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## Impacts of Peer Response on the Cultivation of English Writing Ability

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### Abstract

There are some common problems existing in the cultivation of university students' English writing ability, such as college students' low writing ability, the strong dependence of English writing, the lack of communication between teachers and students, the shortage of English teachers, and the longtime of teachers' essay scoring. The effective reforms must be adopted in order to change the present cultivation situation of university students' English writing ability. Peer response has several advantages in improving the cultivation models of English writing ability and can produce important impacts on the cultivation of university students' English writing ability. The study explores the impacts from the assessment of English writing, improving students' cognitive development, cultivating students' critical thinking and stimulating students' writing activity.

**Key words:** Peer response; English writing; Formative assessment; Critical thinking

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## INTRODUCTION

### A. Research Background

In recent years, the problem of university students' English writing is gradually appearing. The cultivation

of university students' English writing ability has been a conundrum teachers and students facing in the education of non-English major students in our country. There exist in unidirectional and delayed problems in the style of traditional English teachers' evaluation of students' writing. How to strengthen the communication between students in College English Writing? How can we not only reduce the English Teachers' checking task, but also provide students with timely and prompt information feedback? How to improve students' enthusiasm and language skills in English writing? Peer response provides a feasible and effective attempt to solve these problems and to cultivate college students' English writing ability. Foreign countries have been doing quantities of research in how to carry out peer response in writing since the last century in 1990s while it's late to introduce peer response in domestic. Some scholars have done some research in recent years. Peer response is rarely used in Shanxi Province and most of universities, whose application appears only in a small number of front-line teachers' scientific research, such as Wang (2013) and Gong (2007), Gao (2010), Kong (2013). Based on the analysis of peer response in English writing of Shanxi Datong University students and interview, observation and research on the students who carry out peer response, we found that the cultivation of current English writing ability exists some problems. Peer response has some advantages than traditional response, which has a positive effect on college English writing.

### B. Definition of Peer Response

Peer response is a type of social interaction paradigm by the author and the reader's common consultation. It is also termed as peer feedback, peer review, peer editing and peer response. It is the evaluation of work by people of similar competence. It constitutes a form of self-regulation by qualified members of a profession within the relevant field. The information interaction between companions in the process of writing is a form of manifestation of peer

evaluation. It is the core of the writing process, which is to help students increase their consciousness about writing, to reduce their writing anxiety and to promote the quality of the text output. Methods of peer evaluation are employed to maintain standards of quality, provide credibility, and improve performance.

Peer response is an effective process of communication and interaction, which is a part of the student's self-evaluation. It is meaningful only when it is followed by decision-making process based on the results of such evaluation (Serge, 2011). In the writing teaching, peer evaluation refers to students' evaluation of each other's performance in writing process. Mitten pointed out that peer evaluation can offer students with real readers that can help increase students' writing motivation (Mitten, 1989). By reading each other's compositions, students provide valuable feedback to each other. It can also help students to understand different views of others towards their compositions. Opinions from others are helpful for students to read their own compositions in a critical way, thus helping students become confident in writing.

Peer response has many important advantages. Firstly, peer response can lessen teacher's workload; so teachers can concentrate on lesson preparation. In doing so, it can help make their teaching more satisfying. Secondly, peer response is helpful in enhancing student's awareness of audience with revising and self-revising activities. Thirdly, students can build stronger communication and interaction skill through peer response. Furthermore, peer response can develop students' critical thinking ability and confidence in writing. Last but not least, peer response can heighten students' awareness of audience considerations.

### C. Methodology

The research selects 139 students from three classes of the same teacher, one of the first year students in law science, and the numbers of the students are 47, 47, and 45, respectively. A class has traditional English writing training, another class has to peer response but without explaining related knowledge and skills, the third class explains the peer review of the related knowledge and skills in the process of peer response. In two classes which having peer response, students write an essay and have an evaluate every 2-3 week and they are required to complete composition writing and mutual evaluation 5-6 times each semester. Students complete the writing and peer respond task in the fixed exercise book. Analyze the results of this study in the following.

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## 1. THE ADVANTAGE IN PEER RESPONSE

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(a) From the view of teachers, on the one hand, students hold the expectation that they'll be assessments following by the feedback about their writing content.

Because they believe that only their qualified teachers with professional abilities can help them a lot about the writing content and give them suggestions the moment they get trapped in writing, when it comes to the cultivation of English writing ability, on the other hand, on account of the increasing mass-developed higher education in recent years, the proportion of college English teachers and students is widening, causing a tardy valuator and sometimes only assignments without response. Thus, the Peer Response in cultivation of English writing ability can timely feedback, those derived from the evaluation of students may not be comprehensive or coincident though. And through the appropriate training and practice, the student's ability to assessment can be effectively improved and forced ahead. It should be said that peer feedback to a certain extent is more useful than the teachers. Therefore, from the point view of teachers, it is better for them to evaluate the writing and learning as well as development and change of student's writing ability when implementing peer evaluation happens to English writing learning. Democratizing the training mode further and following the student-centered education concept, Peer response is an effective method of formative assessment which not only can reduce teacher's working time but also give instant feedback in writing.

(b) From the view of students, the method of Peer Response can effectively eliminate the communication barriers between teachers and students, peer mutual assessment can give students greater power to control the process of writing assessment and reduce the student's dependence on the teacher. The implementation of Peer Response for evaluate peer learning in the cultivation of English writing ability can help students become more sociable, responsible and become stronger self-learners. It also can effectively cultivate student's problem solving ability and critical thinking ability. Because the implementation helps students become more sensitive, critical and active about learning, in other words, the learning motivation can be improved. In the implementation of peer evaluation, the implementers will fully consider the whole of writing learning, will enhance their ability to master English learning, self-awareness and reflective skill, and will promote student's ability to learn in depth, as well as help to cultivate student's initiative and creativity.

(c) The application of peers assessment not only diversify the subject of evaluation, but also makes the subject of writing evaluation no longer a single form of teacher evaluation. Meanwhile, learners participate in the evaluation of English writing, which is the main body of the evaluators for writing. Peer assessment and teacher evaluation are combined to fully evaluate learners from different perspectives. Peer assessment of English writing learning consisted of formative evaluation and final evaluation results in a variety of ways and ends in the formative of the final results of the students.

In the process of Peer Response, students could send themselves to self-evaluation, and have an active and serious consideration of the companions and their writing content, which positively triggered a student's reflection on writing content and curriculum to enable students to learn the truth of evaluating writing in reader's position. At the same time, in the process of making the work of others, students can also learn how to collect the better knowledge of writing, how to make the others' problems and deficiencies a reminder for ourselves and how to complete a better work.

## 2. IMPACTS OF PEER RESPONSE ON THE CULTIVATION OF ENGLISH WRITING ABILITY

(a) The transformation of the assessment about peer assessment of impacting English writing assessment is in a very important position in education. In order to adapt to the new challenges of network to College English Training Model Reform, the English Department of Shanxi Datong University first adopted the network test examination method in the end of the first semester of the 2013-2014 school years. Due to the design of the network platform system, the system itself does not have the artificial intelligence score system, so the translation and writing class of subjective questions did not achieve the final examination, instead of using the traditional paper-based exam. On the basis of this, the foreign language school has established a new evaluation model. Training mode of students' English ability promotes the combination of computer and classroom, and the evaluation method is a combination of formative assessment and final evaluation. At the same time it promotes the combination of students' learning process and outcomes. The final result is made up of mutual evaluation work and standardized test scores. In this mode, the teachers will be required to teach students the knowledge of English writing skills and evaluation standards according to related system-level to grant students, continuing to organize students to carry out peer translation makes the students familiar with the process of peer assessment. Also, the peer assessment model is gradually developed into a peer evaluation model of network learning platform. In this way, the writing part can make full use of the network auxiliary platform to record the content of the evaluation and the students' scores. English teachers can arrange homework three to five times through the network platform, and finally the every result accumulation is included in the student's final grade, thus forming results can replace the original one-time achievement the end of the examination results. This not only makes the examination results more fair and effective, but also contributes to form a college English test in which forming evaluation takes place at the end of the evaluation of the examination model.

(b) Promoting the students' understanding and development of writing by peer evaluation plays a prominent part in English learning. Modern writing theory regards writing as a kind of advanced cognitive activity. Foreign language learning not only emphasizes the development of students' listening, speaking, reading and writing ability, but also pays more attention to the cultivation of students' cognitive strategies and communicative competence, and pays attention to students' active construction of knowledge in the real context. A large amount of input of information and communication can not only promote the learning of English, but also promote the development of students' cognition. In the cultivation of English writing ability, peer evaluation can make students change their roles in the process of the input of information and language communication besides make them see other students writing content. Students not only have to write on the identity of the author but also have to evaluate the work of others on the identity of reader. The identify transformation is helpful to students finish their writing well and make them learn how to write and evaluate the works of others and themselves. All these help the students acquire and apply writing methods and improve the ability of writing and cognition.

(c) Peer response is conducive to cultivate the students' critical thinking which is one of the most important skills in the process of college students' English learning. It helps the students internalize learn knowledge and evaluate their own writing properly. Peer feedback is good for cultivating students' critical thinking and writing members can read the other students' feedback and writing evaluation which helps students to transform the way of thinking and perspective. In the process of review and evaluated, the college students learn to analyze and explore problems, understand and apply the English language, improve the English communication and presentation skills, then inspire the students' writing interest and motivation, so as to establish students' abilities of independent thinking, the ability of critical thinking and collaborative problem solving skills. The development of critical thinking ability is helpful to improve the students' ability of self-reflection which is the most important way for students to build up their knowledge of English and self-development. Students learn how to self-reflection in evaluating other people's work and accepting other people's evaluation and promote the development of themselves. At the same time, reflections also help students think about their own learning experience, combined with their own experience and comprehension to access learning by themselves, reflect on learning methods and strategies, learning encountered confusion, problems and harvest. Therefore, peer assessment not only trains students' critical thinking but also promotes students' reflection and self-development. It is an important component of students' English ability.

(d) Stimulate students' writing activity. Peer review can also stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning and motivation, enhance their writing interest, tap the potential of writing, and share learning achievements in the process of mutual assessment. Through the mutual evaluation of students, teachers can understand students' writing learning effect, and feel the change of students' interest and motivation in English writing. When students face the English writing learning in a more positive attitude, teachers will be encouraged to enhance the ability of students to improve their writing confidence. Peer assessment can effectively stimulate the students' desire to express and the motivation to learn so that the students can respond to the teacher assigned homework actively, and peer review can also reduce the student's writing anxiety effectively, enhance the confidence of learning. Peer assessment is not only concerned with the evaluation of the results, the evaluation of the evaluation, evaluation itself is also an important part to improve and promote the evaluation of human writing learning, the implementation of English writing learning. Peer review makes learning and evaluation is not completely separate the two parts and evaluation has become an important part of the learning process of English writing, through the implementation of peer assessment, it can guide and inspire students' writing initiative, improve the students' attitude towards English writing.

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## CONCLUSION

Based on the present situation of college English writing ability cultivation, peer response and its superiority in the perspective of teachers, students and evaluation play an important role in the cultivation of English writing ability. Peer response not only affects the change of college English examination mode, but also has an influence on the development of students' cognitive level, critical thinking ability of students, students' writing motivation and interest, etc.. The applications of peer response can effectively improve college students' attitude towards English writing, improve the enthusiasm of College Students' English writing and promote English writing ability and level at last. But there are some problems and difficulties in the research, for example, how to carry out peer respond, which aspects are suitable for students of peer respond, which are suitable for teacher respond and feedback, how to make optimal design in the process etc..

We will do deeply explanation and analysis in the further research.

Through the analysis of the preliminary research and the reflection of research results, the author put forward the following suggestions for further studies.

Firstly, writing evaluation is an organic component of the writing teaching. It is also an important element to ensure the effectiveness of the writing teaching. Therefore, the self-evaluation and peer response should avoid the bondage of traditional evaluation models which take lots of time and energy.

Secondly, the teacher should give students comprehensive feedback about the result of students' self-evaluation and peer response in time. Therefore, how to make a comprehensive summative evaluation of self-evaluation and peer response is a question that needs to be further discussed.

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