

Exploring the Capability of Second Grade Students in Peer Response on Writing Revision

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Abstract: The research of peer response has been majorly focused on older age students. However, we argue that young age students obtain the possibility of doing peer response under the context of writing revision. In this paper, we develop a peer response experiment in the classroom for second-grade students in order to facilitate their story revision. The result indicated that second-grade students were able to revise their writing through the two peer response experiments. In addition, students' preference on certain kind of comment types was also discovered. That is, second-grade students preferred using praise and reminding comments. Meanwhile, students tended to directly adapt given prompt example sentences and create personalized comments. One special revision behavior was found that second-grade students revised their writing beyond the scope of received comments. This is an ongoing research and further analysis and studies will be continuously processed.

Keywords: Peer response, writing revision, response types

1. Introduction

In traditional writing instruction, teachers in Taiwan are used to set topics, provide writing structure, and revise essays. However, for some students, they may be unable to completely take advantage of the instruction to their writing or incapable of transfer the knowledge successfully. Thus, peers are another alternative source of interpreting the instruction contents. By the interaction with peers, general writing skills are not only re-interpreted and re-understood, but also improved (MacArthur, 2007).

Under the line of peer response research, we found that young age students seemed to be considered as writing beginners and excluded from the subject recruitment. It might because young age students were thought as less proficient at language use and social interaction with peers. However, it is risky and too late to tackle students' writing issues after the problems reveal. We should take students' writing issues into consideration before students encountering writing difficulties. Hence, we propose this study to investigate whether young age students are able to participate in the peer response experiment and take advantage of peers' comments on revising their writing.

2. Peer Response for young age students

Young age students have the possibility to review peers' writing and give comments. Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, and Wilkinson (2004) indicated that better writing skills in early ages facilitate students' content-area learning when they are in later ages. Research on peer response to improve writing revision have been mostly adapting high school or college students since a number of research recruited senior students (e.g. Holliway & McCutchen, 2004; Topping, 1998). However, young-age students have the potential to give comments on peer writing and participate in peer response activities. Dixon-Krauss (1995) conducted a study to observe how first- and second-grade students interacted and discussed peers' written stories. He found that students' journal entry writing improved for copying peers' thoughts to rephrasing the story discussion points. In sum, young age students, especially in early grades, have the possibility to do peer discussion and give comments for the writing of their classmates.

3. Methods

3.1 Participant

The participants of this study were a second-grade class consisting of 15 male and 13 female students. The location of the elementary school is at the northern Taiwan. In order to conduct the trials, each student needed to have two completed stories ready on the Drawing & Writing System (Liao & Chan, 2013) before the experiment.

3.2 The trial of Peer Response

3.2.1 Procedure

The experimental trial contained four phases, which were (1) mini-lesson instruction, (2) peer reviewing, (3) writing sharing and verbal peer response, and (4) writing revision. Before the experiment, all students were divided into seven groups. Each group consisted of 4 students. Students were arranged into each group by the teacher. The experimental trials were processed twice during the December in 2012. The purpose of the first trial was to introduce and guide students the whole experiment process. At the second trial, the research provided less guidance. Students became more familiar with the procedure and tasks. The writing topic of the first trial was “A day of my dad” and the second trial was “Firework.”

In the first phase of the experiment, one of the researchers gave a mini-lesson instruction about the concept of peer response, the benefits of peer response on peers’ writing revision, the appropriate manners in the phase of verbal writing sharing and verbal peer response, and the tips for using peers’ response on revising self’s writing. In the second phase, students were told to review peers’ writing within the group. During this phase, students read peers’ writing and typed the comments in the Writing Response System (please refer to section 3.3.2). In the third phase, students as reviewers verbally shared their writing to the group members in sequence. When the reviewers gave comments, they could read the comments typed on the system in the second phase. If students as reviewers shared extra comments while they present, they need to type them in the system afterward. The third phase would be completed after each group members share their own writing and gave comments verbally to other writers. In the fourth phase, each writer revised their writing based on the comments given by the group reviewers typed on the Writing Response System. The trial would be completed after the writers finished revising their writing.

3.2.2 Writing Response System

In this study, Writing Response System was developed to scaffold peers’ response. The Writing Response System was organized based on two roles of students on the system, the reviewers and the writers. Through this system, students as reviewers could read peers’ writing and give comments on the Drawing & Writing System. Meanwhile, students as writers could revise their writing according to received comments.

At the beginning, the reviewers chose peers’ writing to read. After reviewing the writing, the reviewers clicked “response” functions to type in comments. Under the function of “response,” three prompts were given to assist the reviewers, which are “Praise,” “Remind,” and “Correction.” Each prompt contained five to seven sample sentences for adaption. Reviewers used Praise prompts when they admired the general contents of the writing. Reminding prompts were used when reviewers thought the contents, structures, or details should be added or revised. Correction prompts were used when reviewers saw mechanical errors such as wrong words or punctuation. The sample sentences were designed as “*I think you use phrases appropriately that makes your story becomes vivid, for example...*” When a sample sentence was chosen, reviewers were guided to re-specify exact words, phrases, or paragraph for the responding writing. For example, the reviewers needed to revise the sample sentence as “*I think you use phrases appropriately that makes your story becomes vivid, for*

example, *you use ‘itching in your heart’ to say that you are touched.*” The prompts provided here was to categorize the response types for further analysis.

After the writing was reviewed, the writers could see the functions of “check” and “revise” on the right side of the webpage when reading their writing. The “check” function was to show the comments from reviewers, and the “revise” function accessed to the writing revision interface. For example, when the writer is going to revise him/her story, s/he can click “check” function to see what comments were received.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

In order to correctly define whether a student revised his/her story, the researchers individually compared writing before and after revision. Students’ writing was defined as revised when there were words added, deleted, or corrected. This part was to see the extent that students revised their writing.

On the other hand, the comments each student received were separated initially based on the three kinds of prompts provided on the “response” function for reviewers. Besides, the researchers further categorized each prompt based on how it was used (response behaviors), which are (a) directly use prompts, (b) modify prompts, and (c) create comments. “Directly use prompts” means students did not modify the prompts but only used it by a click. For example, a reviewer saw a sample sentence “There are many words written wrong, such as...” but merely clicked it without specifying what the wrong words were. “Modify prompts” indicates students revised the prompts and specified the comments for the writing. For instance, a reviewer saw a sample sentence and modified the exact situation in the writing as *“You should add more supporting details, for example, **you mention about the firework but you didn’t say who was involved.**”* The italic and bold words are the modified part. “Create comments” represents students came up with the comments without applying any of the prompts. For example, a reviewer student gave the comment *“I like your story because you point out what you really feels when you are getting alone with your dad.”*

4. Results and Discussion

In this study, 28 students participated but only analyzed the data from twenty-seven students (fourteen male and thirteen female) because one student was unable to complete two stories for the two trials at the beginning of the first trial. This student still involved in the two trials but the data was excluded.

In the first trial, 128 comments in total were given. After receiving comments, there were fourteen students revised their writing and thirteen students did not revise their writing. In the second trial, 120 comments were given and twenty-three writing were revised (see Table 1). Only 4 students did not revise their writing. After two trials, more students revised their writing. This might be because students have known the peer response trial better and been able to revise the writing by referring to the received comments in the second trial. Furthermore, students may have realized that the peers’ comments were more easily to be understood and more interaction was allowed during the group comment sharing and writing revision phases.

Table 1: Received comments and writing revision

Comparing items \ Trials	Trial 1	Trial 2
Number of received comments	128	120
Student number of writing revised	14	23
Student number of writing unrevised	13	4

4.1 Comments from the reviewers

In Figure 1 shows the comparison between the response types in the two trials based on the analysis of the percentage of given comments from all students. Response types in this study were categorized as Praise, Remind, and Correction. From Figure 1, the percentage that students used Praise comments

range from 37 to 40 percent in two trials. At the same time, the percentage that students used Remind comments was around 31 to 36 percent. The usages of Praise and Remind comments in two trials did not show great difference. Last, the percentage that students used Correction comments in two trials is around 25 to 28 percent. It can be seen that students used Praise and Remind comments more frequent than Correction comments.

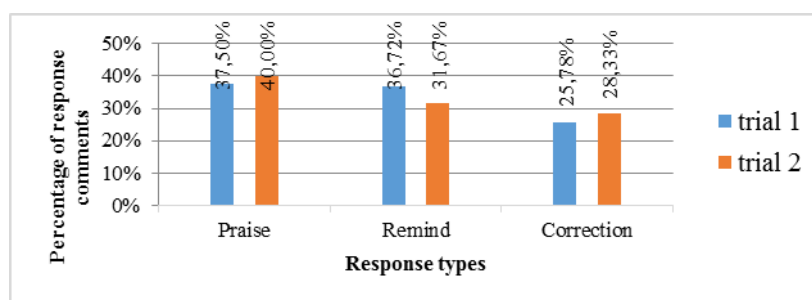


Figure 1. Response types in two trials

Possible explanation of the reason why students' use Praise comments frequently might be because they wanted to maintain peace with the writers beside them. In addition, students in the age of second grade may usually be encouraged to admire the work from other people instead of criticizing. On the other hand, Remind comments were also regularly used might be because reading is to understand the meaning that texts reveal instead of separately recognizing words. Students tend to focused on the structure and logic of the story to understand the stories. If there were inconsistency or unreasonable parts that hindered them from understanding the writing, they were more likely to find out. However, Correction comments were less used might be due to students' lack of proficiency of recognizing wrong Chinese characters from the writing.

In Figure 2 shows the comparison of the response behaviors between the two trials. In this study, we defined three response behaviors, which were "Directly use prompts," "Modify prompts," and "Create comments." For the behavior of Directly use prompts, there were 40-44 percent of comments used in the two trials. For Modify prompts, there were 15-17 percent of comments used. For Create comments, there were 38-45 percent of comments used.

It can be seen from Figure 2 that the behavior of Directly use prompts and Create comments were majorly occurred. For directly use prompts, it may be because the system allowed students to use prompts without modification. Hence, most students would simply click and use because it was the easiest and fastest way to complete the comments giving task. For Create comments, it was also occurred regularly may due to its personalizing flexibility. Students could create comments without formal, long, or complete sentences. They could create comments simply with a phrase or a few words. For example, a created comment could be "You should write more." Moreover, students could create comments that beyond the prompts. Nevertheless, the behavior of Modify prompts were less occurred might be because of the burden of specifying the revising details.

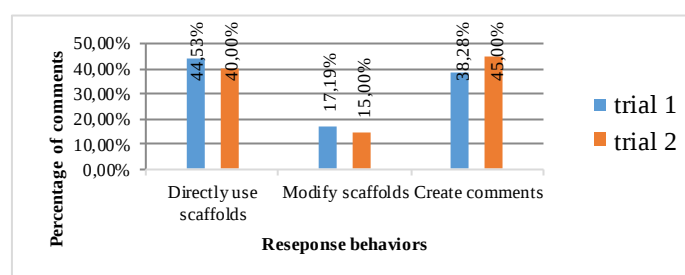


Figure 2. Response behaviors in two trials

4.2 Revisions of the writers

In Figure 3 reveals that more words were revised after writing revision in both trials. Moreover, students in the second trial revised more words than in trial 1. From this progress we could draw the inference that students have progressed to take advantage of peers' comments while they revised the writing.

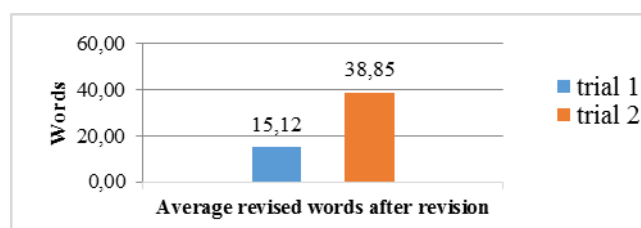


Figure 3. Revision behaviors in two trials

In Figure 4, we can see that the number of students who did not revise the stories decreased and students who revised the stories increased. In addition, we carefully compared stories from each student and the comments individual story received and found that most students would revise their stories based on the comments. Interestingly, we also found that some students revised their stories without referring to the comments, which meant students' revision beyond the scope of comments. It is a surprising discovery that young age students are not only able to revise their writing in accordance with peers comments, but also inspired to revise their writing without even being reminded. Possibly explanation might be students gain more awareness of the authentic readers. In addition, students might get more critical when they revised the writing after the time they reviewed peers' writing.

In most research of peer response for writing revision, researchers pointed out that students (usually were older age students) could do parallel revision. However, little has been concerned whether students were able to revise *beyond* the comments. Hence, we will keep looking deeper to the revised writing and analyze the revision types.

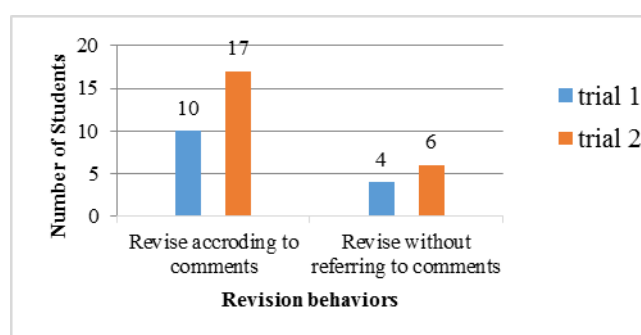


Figure 4. Number of students and revision behaviors in two trials

In summary, second grade students were able to revise their writing in accordance with peers' comments. In addition, we found that Praise and Remind comments were mainly used. It indicates that students tended to praise at peers works and gave structural suggestions. On the other hand, the response behavior of directly use prompts and creating individualized comments occurred more frequent. It means that students tended to directly use prompts may be because they want to *efficiently* complete the task of giving comments. As for frequently creating personal comments, students may think it easier than modifying the prompts because there was no certain restriction for it. Hence, they could do it freely without making the sentences of the comments complete. One encouraging result of students' revision was that some second grade students in this study were able to revise their writing beyond the scope of peers' comments. It sheds light on the potential of peer response and quality writing of young age students.

4.3 Future work

There are some obstacles that younger students cannot overcome easily as older students in the writing and revision. For example, the mechanical errors in older students' writing would be less. Moreover,

senior students are easily to come up with high level comments, while younger students might sometimes have problem to even understand the comments. Hence, second-grade students' may need to learn how to be a critical reviewers and experienced writers.

This is an initial study to understand young age students' interaction through peer response to revise the writing. Although we explored second-grade students' peer response on writing revision, the scope of this study was only on initial exploration of the peer comments and writing revision behaviors. We only report descriptive information of the data in this article. However, to deeply understand the relationship between peer comments and writing revision behaviors, we will continue further analysis of the collected data. First, although we have noticed that students preferred using Praise and Remind prompts than Correction prompts and also different response behaviors, we will keep analyzing the quality of the given comments, seeing if the responses can be categorized into different levels. Second, in this study we only divided students' revision behaviors into positive and negative, next step we will analyze the revision levels of students' writing, trying to explore the relationship between the levels of students' revision behaviors and the quality of received comments. Last, since most students would directly use the provided prompts without modification, we will adjust the prompts using functions and make sure that students use a prompt after modification.

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