

Promoting Student Talk, Reflection and Revisions

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Abstract

The aims of this action learning project are to encourage students to reflect collaboratively on their learning of two communication tasks and to share their insights with other HDEPC students through a learners' guide. The two main features of this project are that first, there is a stage in the learning cycle where students give peer feedback to each other's work and second, the student reflection and evaluation form part of the learners' guide to the learning materials generated by the learners themselves.

Participants of this action research project are first year students enrolled in the Higher Diploma in Professional Communication (HDEPC), taking the module Developing English Skills. The objectives of the learning tasks are to enable students to analyse the genre of news stories; to conduct interviews in order to gather information for their news stories; to write the news stories and to reflect on the effectiveness of their writing before revising their texts for publication.

After students had carried out their interviews and written their first drafts of their news stories, they were given training in the roles of the reader and writer during peer response sessions before they practise on their own using the guidelines discussed. Qualitative analyses of the student interaction during peer response shed light on how students make use of their oral feedback and how they discover new ideas and perspectives, and generate knowledge during these sessions. From analyses of the revisions made, the data suggest how student writers reflect on and incorporate their ideas discussed during peer interactions in their revisions.

This paper will present examples taken from student interactions and revisions to illustrate the different aspects of the texts that student readers and writers responded to during their interactions. There will also be discussion of how feedback strategies of effective readers and writers can be introduced to students during the practice sessions in the next cycle of learning.

Aims of this Action Research Project

The aims of this project are to encourage students to reflect collaboratively on learning two communication tasks, and to share their insights with other HDEPC students through a learners' guide.

The two main innovative features of this action learning project are:

- 1 There is a reflective loop at the end of each stage of learning and students are engaged in an evaluation of these communication tasks.
- 2 Student reflection and evaluation form part of the learners' guide. This learners' guide also includes the following:
 - summaries of students' class presentations on analysis of the structures of the news stories and

points to consider when preparing their tasks;

- descriptions of suggested procedures when carrying out the tasks, samples of their interview questions and the mind maps they have worked out in order to organise their data;
- outlines of the steps they have taken in order to prepare themselves for collaborative reflection of their drafts; and
- a sample of the selected news stories for their magazine.

Learning Objectives

The objectives of this project are:

- to enable students to analyse the genre of news stories for news magazines;
- to conduct interviews in order to collect primary data for their news stories;
- to write the news stories; and
- to reflect on the effectiveness of their writing before revising their texts.

Reporting the Stages in the Action Learning Cycle

Stage One: Reflect

Participants of this action research project come from two classes of first year students enrolled in the Higher Diploma in Professional Communication (HDEPC), taking the module Developing English Skills. This module aims to develop students' confidence in using English for instrumental purposes within familiar academic and social contexts; to provide opportunities for students to use English in spontaneous, realistic situations; and to provide a variety of integrated skills for students to practise their English. In order to help students achieve the aims of the module described above, the following features have been built into the design of the communication tasks:

- students are engaged in spoken and written discourse with a specific communicative purpose, audience and persona in mind;
- students' communicative tasks are communicated to a real audience, with the teacher being a collaborator and a facilitator rather than the audience;
- in carrying out the the tasks, there is the opportunity for active student involvement and interpersonal communication; and
- students are also engaged in collaborative learning and reflection.

The communicative tasks thus planned are:

- conducting interviews with people on the City University campus;
- writing news stories and reporting events at City University based on these interviews;
- writing features on people and news related to either City University or related to English for professional communication; and
- selecting the best news stories and features for two news magazines published by the students themselves.

Stage Two: Plan

In order to enhance collaborative learning and reflection when students carry out these communication tasks, a reflection loop was introduced at various stages of the learning cycle. After the teacher presented and discussed the features of each communication task during lectures, students had to present the structures of various types of news stories, using news stories from newspapers for illustrations. Students were encouraged to refer to the textbook (Rich,1994) as background for their reading and presentations.

At the next stage, students formed groups to discuss what interesting news stories they could report on for first year students at City University. In groups, they planned the procedure for carrying out the task, with the tutor acting as adviser and facilitator. Specifically, after they had referred to the posters of student activities they think would interest first year students at City University, students selected the events on which they would like to report. They were advised to write down the contact number of the liaison person and attend the function publicised on the posters in order to gain more background information and to contact the event organisers and participants for interviews.

Next, students planned and rehearsed establishing contact with their interviewees, and prepared questions for the interviews, remembering that they had to be flexible in selecting and rephrasing questions as the occasion demanded. They practised using probing questions and charts to help them focus their questions during the interviews.

Stage Three: Act

The students contacted their interviewees by phone, written messages or in person. They also carried out the interviews in pairs, so that they could take turns asking questions and taking notes. Their next step was to write out their notes and choose a focus for their story. Students were encouraged to find their own focus even though they shared the same interview data. The fact that they were able to do so was illustrated in the drafts of their news stories. This ability to write news stories from multiple angles based on the same set of interview data could also be illustrated in the student guide.

Students conducted interviews twice for two feature articles in two issues of the student magazine. They have thus followed each stage described here, including reflection and evaluation of their news writing tasks in two cycles.

Stage Four: Observation

Students were introduced to the value of peer feedback to drafts. Teacher researchers can refer to the value of peer response for second language learners indicated in these studies (Urzua,1987; Lockhart and Ng,1995; Mendonca and Johnson,1994; Mangelsdorf and Schlumberger,1992). Students in this action research project were given training in the roles of the reader and the writer in practice sessions in class before they practised on their own using the guidelines discussed (Leki,1995). They were asked to identify the writer's intention for the news story; discuss to what extent the writer manages to attract and maintain readers' interest; and in response to the discussion, decide which part of the text could be improved. Altogether, there were four sessions before students were given time in class to review and prepare feedback to one of their partner's drafts (students chose their own partners). It must be noted that students encountered genre analysis of news stories of a great variety throughout the whole semester — during lectures, tutorial presentations by the students themselves and in the textbook readings. Students reviewed their peers' drafts in class and wrote their comments on paper as preparation for the peer response session.

Next, students gave their feedback to their partners, exchanged views and discussed suggestions in the lab. This allowed privacy for each pair while enabling the tape recording of the whole feedback session. Each session lasted 30 to 40 minutes. Students undertook these peer response sessions twice, once for each cycle of the communication tasks.

Findings

From analyses of the tapescripts of the discussion by students during their peer response session, and from comparison made of students' first and second drafts, there are some interesting findings which this paper will now report.

There seems to be a general pattern as to when revisions would result following a peer response session. There were three types of discussion episodes (the beginning and ending of which is indicated by a topic shift) which did not lead to revisions in this study.

These episodes are those in which 1) the reader made a suggestion to the writer without giving reasons to support the suggestion recommended, 2) the writer was not satisfied with the justification provided by the reader and 3) the writers were sure of their own position and posed counter arguments. Examples from three extracts of peer discussions are provided in the following sections to illustrate each of these types of interaction.

Extract 1: The Reader Made a Suggestion to the Writer without Giving Reasons to Support the Suggestion Recommended

In the following extract of the peer interaction, the reader and writer were discussing the ending of an article on the City University Choir. The reader was suggesting to the writer that the end of the article could be revised to include questions that would stimulate the audience to evaluate the quality of the programmes offered by the choir, and the success of the choir itself:

Extract 1

252. R: //Yeah.//But however, during the ending, you should leave some challenge, or

253. questions to the readers, too.

254. W: What's your suggestion?

255. R: For example you should leave the readers to judge the quality of the programme.

256. Whether the programmes are excellent or not, and to give the element of how the choir

257. was carried out. Mmmm...to let them judge that whether the choir is successful or not. Just

258. leave the questions to the readers.=

259. W: Mmm.

260. R: I think that will be OK.=

261. W: Have we finish?

Although the reader in this peer discussion elaborated on what he thought should be included in the text (L.255-258), he did not provide support for this suggestion. The writer responded in such a way as to be almost dismissive in tone (L.261). A comparison between the first and second draft indicated that no revision was made by the writer.

Extract 2: The Writer was Not Satisfied with the Justification Provided by the Reader

In this extract, the writer was not convinced that the reason provided to support the suggestion was valid. Two readers are discussing with the writer an article on Multi-level marketing (MLM).

Extract 2

10. R1: I want to ask why you separate the first paragraph with the second one.
11. W: The one start with=
12. R1: =More attractively
13. W: Just because the second paragraph is too long.
14. R2: Oh...but in the first paragraph it tells totally different things from the second
15. paragraph? Is it totally different?
16. R1: But I think the first paragraph em... and the second paragraph are also introducing the
17. the 'MLM'
18. W: 'M'
19. R1: So I think, if you join the first paragraph with the second paragraph it's better for you,
20. a...a little change.
21. W: So, as a reader do you think if I link the first paragraph with the second paragraph
22. R1: Yes, it's better because we knew that em... these two are talking... yes, are related.
23. W: //Related. //Em... I want to ask as I read what you expect when I say the 'MLM'
24. What is your expectations?
25. R1: Em... I think our expectation you have told early in the story... you said earning
26. money in a new way and we want to know the way to earn money in 'MLM' and
27. you also state the way to earn.
28. W: And...Irene (to the second reader), do you have any comment?
29. R2: Mmm...
30. W: And how about the interviewees...er... I think I state about too much about why=
31. R1: =Why join
32. W: Yeah... em his experience in other business.

One of the readers (the first reader) started by asking why the writer presented the beginning of the article in two paragraphs. The writer and the second reader both gave their reasons (L.13-15). The first reader countered by suggesting that since both the first and second paragraphs introduced the idea of Multi-level marketing (MLM), there should be only one paragraph (L.19-20). The writer followed up this point by checking the two readers' expectations when 'MLM' was mentioned in the text. The first reader answered in some detail and the writer proceeded to check the response from the second reader who paused and could not give an answer. The writer proceeded to move to another of her concerns. From the tapescript, there was no indication that the writer considered the reader's reason valid. The text was not subsequently revised.

Extract 3: The Writer was Sure of Her Own Position and Posed Counter Arguments

In this extract, the reader suggested ideas for revision and the writer posed counter arguments against the suggestion. The reader was discussing with the writer an article on the work of the Student Overseas Activities Fund (SOAF) at City University.

Extract 3

540. R: M. It will be better. And then paragraph five. ... Um, in fact, the idea of
541. external sponsorship is, is quite {bad} not um NOT clear. Because I think the
542. students would want to know what, what is mean by external sponsorship. And
543. usually I think individual student is hard to find external sponsorship.
544. W: So they would like to know uh how to seek external sponsorship.
545. R: M. Yes maybe you shall give some example. State some example,
546. sponsorship from who or from where or ...
547. W: But in the later part. ... So uh we start again,
548. R: M. (laugh)
549. W: About the external sponsorship.
550. R: Yes
551. W: Uh I just want to say that uh in the later part, uh you can see in the last part of
552. my passage I have quoted an example of //a student's experience
553. R: //Oh, // //Wu Chi Kan
554. W: //He also got, // Yes. He got external sponsorship //so after reading his story
555. do you found it more infor, more informative about the external sponsorship?
556. R: //Because he is, // But,
557. W: That's still not enough?
558. R: Yes not enough. Because the student is a Law student and he can um ...
559. surely find sponsorship um from some, from some law office.
560. W: M.
561. R: Um. It's more easy for Law students to seek sponsorship but how about
562. others? They were, because you told them their dream would come to reality.
563. //(Laugh) How about if they cannot find other sponsorship to support their
564. financial needs um to go to the overseas, then they will be disappointed. Because
565. the SOAF will only grant very little money for them.
566. W: //(Laugh) // M. But I think um it's not really alright to, for me to say a lot
567. about external sponsorship //because // I was interviewing the SAOF and I want
568. to give //Mmm information to students about, about it.
569. R: //Yes. // //mmMM. // Yeah.

570. W: So I should focus on telling people about the SOAF's function,
571. R: M. //(Laugh) I know I know what you mean. You cannot say too much.
572. W: //So if I turn, uh ... if I turn my, turn to other money, money source, that
573. would be,=
574. R: =(Laugh) another topic.
575. W: Hai lo [Yes]. Yeah.
576. R: There would be another topic (laugh).
577. W: Sorry (laugh).
578. R: That maybe another topic. (Laugh) Okay, I I see. Um, maybe if you want to
579. explain with a small sentence or just little paragraph is enough. Okay up to you.
580. W: mmMM.

In this extract, the reader commented that the writer had not explained in her article what was meant by external sponsorship (L.541-543). The reader suggested that the writer give some examples. The writer then explained that she had already included a student's experience at the end of her article and one example of external sponsorship had been provided in the text. The reader countered by saying that it was easier for Law students to find external sponsorship and that the audience would be disappointed when they realised how difficult it was to get such sponsorship. The writer defended her position and said that her focus was to inform her audience of the work of the SOAF. To talk more about other possible financial sources, she said, would be like starting another topic. Both reader and writer laughed at this point (L.576-578) and the reader accepted the writer's position with a qualified suggestion at the end of this part of the discussion. From a comparison of the first and second drafts of the article, it was obvious that the writer had not changed the position that she had defended in the discussion. This part of the text had not been revised.

Analyses of the tapescripts of the peer interactions during the reponse session also indicated that there were other types of discussion episodes which did lead to revisions. As reflected in the data, these are situations in which : 1) the reader provided justifications and the writer indicated acceptance of the suggestion, 2) the writer reacted to the suggestion by engaging in disagreement, however indicating that he would reconsider the ideas discussed and 3) the writer responded to the reader's suggestion and contributed to the ideas initiated by the reader. Examples of each of the three situations are provided in the following paragraphs to illustrate the contributions of readers and writers in these discussions. Comparison of the revised texts are also provided in this paper to describe the types of changes made in the revisions.

Extract 4: The Reader Provided Justification and the Writer Indicated Acceptance of the Suggestion

Extract 4 is an example of interactions during peer response sessions which resulted in the writer accepting some of the reader's ideas and subsequently adopting them in the revision of the text. In this extract, the same reader and writer (as in extract 3) were discussing the article on SOAF funding. This time, the reader's suggestion was that some of the information could have been omitted.

Extract 4

482. R: Um, I suggest you um to add some explanation ... um for the introduction of

483. the SOAF's panel members. Because you, it seems quite useless for the students

484. to know the panel members. //You know what I mean?

485. W: //Oh.// M.

486. R: Maybe it's not useless but you have to, //explain to them.

487. W: //So what other information do you want to know? About the panel.

488. R: The panel,=

489. W: =Actually I didn't uh have too much information about the {work}.=

490. R: =So um I suggest you either to add more information or=

491. W: =I can //delete it

492. R: //Just ommit it. Yes or delete it. It will be better. Because the, the paragraph

493. here is so short that you can nearly delete it.

494. W: Yeah, I also find it not really, Mmm useful in this part.=

495. R: =Yes. It's some how boring and I don't know //who is who,

496. W: //Yeah. Readers are not be interested. And I just mention the name of

497. different people.

498. R: Not significant. In fact. Um, for paragraph five, Miss Rebecca Chan, what

499. Miss Rebecca Chan said um is also, is also not very significant. I think. Not

500. very significant because she is just tell us her work, her job.

501. W: mmMM.

502. R: But //um it will be better// if the criteria is set out, is told by herself or you

503. yourself told, tell the student about the criteria //for, for the application.

504. //So you think,// //You mean the,// Oh. Application.

505. W: Yes.

506. R: But in fact she has, she hasn't mentioned anything about the criteria but just the

507. procedure. It's not important for the students to know the procedure. In fact.

508. W: mmMM. ...

509. R: What do you think about this?

510. W: Yes I I come to realise that this is ... not really interesting to the readers.

The reader observed that the writer should either explain more about the work of the adjudication panel, or omit that part altogether (L.482-490). In fact the writer was listening so attentively to the suggestion that she already anticipated what the reader might say and completed the suggestion for her (L.491). The writer agreed that she did not find this part useful to the audience and she added that it was not interesting to just mention the names of the people on the panel. The reader responded and added that she thought the part describing the job of Rebecca Chan, one of the members of the panel, was also not very important and that it would have been more useful to let the audience know the criteria of selection and the application procedure. The writer concurred and said she came to the same conclusion. This acceptance of the reader's suggestion was put into

action as evidenced in the revision. A comparison of the first and second drafts demonstrates that the writer (whom we shall call Sally) has adopted the ideas developed in the discussion.

Comparison of Sally's Two Drafts

Sally's Draft 1

'The ultimate objective of establishing this fund is to make money available for students to travel abroad so as to widen their horizons,' said Ms Rebecca Chan, the secretary of SOAF. 'It is a way of informal learning which compliments the traditional classroom learning. It is also part of the education process which is very useful and stimulating.'

The SOAF comprises a panel which is chaired by Mrs Astor Yu, Director of Student Affairs. This year they have invited Mr W.T.Chan, the Head of Applied Social Studies, on the panel board.

Ms Rebecca Chan said, 'My responsibilities as the secretary are to prepare documents, make recommendations and compile applications. The compiled information will then be presented to the panel who will decide on the eligibility and the amount to be funded to each application.'

In most cases applicants are required to submit attached information of the proposed activities in order for the panel to consider the application. They include self-decide proposal, copy of invitation letter, programme of conference to be attended and so on. Fees spent should also be supported by relevant documents and receipts.

Students can participate in various kinds of activities and there are two main streams, according to Ms Rebecca Chan.

'In the last academic year students either participated in self-organised study tours which is becoming more popular or in activities organised by other organisations. Self-organised study tours are set up entirely by the students themselves and are usually related to the subjects they major in. Activities organised by other organisations are mostly interest-oriented,' she explained.

Sally's Draft 2

(The text in bold italics is the part revised by the writer after the discussion in the peer response session.)

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The SOAF comprises a panel which is chaired by Mrs Astor Yu, Director of Student Affairs. ***The panel will decide the eligibility and the amount to be funded to each application. In most cases applicants are required to submit attached information of the proposed activities in order for the panel to consider the application. They include self-decide proposal, copy of invitation letter, programme of conference to be attended and so on. Fees spent should also be supported by relevant documents and receipts.***

When asked how much money is usually funded to each application, Ms Rebecca Chan replied, 'As there is only \$150,000, it certainly limits our funding. We normally allocate not over \$10,000 to each application so as to benefit more students. Our principle is that SOAF is only a kind of subsidy and it is not the single source of money. Students have to contribute some money themselves and we strongly encourage them to seek external sponsorship. In our experience

students could cover a large proportion of their expenses with our funding together with external sponsorship. The results were very satisfying.'

Students can participate in various kinds of activities and there are two main streams, according to Ms Rebecca Chan. *In the last academic year students either participated in self-organised study tours which is becoming more popular or in activities organised by other organisations. Self-organised study tours are set up entirely by the students themselves and are usually related to the subjects they major in. Activities organised by other organisations are mostly interest-oriented. The duration of activities varies a lot, from the longest of three months to the shortest of four to five days. Normally students can expect to stay overseas for one to two weeks.*

Description of the Changes Made in Sally's Revised Draft

If we refer to the discussion of the mainpoints in extract 4, it is clear that the writer has accepted the reader's comment that the list of names on the panel would not be interesting to the audience. The writer has subsequently omitted this part in the second draft. The reader's second suggestion was that less should be mentioned about the nature of the work by Ms Rebecca Chan. The writer has also considered this point and has rewritten this part so that the points mentioned by Rebecca Chan are now represented as the work of the panel. This part of the text is now followed by a description of the documents required. Another section on the amount of funding and external sponsorships has been brought up earlier in the article. The third change was that information on the variety of eligible study tours is now no longer presented as a quote from Ms Rebecca Chan and there is the additional information on the expected duration of student activities.

From comparison of the two drafts, it is clear that the writer has revised the text in such a way that can accommodate the ideas suggested by the reader. The writer has omitted the part that would not interest her audience. In addition, she has revised the part that would give the audience more detailed information on the application procedure. This she did by taking the points out of the mouth of the officer and thus described the expected information and diminished the role of the officer, Ms. R. Chan. She used the same technique in the paragraph following this one. Again, she added more information which she thought would interest her audience, that is the part about the expected duration of student activities, and provided background information on the role of the officer who gave this information by not using quotation to attribute the source.

Extract 5: The Writer Reacted to the Suggestion by Engaging in Disagreement, However Indicating that He Would Reconsider the Ideas Discussed

Extract 5 demonstrated a second situation where interactions during peer response sessions led to a disagreement which was finally resolved by the writer indicating willingness to reconsider his position. The interesting point to note is that the writer did reconsider what the reader suggested and revised the text in a way that accommodated the ideas discussed in the response session while still addressing his concerns raised in his disagreement with the reader.

Extract 5

48. R: Er.. I also think that in the 3rd paragraph =

49. W: The 'distinctive aspect' paragraph? =

50. R: Yes, that paragraph. You emphasise the importance of cooperation between

51. students and teachers =

52. W: uhmm..

53. R: Maybe you can move into the paragraph which describe programs carry on

54. process.

55. W: Yes... but really, I want you to know that this kind of cooperation is for

56. themselves. I don't think during the time for doing some activities. But I don't

57. think that the staff members, I mean the faculty members participated in activities

58. quite often.

59. R: mmm.

60. W: Cos' maybe they are busy.

61. R: But however, I think that... I greatly appreciate that the cooperation between

62. the teachers and the students as you mentioned. But I think you can put these

63. events into the part with describes activities carried out.

64. W: What you said? Can you say it again?

65. R: I just mean that I... say is that I greatly appreciate your emphasise on the

66. importance of teachers and students cooperation. But why don't you put these into

67. the paragraphs states the activities carried out by the choir.

68. W: Well, I can do so. But as... like my first sentence had said =

69. R: Uhm=

70. W: It's so special about the choir. It's organisation is special =

71. R: Uhm

72. W: That's why I talked about the special relationship, the special interaction. I

73. mean... students and faculty members.

74. R: Uhm..

75. W: So do you want me to put one more time in the paragraph about the =

76. R: Activities.

77. W: Yeah. But I don't think it relate to the... actually, I can consider that.

In this extract, the reader expressed that the writer (whom we shall call Tom) had emphasised the importance of cooperation between students and teachers and that this theme could have been moved closer to the section of the text where the writer described the activities of the City University Choir. However, the writer interjected (L.55-58) and said that actually the faculty members (lecturers and tutors) did not participate as often as might be expected. The uniqueness of the choir is in its composition and that was why he, as the writer, put this description of the choir membership in the section describing the organisation of the choir (L.68-73). But he finally came round to responding positively to the reader's opinion. He was, however, insistent that he did not agree with the reader's point of view but he said that he would reconsider his comments (L.77). A comparison of the two drafts shows that the writer did reconsider what had been discussed and revised the text after much reflection on his part.

Comparison of Tom's Two Drafts

Tom's Draft 1

The City University Choir was founded in 1990. It was a small music club organised by the Student Union and it is now a truly City U Choir under the operation of the Cultural and Sports Committee.

The aim of the Choir this year is to develop student's interest in vocal music and to promote vocal music among the student body. Its nearly 60 members, representing different faculties and divisions, are noted as a group for the dedication to both improving the quality of cultural life and representing the City U Choir in the Musical Festival.

A distinctive aspect of the City U Choir has to do with its organisation. The Choir was reorganised last year as a school choir individually and it no longer acts as just a music club any more. One of the Choir's important characteristics is the exceptional interaction between students and faculty members since it consists of staff and student members. Whether in the theatre in the City U or outside the City U, they work together, sing together and sometimes perform together. The interaction binds student and teacher together and stimulates members' self-motivation, thus making them not only more enjoyable and satisfying towards their performance, but also more improving their singing skills.

Tom's Draft 2

(The text in bold italics is the part revised by the writer after the discussion in the peer response session.)

Established in 1990, City U Choir is now under the operation of the Cultural and Sports Committee since August 1995, with the aim to develop student's interest in vocal music and to promote vocal music among the student body.

City U Choir's nearly 60 members, representing different faculties and divisions, are noted as a group dedicated to both improving the quality of cultural life and representing the City U Choir in the Musical Festival.

You will find the Choir has many cultural and musical activities in the coming year. In December, a lunch time Christmas concert will be held respectively. Around February, there will be a HK School Music Festival, in March, a Spring concert and in July, the first annual concert presented by the City U Choir.

The Choir was reorganised last year as school choir individually and it no longer acts as just a school music club any more. One distinctive feature of this new Choir is its organisation. Its important characteristic is the exceptional interaction between students and faculty members since it consists of staff and student members. Whether performing at City U or off campus, they work together, practice together and sometimes perform together as a team. ***This kind of interaction binds students and teachers and stimulates member's motivation for development both individually and as a group.***

Description of the Changes Made in Tom's Revised Draft

The writer did move part of the text describing the distinctive feature of the choir to the paragraph where he introduced the work of the choir. This revision made possible a shorter lead-in to the description of the activities and without repeating the composition of the choir which was the point raised in his disagreement with the reader. In his revision process, this writer had used the ideas that was negotiated during the discussion, reflected on his own concerns and accommodated the ideas of his reader.

Extract 6: The Writer Responded to the Reader's Suggestion and Contributed to the Ideas Initiated by the Reader

An example of the third type of interaction during peer response sessions in this study which leads to reconsideration of the text by the writer is found in extract 6. In this extract, the reader and writer were discussing an article introducing the English Departmental Society at City University.

Extract 6

93. R: Well, actually I think the content is quite good. But, the only thing is I think
94. this uh article maybe uh, can be longer (yeah). For example, you have you...
95. mostly you focused on just the problems=
96. W:=mmMM.=
97. R: =but you haven't say just now what we say the details or the way to solve, So I
98. think this article can be longer.=
99. W: =mmMM. How to solve, Yes. Okay, Um, let me see, and...mmMM, yeah.
100. (what about?)
101. (exhales)
102. W: Speaking of questions,=
103. R: =Yeah!=
104. W: =Uh, You mentioned about the welfare on the second page, //second//=
105. R: //Aha.//
106. W:=Paragraph=
107. R: =Yeah.=
108. W:='The aim of the society is to serve and provide welfare.' You mentioned
109. about uh...ask or asking about elaboration on the welfare.=
110. R: =Aha.=
111. W:=Would it be ni-would it be better if I would probably uh put a box... there and
112. then say what are the welfares provided by the society.
113. R: Yeah.
114. W: So that uh=
115. R: =Yeah, yeah.=
116. W: =it would be more information packed.
117. R: Yeah,=
118. W:=mmMM.

In this extract, the reader mentioned that the writer (whom we shall call David) had so far only focused on the problems facing the society and had not mentioned any details about how the Society was going to solve their problems. The writer responded to the challenge immediately by taking up the turn and starting to think aloud (L.99-112). He did the thinking aloud over several turns, each time engaging the reader by recalling the ideas that the reader had suggested earlier in

the discussion (L.104, L.108-109). The role played by the reader here was to give positive feedback (L.105,107,110,113,117) to support the writer and allowed him the freedom to continue his thinking aloud and reasoning on his own until he reached his conclusion in the form of a suggestion to the reader (L.111-112). After this point, there was a lot of affirmation on both sides. The writer thought of one more reason before the two finished off with agreement on this course of action. A comparison of the first and second drafts showed that the writer has reflected on his plan of action, which he rehearsed aloud during the peer interaction.

Comparison of David's Two Drafts

David's Draft 1

The Fate of the English Departmental Society

'... So there is a big gap between Higher Diploma and BA(Bachelor of Arts) level,' said Charles Man. 'This problem is a very big one that we can't resolve in the near future.'

Charles Man is a six-footer with a strong body figure, would have been mistaken as CityU's basketball team player, if you don't know him; but, actually he is the fourth President of the English Departmental Society, also a second year student of BA EPC.

'Specially the Higher Diploma [students] in EPC do not have a sense of belonging to the English Departmental Society', answered Charles, when asked whether members have a sense of belonging to the English Departmental Society.

'It is an institutional problem,' said Charles.

Every year, there is a big time gap between the registration date of JASPIC and that of JUPAS. The Orientation Camps cannot include Higher Diploma students, so Higher Diploma students do not know what is English Departmental Society and students studying in the BA EPC or BA TESL (Teaching English as a Secondary Language) students.

'So there is a big gap between Higher Diploma and BA (Bachelor of Arts) level,' said Charles Man. 'This problem is a very big one that we can't resolve in the near future.'

'This year I will closely monitor how the Higher Diploma EPC can be included in all our activities,' said Charles, 'specially the formation of the executive committee; I hope that the coming executive committee can include many, many students from the Higher Diploma'.

The English Departmental Society is made up of three divisions, namely the English Departmental Society council, which monitors the function of the executive committee; the election board, which is an ad hoc division, that is it is established only during the election of the executive committee, with members appointed by the President of the executive committee; and the executive committee, which is mainly responsible for providing service to its members.

The aim of the Society is to serve and provide welfare to its members, to act as a bridge between the department and students.

Charles reflected that human resources, money and time are the major obstacles of the Society in carrying out its mission. Year 2 students of the Departmental Society are busy in their own course.

Fundings of English Departmental Society mainly comes from the Student Union, application to Student Affairs Office and outside sponsorship. But Charles thinks these channels are still not enough to fund their activities. '...[with] more money, we can do more things,' commented Charles.

This year members can use the bulletin board of poly link to communicate with their teachers and other members, to know what activities are being held. 'This (bulletin board number 67) is one of our greatest achievement this year,' said Charles proudly.

Charles Man emphasised that 'English Departmental Society never exclude or forgets the HDEPC students,' in response to the lack of participation of Higher Diploma students.

David's Draft 2

(The text in bold italics is the part revised by the writer after the discussion in the peer reponse session.)

The English Departmental Society in Transformation

... the Higher Diploma EPC students, in particular, have no sense of belonging to the EnDS ... 'This problem is a very big one that we can not resolve in the near future.'

Charles Man, a six-footer with a strong body figure, would have been mistaken as CityU's basketball team player; yet, actually he is the fourth President of the English Departmental Society's executive committee, also a second year student of BA EPC (Bachelor of Arts in English for Professional Communications).

Man revealed that the Society faces problems ranging from scarce resources, lack of communication between Society and members to lack of involvement from members.

He pointed out that the major obstacles for the Society on providing welfare to 498 members are lack of human resources, money and time. Specially, because year 2 students are too busy in their own courses to organise the society's activities; while fundings, which comes mainly from the Student Union, application to Student Affairs Office (SAO) and outside sponsorship, are inadequate to make ends meet with the society's activities.

The English Departmental Society (EnDS) has not received money from the Student Union due to bureaucracy. So members of the executive committee have to temporarily provide the money needed to run the activities.

Outside sponsorship is no better a channel to raise funds. Of the seven letters sent to companies appealing for sponsorship, only two replied. Swire Group for Coca-cola agreed to provide 20% discount; while Oxford University Press, although a big corporation, complained the sponsorship was expensive. Application for SAO funding is tedious, and the amount is 'unforseeable'.

The society also tries to raise money to run some of their most 'meaningful' activities, but only a scant amount of money can be raised; for instance, 55 people joined the Orientation Camp, and the society only earned HK\$500.

The activities run by the society are exclusively for English major students.

In October, there were Orientation Night, Squash Badminton Day and Mega Sales (the only activity open to non-English major students). In November, English Festival, one of the most costly activities, was held – the HK\$20,000 activity includes an Opening Ceremony, an English movie day, an English debate, a singing contest, an exhibition and a talk. When asked whether there were enough activities, Man replied, '...[with] more money, we can do more.'

This year members can use the bulletin board of poly link to communicate with their teachers and other members, to know what activities are being held. 'This (bulletin board number 67) is one of our greatest achievement this year' said Charles proudly.

With regards to involvement from members, Man lamented that the Higher Diploma EPC students, in particular, have no sense of belonging to the EnDS. He referred to it as an 'institutional problem'.

Every year, there was a big time gap between the registration date of JASPIC and that of JUPAS. Hence the Orientation Camps cannot include Higher Diploma students, consequently, Higher Diploma students do not know the function of English Departmental Society, nor BA EPC or BA TESL (Teaching English as a Secondary Language) students.

Man commented disappointedly, 'This problem is a very big one that we can not resolve in the near future.'

He will closely monitor how the HD EPC students can be included in all the society's activities, specially in the formation of the executive committee. 'I hope that the coming executive committee can include many, many students from the Higher Diploma,' said Man.

The English Departmental Society will change its name to 'English Student Society' to abolish the color of 'Department' to encourage Higher Diploma student's participation. Man emphasised that 'English Departmental Society never excludes or forgets the HD EPC students.'

Description of the Changes Made in David's Revised Draft

The writer has reorganised the text so that the second draft starts with the general problems that the English Departmental Society has to face: the lack of funding and human resources. The writer then presented the activities that had been organised, i.e., the successful and positive aspects. He also put the innovative achievement of that year, the electronic bulletin board, in a highlight box so that it has a place of prominence, which is a decision that he reached when brainstorming with his reader during the peer response session. In his revised draft, he has also re-grouped the ideas about the relationship of the English society with the group of students enrolled in the Higher Diploma in English for Professional Communication (HDEPC) course. The way the writer ended the article also reflected his consideration of the reader's discussion with him. He added one paragraph about the positive steps that would be undertaken by the president of the society to improve their relationship with HDEPC students. In his second draft, he closed with the promise of the society president, rather than the negative note that was presented in the previous draft.

Pedagogical Implications

The students in this action learning project have been given training before the peer response and have also prepared for the peer response sessions using guidelines so that they will be able to attend to the text when starting the discussion with the writers. It is therefore not surprising that they responded to the text by considering the needs of the audience, impact of the lead and the kicker (ending) on the audience, the pace of the story, clarification and elaboration of ideas; logical sequence and organisation of ideas; and development of the theme of their articles.

The student readers and writers displayed a range of discussion skills using their second language. Their main strategies included asking for clarification of ideas; suggesting ideas and alternatives in presenting information; asking for and giving justifications; asking for and giving explanations; disagreeing and articulating different positions; and reaching conclusions.

The teaching implications for the next cycle of learning is to help students to be more aware of the range of negotiation strategies adopted by effective interactants who managed to explore more alternative ideas and positions while maintaining a supportive relationship with each other. From reviewing the six types of interaction episodes found in this study, it is clear that if writers are to be given more opportunity to explore different ideas open to them, they need to have readers who 1)

can offer justified suggestions in line with the writer's intentions; 2) can give writers time to think over and discuss alternative ideas and/or counter arguments; and 3) can engage writers in brainstorming alternatives to expressing their ideas in the text.

A review of the three successful interaction episodes, where discussion resulted in the writers rethinking their texts and ultimately revising these texts, also indicates that the writers in these situations were much more cognitively engaged. They contributed more and much longer turns, took an active part in responding to the readers' comments and suggestions, and did more thinking aloud with the readers. From a pedagogical point of view, this means that more work has to be done to prepare the writers and not just the readers for the peer response sessions. Writers should also be given review tasks to help them prepare for the topics they want to raise during their discussion with their readers (e.g., the likely impact of their text on their reader, ideas that they think might need further clarification or elaboration, parts of the text they might like to re-organise), so that writers will then get a first-hand view of how a potential reader might interpret certain parts of the text with which they are concerned. This will also make the writers less defensive since it will be they who initiated the topics of discussion, rather than responding to a reader's observation about something defective in their texts.

In training sessions, writers should be made aware of the fact that they are the main stakeholders of the discussion, and that they should share with the readers the role of initiating the topics of discussion. Writers will then be more responsible for the direction of the interaction and will want to take a more active part in making the discussion work.

Students should also be shown tapescripts of effective peer discussions in order to get a clear picture of the active role played by writers who are effective interactants. They could also be made aware of the negotiation techniques of these interactants who can engage in disagreement of ideas while still working collaboratively on further exploration of ideas. Students should also be shown samples of texts revised by the writers after their discussions so as to let them realise the extent of post-response reflections undertaken by effective writers during their revision process.

Conclusion

In an English for Professional Communication course, there is the need to challenge students to communicate with a purpose to an authentic audience. By having students prepare and write news stories for their news magazine, student writers have access to an immediate and authentic audience on campus. This sense of audience and the importance of securing audience interest were points mentioned by students when they talked about the usefulness of reader's feedback during post peer response interviews.

In the peer response sessions, students have been allowed an opportunity to know the readers' response to their writing, and reflect on their readers' opinions and suggestions. Although the reactions and concerns may represent only some readers during each of the response sessions, the whole process of peer response, from reviewing each others' drafts to the mutual exchange of opinions and discussion, stimulates the writer to rethink aspects of their texts.

Student writers have indicated in the post peer response sessions that in secondary schools, they have not been taught the process nor the skills to embark on such a task. Students reported that they had learnt to be more responsible for reviewing and revising their writing. The comparison of the revisions made between drafts has been recorded and will be made accessible to the next group of student writers who can read the process of peer response and the subsequent revisions by student writers.

Students in this action project have been invited to share the process of their learning by recording their approaches to the two communication tasks and by committing their knowledge (strategies used, procedure taken, reflections as pairs and evaluations as groups) to writing through the learners' guide. This type of knowledge gleaned from their experience, and by a group of learners at a level of proficiency similar to their target audience (the next group of first year students) is of value to both the group who participated in this project (the creators of the student guide) and the readers of the guide.