been set (Cazden 1988).

Scaffolding Substrategies

Ten substrategies (Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996) for providing scaffolding were evident in this study.

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Instructing | 6. Requesting clarification |
| 2. Announcing | 7. Clarifying |
| 3. Justifying | 8. Eliciting |
| 4. Restating | 9. Responding to elicitation |
| 5. Giving directives | 10. Reacting |

Instructing. The scaffolding strategy, instructing, was illustrated when Jaesun responded to Yukiko's statement, "just I don't know the word meaning of 'reputation'". Jaesun responded with more than a simple definition. She

used examples to make the meaning of the word available to Yukiko.

Reputation means the store is very good. Price is very low and they don't cheat customers. It's good reputations. They overcharged people, they don't - we can't get a refund. That's bad reputation (116-118: 1).

Because of her proficiency in English, Jaesun became the instructor or teacher to the less proficient peers.

Announcing. Announcing was infrequent in these peer response sessions. One student, Sukjivan, announced, "My topic is the use of money in Canada and India". This was an organizer which refocused attention so that the task could continue. It is used twice, both times in the same peer response group.

Justifying. Giving reasons for the use of a particular phrase, structure, or example in the essay, a scaffolding strategy called justifying, occurred only once in this study.

Chie: I [here] like your comparison, farmer's market and Korean market.

Jaesun: I just took..if I say just traditional market then you don't know what it's like (126-129; 1).

Restating. Used in one of the peer response sessions to indicate understanding was the strategy of restating.

Terumi: I wonder how many good points you put in one paragraph

Bill: Ah...

Terumi: Like...

Bill: I use two point in one paragraph

Terumi: Two points for one paragraph. I use two points for one paragraph (409-419; 2).

Terumi reiterated her message about Bill's paragraph structure. This comment did cause Bill to make revision to this part of his essay.

Giving directives. This strategy occurred in only one peer response session. Sukjivan directed George to correct a spelling mistake and a grammar error in his essay. The structure of the peer response sessions limited the use of this substrategy since students did not have copies of their peers' essays to refer to. Sukjivan consulted George's essay when she couldn't understand if he meant 'airmiles' or 'air mail'.

Requesting clarification. This substrategy was evident in the conversation among Grace, Bill and the author, Terumi. Grace and Bill did not understand the problem faced by Terumi when she tried to reserve a hotel room without having a credit card. They asked questions to solicit Terumi's intended meaning.

Clarifying. In the portion of the transcript, which records Grace and Bill talking to Terumi, was an example of the scaffolding substrategy, clarifying. Terumi clarified her meaning by reminding Bill and Grace that she was not discussing requesting a hotel room in person without a credit card, but reserving one in advance without a credit card to use as a guarantee of payment.

Eliciting. This substrategy, an attempt to draw out additional information, was illustrated in the conversation regarding Riyoko's essay. Jaesun queried, "You said credit card is the most important card. Why?" (70-71; 1).

Responding to elicitation. In answer to Jaesun's query, Riyoko stated,

You don't think so? Just because they are used instead of money so they can us...Credit cards instead of money so money is not most important but important we need

money but I thought I might change this paragraph (73-75; 1).

By the end of this statement, Riyoko was acknowledging a problem with this paragraph and at least considering change.

Reacting. An important part of the task of peer response was reacting in both general and specific ways to the essay under consideration. General comments such as the following are to be found throughout the tapescripts.

I like your introduction and I like your essay style as a comparison between difference of Canadian and Indian. It makes more clear and easy to understand. I like your essay (590-592-3).

Observation 7: Students displayed both collaborative and non-collaborative behaviour.

Two aspects of social behaviour evident in the data in this study were collaboration and noncollaboration.

Collaboration. Collaboration occurs when persons work together in a supportive manner to achieve a mutual goal. In this response session, individuals were working together to help members of the peer group see their writing through the eyes of others.

An instance of collaboration was revealed in Jaesun's comments.

Jaesun: as I said before, yeah, your essay is very focused so three of body paragraph is very clear. And I wondered your topic, no thesis statement in the introduction paragraph "There is lot of different media of strategies to sell a product to "consumers" so it's ummm... emphasized the advertisement of the company. I mean company wanna sell as many products as possible. It is focused that way but you wanna say.

Chie: Yeah consumers

Jaesun: Yeah, wise consumers should use the kind of new information, yeah, actively, yeah so I think yes... (277-288-1).

This collaborative work on Chie's essay later manifests itself in a revised thesis statement.

Non-collaboration. Non-collaboration occurs when students resist working together either by behaving indifferently, by doing the minimum required in the group or by speaking in a way that may seem to be aggressive. The following conversation illustrates the latter. The student, Grace, through word choice and the abruptness of her speech likely conveyed a non-collaborative attitude to her peers, and in particular to Bill.

Grace: I like you own example in introduction and in fourth paragraph. I have no idea about last sentence of conclusion.

Bill: Yeah, it's....

Grace: It's kind of weird. Yeah. I don't like [inaudible] you say did ah if you like carry lots of money ah if you did you may carry. I don't know.

Bill: too heavy wallet?

Grace: Yeah, Yeah. I think I don't know. I just don't like it. That's it. (393-406-2).

It is interesting to note that Bill did not make changes to his essay as a result of the peer response session.

Observation 8: Students displayed affect in their behaviour when working in peer response groups.

This aspect was illustrated in the students' concern about not hurting their peers' feelings, as well as in the positive comments made about the writing. There was empathy in comments such as the following:

Chie: My essay's quite different

Yukiko: This is good thing, very unique topic so very fresh to me (254-257-1).

Yukiko: This is good thing, very unique topic so
very fresh to me (254-257-1).

and later,

Chie: but I'm not sure am I good or your essays are
good.

Jaesun: It's just different. You just focused how to
use...[Yukiko, Jaesun, Riyoko together]
advertising (266-269-1).

Affect was also evident in what Freedman (1992) called
solidarity rituals (p.98). These occurred at the beginning
of the student's reading in one of the groups in particular.
These "ritualistic, negative" comments given in a self-
deprecatory way support group unity. In this study, they
were statements such as the following: "I typed it but it's
not quite right way I typed"; "I have no time to...okay,
but I wrote about the credit card". Affect was also
revealed in the "politeness strategies" I found in the
analysis of the tapescripts of the sessions. In one group,
students always made a point of saying "thank you" when
peers were finished responding to their writing.

Observation 9: Some students used feedback from peer response sessions in revising their essays.

An analysis of the tapescripts of the fourth peer response session revealed the discussion of what have been referred to as troublesources in student essays. Troublesources, pointed out by peer group members, frequently influenced the revision of essays.

In the study, three of the twelve participants received no suggestions from their peers, nor were they directed to troublesources in their writing. Their revised essays, consequently, owed nothing, at least directly, to the peer response sessions. Two other students received feedback which they did not take into account when revising their essays. However the remaining students, 7 of the 12, to varying degrees, made use of the comments from other group members in the sessions to make changes in their essays.

George, Naomi and Bill all received feedback on two aspects of their writing. Each chose to ignore one comment and use the other in the revised essay. Whether this choice was deliberate or not is not evident. In George's case he corrected a grammar error which his classmates had pointed

out to him, but he did not alter the conclusion of his essay as Sun had suggested. She made it clear that she thought his conclusion was "little bit short... so I believe you can write more...". George did not, however, use this suggestion in his revising. It is certainly possible he considered Sun's comment. He may not have known what or how to add to his conclusion; he may, on the other hand, have preferred to leave the conclusion as he had first written it.

Yukiko and Chie both made a number of revisions to their drafts. Some were the result of the peer response sessions; others were not. Yukiko, for example, added a sentence immediately after an expression which had puzzled Riyoko, presumably to try to integrate the idiom more naturally into her essay.

Chie's revisions also took into account the interaction of the peer response group. In the session, Chie's attention had been drawn by Jaesun to the fact that her thesis statement did not really fit the content of the essay. A comparison of the original and the revised

versions indicated her attempt to respond to Jaesun's feedback.

ORIGINAL: By using the advertisement the consumers can spend money carefully. There are lots of different medial of strategies to sell a product to consumers.

REVISED: Occasionally, an enormous information is confused and blinded consumer's right decision. However, a wise consumer has several methods to pick up a correct information by using a media. There are main media a wise consumer does.

While the revised version may not have been necessarily an improvement on the original, it was evidence of an attempt to respond to the needs of a wider audience as represented by peers.

Chie made additions, deletions and substitutions, most of which were not the result of feedback in the peer response session. One noteworthy addition which was the result of Chie's participation in the peer response session was her appropriation of the word "reputation", a word used and explained by Jaesun.

Terumi and Sukjivan also used the feedback they received in their revisions. Both also had changes not

attributable to the peer response session. Sukjivan's revisions were the most extensive in the study. She revised all problematic areas of her writing and added idioms because the group had appreciated her natural use of these expressions. She also changed her conclusion. While she stated this was the result of peer feedback, in actual fact, she, herself, had commented on her conclusion during the first reading of her essay.

Observation #10: Both less proficient and more proficient students benefited from peer response sessions.

In this study, the data revealed benefits for both less proficient and more proficient students from participation in peer response groups.

First, the less proficient students were able to participate equally in the assigned task with other more proficient students. Chie, for example, the student who was repeating the course, was able to make general comments about the essays she heard read by her classmates. Also, she pointed to a troublesource in Riyoko's essay stating "I

just wondered the meaning of [bonus]." When she heard Jaesun's essay read for the second time, her specific comment indicated her appreciation of the comparison between the farmer's market in Kamloops and the Korean market. In summary, she evaluated the essays, pointed to troublesources and as did more proficient students, participated as an equal member of the peer response group.

More proficient students as well as less proficient students appreciated the opportunity to *"share ideas with other people"* and *"compare different approaches to one topic"*. These were comments made by Jaesun, the best student in the class. Kyoko another more proficient student, also expressed the sentiment that *"it's good to know the member's idea and how they write an essay"*. Echoing Jaesun and Kyoko was George, one of the less proficient students, who stated in his journal, *"I can get some good ideas from the classmates"*.

One of the most important gains referred to by both groups of students was improved listening skill. George thought reading *"the essay in class can improve my speaking, listening"*. Yukiko, another student less proficient than

Jaesun and Kyoko noted in her journal that "my hearing level go up. (I think so...) I want to give good suggestion for my peers so I need to listen carefully. I concentrate on my peers' essays". Even though Jaesun is a more proficient writing student, she concluded her final journal in a similar vein.

Most of all our group process is beneficial to my listening skills. It makes me pay careful attention to catching the thesis statement and topic sentences of the essay so that I can understand the content of the essay and comment on the essay appropriately (3-#16).

Kyoko and Jaesun, two of the more proficient students in the class, benefited from the opportunity to work with their classmates in a group setting for the good of all. Kyoko noted in her journal that she learned "proper expressions... 'I think...', 'In my opinion' and so on. We can't say, 'You should' or 'You are wrong'. We have to respect group member's writing" (3-#12). Jaesun's awareness of her classmate's feelings was evident in the tapescript. Because of her ability and her commitment to the task, illustrated in the quote above, Jaesun pointed to troublsources in the essays of her peer group members. In

each instance she began her comment with an expression such as "I am wondering", "I wondered". When it was her turn to receive feedback, she thanked each of her classmates for their comments. Her journal made it clear she was aware of both her obligation not to hurt her classmates' feelings and her responsibility to help them identify problematic aspects of their writing. Less proficient students were also concerned not to hurt the feelings of others. For the most part, though, these students avoided giving negative feedback. They did, however, ask questions about word choice and the meaning of passages they did not understand.

Reading their essays aloud benefited both less proficient students and those who were more proficient.

Yukiko commented:

Whenever I write an essay, I have hard time to edit it. I know there are lots of things need to be changed but I don't know where or how. When I read aloud, I can hear and also my peers can hear something that sounds unnatural (3-#2).

Kyoko concurred noting that "when I was reading my essay aloud, I found many mistakes in it. It's good opportunity to find mistakes by myself".

A final benefit experienced by most students whatever their proficiency level appears to be an increased self confidence and sense of comfort when participating in peer response sessions with classmates. Sukjivan notes that even though the composition of the groups changed at mid-term, the comfortable atmosphere did not change. When Yukiko began the peer response sessions, she was embarrassed and nervous about reading her essay aloud but by the end of the semester, she was enthusiastic about the process, and in her final journal entry made no mention of any reluctance to share her work with others. Chie, too, was apparently much more confident and comfortable in the *"group activity in my writing class which is my favorite activity"* by the end of the semester.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Implications

This chapter discusses the observations set forth in Chapter Four. It also presents the implications of those observations for the ESL classroom and suggests areas of further research.

Students' Perceptions of Peer Response

The observations in this study concerning students' perceptions of peer response sessions were interesting because they varied from those of other studies. Observations seemed to indicate that my students were more positive in their attitudes towards peer response than those in Manglesdorf's (1992) study.

When the perceptions of the Asian participants in Manglesdorf's study are expressed in percentages and compared to the perceptions of the students in my study as expressed in the first journal entries, the results indicate a more positive attitude toward peer response work in my study, as shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1Comparison of Holistic Ratings

	<u>Asian Participants</u>		
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Mixed</u>	<u>Negative</u>
Manglesdorf (1992)	8 (57.1%)	1 (7.1%)	5 (35.7%)
(n = 14)			
My study (1997)	6 (50%)	4 (33.3%)	2 (16.6%)
(n = 12)			

In my study, the first journals were the most negative overall and yet my results were still more positive than Manglesdorf's.

An explanation of these results may be found in the fact that in this study I was the teacher/researcher. The relationship that developed between the students and the teacher/researcher may have resulted in more positive assessments of peer response sessions. Manglesdorf was an external researcher who asked students to "take about twenty minutes of class time towards the end of the semester to

answer four questions about peer response in writing"
(p. 275).

Another possible explanation for the more positive perceptions of the students in my study may be the fact that all of the students in the classroom were of Asian origin. Consequently, they may have felt more comfortable working in peer response groups than the Asian students in Manglesdorf's (1992) study where the 40 participants were an "extremely heterogeneous group" (p. 275) speaking 18 languages.

Results then seemed encouraging. The students in my study, all of whom were Asian, apparently were no different in their perceptions of peer response than the general population in Manglesdorf's (1992) study (See Table 5.2).

Table 5.2Comparison of Holistic Ratings

<u>All Participants</u>			
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Mixed</u>	<u>Negative</u>
Manglesdorf's study (n = 40)	22 (55%)	12 (30%)	6 (15%)
My study (n = 12)	6 (50%)	4 (33.3%)	2 (16.6%)

Changes in Perceptions over the Semester

Students' perceptions of peer response sessions in my study changed over the course of the semester. Table 4.1 (p. 89) illustrated the changes that took place as the semester progressed and as students articulated in their journal entries the benefits and concerns they perceived in peer response sessions.

First, as previously reported, results of the rating of the initial journal entries were very similar to those tabulated by Manglesdorf (1992). (See Table 5.2). For the

second journal there were fewer entries rated as negative, but there were also considerably fewer entries rated positive. The majority, 63.6%, were rated as mixed. For the third journal the numbers changed again, and this time there were no students whose journals were totally negative. Journals rated as positive were 44.4% of the total while journals rated mixed constituted 55.5%.

The results shown by these statistics, in my opinion, conformed to the typical pattern evident in student attitudes generally over the course of a semester. In the beginning, students are for the most part enthusiastic, confident. By the middle of the semester they are confronting challenges, finding the work perhaps somewhat difficult and at times feeling confused and discouraged. Finally, by the end of the semester, most students have resolved whatever problems they have had, and usually complete the term with some level of satisfaction or at least with a mood of acceptance.

Benefits and Concerns

The benefits students perceived regarding the peer response sessions confirmed those described in previous studies: increased audience awareness (Mittan, 1989; Urzua, 1987), opportunities to practice listening to and speaking the target language (Gass & Selinker, 1994; Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1992; Long & Porter, 1985), seeing text in a new way by reading it aloud (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; Zamel, 1983), and learning from others' writing (Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996).

Students mentioned having difficulty understanding classmates' pronunciation and remembering the essays which were shared during peer response sessions. One student became confused upon hearing how her peers had shaped their essays, and her confidence suffered since she felt her essays were not as well written as those of the others in the group. These concerns, while they cannot be dismissed, did not outweigh the cognitive, social and linguistic benefits for students of participating in the peer response groups.

One area of concern mentioned in other studies was not evidenced in this study. The research documents student complaints about group members who are sometimes lazy, poorly prepared or indifferent to the group task of peer response (Obah, 1993; Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996). In my study there were no comments relating concerns of this nature. Perhaps this was the result of the homogeneous nature of the group, or perhaps this was simply an exceptional class.

Peer Interaction

In analyzing what students did in the peer response sessions, my observations replicated the findings of Villamil and De Guerrero (1996). The peer response sessions were revealed to be surprisingly rich and complex in both studies, given the differences in the ways in which the studies were conducted.

While Villamil and De Guerrero's (1996) participants were very carefully selected for inclusion in the study, my subjects were those who had simply enrolled in the class. Their writing abilities varied, as did their stated goals,

the length of time they had been in Canada and their country of origin. For peer response sessions, my students were in groups of four; for Villamil and De Guerrero's (1996) research project, students worked in dyads.

In spite of the differing designs of the studies, students in both studies engaged in socio-cognitive activities, made use of mediating strategies and exhibited aspects of social behaviour characteristic of response groups (Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996).

The peer interaction in my study, however, was more limited than in Villamil and De Guerrero's (1996). For example, my students engaged in five not seven socio-cognitive activities (p. 57). Because the response groups worked orally, they did not compose new sentences for each other, nor did they actually "deal with troublesources". My students pointed to troublesources, the author noted them, and at home, when revising the essay, determined whether to make changes or not.

With respect to mediating strategies there was evidence only of the use of scaffolding substrategies in my study. Students helped each other understand responses to essays by

employing ten substrategies such as 'instructing', 'requesting clarification'. Finally collaboration, non-collaboration and affect were evident in the behaviour of the students in my study.

It is encouraging to note that in the classroom situation, students reap many of the same benefits of peer interaction as students in a more controlled, homogeneous environment.

Revision

In this study, 7 of 12 students (58%) made revisions based on the peer response sessions. Most of the students made minor changes. George, for example, corrected a grammar error; Bill created two paragraphs of one; Naomi added information her classmates offered to her essay. Only two students revised substantially using peer feedback. These results were disappointing.

Mendonca and Johnson's (1994) study focused on peer negotiation and revision. Results indicated that "in 53% of the instances of revisions, students incorporated their peers' comments" (p. 758). However, the revisions that were

made seemed to be more substantive than what was evident in my study. It was possible this was a consequence of the fact that the students in Mendonca and Johnson's study were graduate students with TOEFL scores equal to or higher than 550. My students were undergraduates with TOEFL scores of below 550. It may be too that working in pairs with a revision sheet made a difference in the types of revisions which Mendonca and Johnson's students made.

Feedback Issues

One of the problematic areas of peer response was the students' feelings of inadequacy when they were asked to critique their classmates' writing. Corollaries to this were the distrust two of my students had of peer feedback and the consequent desire for teacher feedback. In these two instances students' views were similar to the views of participants in Zhang's (1995) study, where it was clear that most students preferred teacher feedback to peer feedback when given a clear choice.

Such results were not surprising since the teacher is, after all, the final authority in the classroom, and often

one of the few native speakers with whom many students come into contact. It makes eminent sense for students to prefer to have the teacher provide feedback on their essays rather than their peers.

It is important to listen to students and their concerns regarding peer feedback. For example, Bill, the student in the study who was the most adamant that the teacher should provide feedback, had good ideas and spoke fluently as a result of attending high school in Canada. His difficulties with writing centered around grammar. Given the task structure, Bill knew he was not receiving the kind of feedback from his peers that he needed to improve his writing. Bill would likely have fared better had he worked in a dyad with a written copy of his partner's essay to examine and comment on.

In addition to peer feedback, students need feedback from their teachers. During this study, teacher feedback was not denied to Bill nor to any of the students; it rather was in addition to peer feedback not in place of it. Teacher feedback was not studied but it seemed to be most

useful if it was focused on grammar at the final stage, editing (Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1992).

One final comment needs to be made. Students may resist peer feedback and insist on teacher feedback because they "fail to recognize their responsibility for monitoring their own writing" (Devine, 1993, p. 188). Peer response sessions are an attempt to help students realize this responsibility. Perhaps teachers need to be more explicit about this goal.

Implications for Teaching

First, teachers need to be encouraged to use peer response groups in their writing classrooms. The benefits are considerable for ESL students. Although conducting peer response is not without its problems, the time and effort required to determine how to mitigate difficulties are worth expending.

Because this was an action research study whose purpose it was to improve my teaching practice and to improve learning conditions for my students, the implications that follow are made with specific reference to my situation.

In future writing classes, providing more extensive training for peer response sessions will help students to participate more fully in the process. First, language training needs particular attention since the use of politeness strategies and facilitative language seemed to promote a more cooperative atmosphere in the sessions, and consequently resulted in greater social and academic benefits (Manglesdorf and Schlumberger, 1992; Nelson & Murphy, 1993). Coaching students in the use of scaffolding substrategies would "offer [peers] more specific guidelines for revision" (Stanley, 1992, p. 229). Some preliminary practice with such strategies perhaps in a whole class activity with a model essay would help students understand their task and give them additional language resources for accomplishing that task.

Next, students need to be made aware of the advantages inherent in peer response sessions. They apparently see the activity solely as a vehicle for having their essays 'fixed' before those essays must be handed in. The other benefits that accrue need to be explicitly presented. To accomplish this in writing classes next semester, I would like to monitor progress with each group by examining tape

recordings of the sessions and use portions of the tapescripts with students to help them become more cognizant of their contributions to the task, and the benefits they are receiving.

Finally, at least once a semester I would like to conduct peer response sessions using dyads and to give students written copies of the essays. In particular, I would like to compare the peer interaction of dyads with that which takes place in groups. In addition, I would like to explore the students' attitudes to working in dyads and more closely investigate patterns of revision.

To support peer response groups, teachers need to monitor student progress, and give assistance where necessary. In my class next semester, teacher feedback will be given during the editing stage. If students are quite clear that peer feedback and teacher feedback are both available although at different times and for different purposes, students may be more receptive to peer feedback during peer response sessions.

Implications for Research

Research into the peer response process needs to continue. Issues of interest just beginning to be explored are those that have to do with culture (Carson & Nelson, 1994). "In group/out group relationships [as they] play out in writing groups" (p. 27) need to be investigated if peer response groups are to continue to be effective in ESL classrooms.

Research into peer revision perhaps through think aloud protocols would provide us with more information about why students have varying attitudes to using peer suggestions. Goldstein and Conrad (1990) point out that "each student who participates in a conference brings to that conference a unique personality that may affect the ways in which that student behaves" (p. 455). This is surely true of peer response studies. Perhaps it is personality which accounts for Sukjivan's enthusiastic revision behaviour. Such questions need attention.

It is also important to investigate whether revisions which do take place actually improve the quality of students' writing.

Another issue requiring consideration involves whether or not students, as a result of participating in peer response sessions, become more capable of independently revising their work.

Finally, the relationship between classroom instruction and what features of composition are attended to in the peer group needs to be explored.

There is scope for further research into peer response in the second language classroom and such research will further our understanding of the process and improve learning conditions for students.

Summary

This study was an action research project designed to explore whether students benefited from peer response groups and if so to what extent. The implementation of peer response groups was carefully planned and using diaries, journals, and audiotapes, groups were observed. Reflection on the situation was reported in this thesis. Finally, an amended plan for action was put in place for the coming semester. This study exemplified the "spiral of planning,

acting, observing and reflecting...central to the action research approach" (Kemmis, 1992, p. 178).

Action research is collaborative "whenever possible involving coparticipants in the organization of their own enlightenment in relation to social on a political action in their own situations" (p. 185). In a small way, this project has been collaborative, involving students and involving a colleague who is, as a result of this study, committed to using peer response groups in her classroom of native speakers. In investigating peer response in my classroom, I have become convinced that the problems of peer response sessions are not insurmountable and that the benefits are too numerous to be forfeited by not using peer response groups.

This action research project will continue. Elliott (1991) suggests that "it [is] necessary to complete at least three or four cycles before one ought to be satisfied with the improvement effected" (p. 85). This study is only a beginning, the end of the first cycle.

The final step in this study is the sharing of the results of the study in the thesis and with colleagues both

informally and perhaps formally through workshops.

Conducting this study will certainly lead to improvements in my teaching practice and to improvements in conditions for student learning. It is my hope that it will also benefit other teachers and their students.

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