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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a pilot study of prewriting group discussions, and language of the discussion group, with 22 university students in a freshman English class in Taipei. Students were assigned to groups of Chinese discussion or English discussion on writing assignments. The quality of each group's first and second drafts was compared, and questionnaires were used to obtain information on the students' sources of ideas for writing first drafts and their attitudes towards peer responses. Findings suggest that students relied more on teacher-provided sample articles and their own knowledge than on the prewriting group discussion for ideas when writing first drafts. There was no statistical difference between the groups in quality of second drafts. Students in the Chinese discussion group believed in the benefit of peers' comments more than the English discussion group, yet few students in the Chinese group liked to provide feedback. It is concluded that prewriting group training of less than 3 weeks may not be enough time to expect the students to benefit from group activities learned; extensive teacher modeling and monitoring of student progress on a regular basis may be required. In addition, writing should not be taught separately from reading. (Contains 28 references.)
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The Efficacy of Using Writing Groups to Help Students
Generate Ideas for Writing and Revise Drafts in an EFL University
Writing Class

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Abstract

Writing groups are being used by some university teachers in Taiwan to facilitate students' idea generation and revision during the writing process. However, some groups may not know how to discuss ideas during prewriting discussions and peer response sessions in the initial stage, either in Chinese or in English. Being second-language learners, they may not trust their peers' opinions enough to use them. In addition, the quality of the ideas generated during the discussions may suffer if the language used for communication is one that the students are still struggling with.

A pilot study was conducted to look into how writing groups work in the beginning stage. The research questions are: (1) Do students use prewriting group discussions to generate ideas for writing? (2) Does the use of Chinese or English in prewriting group discussions and peer response sessions have differential effects on the quality of students' persuasive writing? (3) Are there differences in attitudes toward peer response between groups that use Chinese and groups that use English?

The subjects in this study were 22 students in a Freshman English class at a university in Taipei. This study covered 11 class periods spread over three weeks. The students were divided into groups of three or four and randomly assigned to an L1 group (which used Chinese in discussion) or an L2 group (which used English). The quality of the L1 and L2 groups' first and second drafts was compared. Questionnaires were used to obtain information on the students' sources of ideas for writing first drafts and their attitudes towards peer response.

The study found that the students relied more on teacher-provided sample articles and their own knowledge than on the prewriting group discussion for ideas when writing first drafts. There was no statistically significant difference between the L1 and L2 groups in the quality of their second drafts. More students in the L1 group believed in the benefit of peers' comments than in the L2 group. However, fewer students in the L1 group liked to provide feedback. Pedagogical implications are discussed in terms of the expectations teachers should have in the initial stage of training writing groups. Research implications are also discussed.

Introduction

The efficacy of the use of writing groups as a way to help students' idea generation and revision has been an issue of interest for many teachers and scholars in both the first (L1) and second/foreign language (L2) context. In the latter, it is especially controversial because L2 learners are often still struggling with the language they are learning. In general, these writing groups are used to help students brainstorm for ideas in the prewriting stage and to correct their writing problems in the revision stage. Many teachers and scholars may have doubts about whether these learners can work effectively in writing groups. Some may even wonder if students would work more productively if they are allowed to use their L1 in the discussion. However, this issue is debatable because some people may believe that the use of the L1 deprives the students of the opportunities to practice using the language they are learning. Students' attitudes toward peer response is another interesting issue since these students may not trust their own or their peers' ability to identify problems in the writing or to provide effective suggestions for revision. Little research has been done on these issues and even less has been done on Chinese subjects. How Chinese L2 writing groups function remains unknown in many aspects.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how a group of EFL university students in Taiwan made use of the prewriting group discussion they held on the assigned topic. Also investigated was the effect of students' use of L1 or L2 during the prewriting group discussion and peer response session on the quality of their persuasive writing. In addition, data were collected to determine whether the language chosen for use in writing groups resulted in any differences in the students' attitudes toward peer response.

Review of the Literature

In recent years, writing teachers have experimented with writing groups as a means of helping students to write. The underlying theory can be traced back to Vygotsky (1978), who believed in the social origin of learning. According to Vygotsky, interaction with others is central to learning. To test this theory, many scholars have looked into the issue of using groups in writing classes.

Benefit of Peer Group Talk in Developing Writing Skills

Barnes (1976) and Britton (Barnes et al., 1990) argued for the value of exploratory talk in peer groups for learning. Language plays an essential role in peer interaction since it is the medium through which negotiation of meaning occurs. According to Barnes (1976), much of the verbal interaction is

expressive language, allowing the learners to freely express thoughts, feelings, and opinions, which is a beginning point for assimilating and accommodating new knowledge.

Many studies have proven that group talk in peer response sessions improves the final written products (David, 1986; Gere & Stevens, 1985; Liner, 1984; Nystrand, 1986). Liner (1984) claimed that peer response enabled 10th- and 11th-graders to feel freer to reveal themselves and thus helped them develop a voice in their writing. Their stories became more interesting, honest, and alive. Many studies have also showed that peer response brought about improvement between first and subsequent drafts. Gere and Stevens (1985) concluded that 5th-, 8th-, and 12th-graders made constructive comments and helped one another towards better drafts. Danis (1982) claimed that college sophomores provided objective reflection for writing and that 60% of the revisions improved the writing. Jones (1977/1978) showed that high school seniors corrected about 60% of their errors after getting feedback from their peers. In the EFL context, Jacobs (1989) indicated that university students miscorrected very few grammatical errors with the help of peer response.

Role of First Language in Second Language Learning

There has been little research on whether students should use their first language (L1) or the language they are learning (L2) when talking in groups. However, some research has touched on the issue of the role of L1 in L2 learning. Many scholars in the cognitive paradigm believe that L2 learning is facilitated by whatever knowledge already exists in the learner's mental representation (McLaughlin 1987). They say it is natural to assume that this knowledge would include what learners understand about the L1 and the cognitive capacity for problem solving developed through the acquisition of the L1. Thus, the L1 plays an important role in the learning of the L2.

According to Smith (1978), two basic principles pertaining to language learning are broadly accepted by scholars in the cognitive paradigm: (1) new knowledge is to a greater or lesser degree acquired via old knowledge; and (2) knowledge is often "procedural", which means that it is facilitative in solving problems involved in encoding and decoding utterances in a given language.

Klein (1986) has a similar view. He believes that the knowledge a learner can utilize to process linguistic input to analyze a second/foreign language falls into four categories, the first two of which are (1) general knowledge about the nature of human language and of verbal communication, and (2) specific knowledge of the structure of the learner's first language or any other language.

Inherent in the above claims is a link between the L1 and L2 in the L2 learning process. Some pedagogic implications have been derived from this. Smith (1978) claims that teachers should provide possibilities for relating the new facts of the target language to the world that is familiar to the learner via his/her native language and everyday experience.

Since the L1 plays an important role in L2 learning, a few researchers have begun to look into the quantitative and qualitative differences in the learner's L1 and L2 communication strategies. Tarone (1977) and Ellis (1984) both studied the difference in the strategies used by young students in story telling in the L1 and L2. However, so far very few researchers have examined the effects of the use of students' L1 or L2 on their discussions in prewriting groups and peer response sessions, or on the quality of students' revisions.

Students' Attitudes Toward Peer Response

With regard to students' attitudes towards peer response, research shows mixed findings. Some studies indicate that students have positive attitudes. In the L1 context, Bencich (1989/1990) found that for 11th-graders, peers' opinions seemed to be more important than a grade, as evidenced by the influence of these opinions on writers' revisions. Involvement in a writing group was a pleasurable and beneficial social experience. Liner (1984) also found that 10th- and 11th-graders enjoyed sharing writing and personal experiences. Their choice of pieces for publishing was increasingly influenced by their peers. In the L2 context, Mendonca and Johnson's (1994) ESL graduate students all found peer response to be useful for revision.

However, research also reveals negative attitudes towards peer response. In the L1 context, Danis (1982), Ziv (1983), and Spear (1988) reported that some college students did not regard their peers as valid audiences. Danis (1982) showed that they thus failed to ask critical questions of or engage in discussion with their peers. Few of Tebo-Messina's (1987/1988) college freshmen desired to be part of the group. They either had reservations about the value of the group or felt resentment towards it. Cross' (1993) adult writers did not perceive peer response as a way to improve writing and preferred to maintain control over their own writing. In the L2 context, some studies showed that college ESL teachers and students were also worried about using peer response because of a lack of confidence in students' language ability (Allaei & Connor, 1990; Chaudron, 1984; Jacobs, 1987).

As discussed above, findings on L1 students' attitudes toward peer response have been mixed so far. With regard to L2 students, the few studies conducted so far seem to indicate that students are more negative toward peer response than their L1

counterparts.

To date, there has been a severe lack of research on the differential effects of the use of students' L1 or L2 during prewriting discussions and peer response sessions on the quality of student writing. There has also been very little research on Chinese students' use of the ideas they develop during prewriting group discussions and their attitudes toward peer response activities. There is need for research in these areas.

Research Design

The research questions are as follows:

1. Do students use prewriting group discussions to develop ideas for writing?
2. Does the use of students' L1 or L2 in prewriting group discussions and peer response sessions have differential effects on the quality of persuasive writing?
3. Are there differences between the L1 and L2 groups in their attitudes toward peer response?

Subjects

The subjects in this study were 35 college students in a Freshman English class who were either Applied Psychology or Library Science majors at a university in Taipei. They had had six years of English in high school before entering the university. Their proficiency was at a high-intermediate level in comparison with other freshmen at the same university.

The study was conducted during 11 class periods (50 minutes each) spread over three weeks. The students were randomly assigned to an L1 group, which used Chinese in the prewriting discussion and peer response session, or to an L2 group, which used English.

Instructional Procedures

The students were asked to write persuasive essays. The two elements to be evaluated were **persuasiveness** and **organization** since these are essential for persuasive writing. Three such essays were completed during the semester, all written in class in 50 minutes. The first two assignments were analyzed for this study. The students wrote their first essay on the topic "Should students infected with AIDS be allowed to come back to school?" They revised this essay independently at home. This served as the pre-test.

The second essay was written on the topic "Do Teachers Have

the Right to Strike?" Before writing, the students read sample persuasive essays on other topics and then discussed in small groups the language and approaches to argumentation used in these persuasive essays. In addition, they read one English and two Chinese sample articles about teachers' right to strike and then participated in group discussion about the pros and cons of this issue. This particular prewriting discussion lasted 25 minutes. Both the L1 and L2 groups were divided into two subgroups and each used the language assigned for communication. Then the students revised their first drafts with the help of peer feedback.

Before the study, to ensure that the above two writing topics were at the same or similar level of difficulty, nine writing topics assumed to be of interest to the subjects were designed, and the students rated the difficulty of each topic on a scale of 1 to 5. Then the sum of the ratings for each topic was obtained, and the nine sums were rank-ordered. Two topics with values that clustered together were assumed to be of similar difficulty level and chosen for the writing tasks. The topic "Do Teachers Have the Right to Strike?" ranked next to "Should Students Infected with AIDS Be Allowed to Come Back to School?", which had a slightly lower ranking.

Guidelines on how to respond to peers' writing were given in handouts. In two class sessions, the instructor demonstrated how to respond to writing on both the micro- (e.g., grammar, word usage) and macro-level (e.g., organization, content, approaches to argumentation). The students then practiced responding to their peers' drafts (done for the first writing assignment) in groups. After the students wrote the first drafts, a peer response session was held. Both the L1 and L2 groups were divided into five subgroups and worked in the language assigned. This session lasted 30 minutes. At the end of the session, students recorded their comments on their peers' essays and returned them to their peers for revision.

Data Collection Procedures

Eventually only 10 subjects from the L1 group and 12 from the L2 group were considered for this study because only these 22 students attended all 11 class periods and turned in both the writing assignments. Their writing samples were typed and given code numbers, so their identities remained anonymous. Also, the samples were placed in a random order so that no clues were given as to when they were written.

Two Chinese EFL instructors at the same university served as raters of the writing and received three hours of training before the actual evaluation task. The Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient for the two raters on **persuasiveness** was .66 ($p=.0001$). For **organization**, the coefficient was .76 (p

=.0001). Both figures were considered respectable (cf. the interrater reliability achieved in the University of Hawaii, Manoa Writing Project, was .67). The correlation between the scores on the two traits for one rater was .89 ($p = .0001$) and for the other was .84 ($p = .0001$). Both were high, which suggests that these two traits were closely related.

Questionnaires were used to gain information about where the students get ideas for writing the first drafts of their second assignment. Questionnaires were also used to obtain data on the students' attitudes toward the peer response session.

While observing the students working in the prewriting group discussion and peer response session, the researcher noticed that some L2 group members occasionally switched into Chinese. However, the researcher, after listening to the audiotapes made of the conversation in two L2 subgroups, found that there were few instances of code switching and that most of the code switching was at word level. If the language use of the unrecorded groups resembled that of the recorded ones, it is reasonable to assume that the effect of code switching did not seriously confound the results of this study.

Results and Discussions

This section is organized according to the order of the research questions.

Question 1: Do students use prewriting group discussions to get ideas for writing?

The students' report of the sources of ideas for writing the first drafts of their second assignment is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Percentages of Students Using Four Sources of Ideas

| Source | Always | Often | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
|------------------------|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|
| Sample articles | 14% | 50% | 36% | 0% | 0% |
| Peers | 0% | 36% | 55% | 9% | 0% |
| Writer's own knowledge | 45% | 23% | 18% | 14% | 0% |
| Teacher | 0% | 0% | 50% | 41% | 9% |

Note. $N = 22$.

Table 1 reveals that the students relied more on the sample articles dealing with the assigned topic and their own knowledge than their peers or the teacher for ideas. Sixty-four percent of the students stated that they always or often drew ideas from the sample articles, and 68% said they always or often developed their own ideas. Only 36 percent claimed that they often got

their ideas from their peers. None of the students said they always or often got their inspiration from the teacher. The students' heavy reliance on the sample articles and their own knowledge shows that the prewriting group discussion might not have exerted a significant impact on the students.

The fact that the students did not rely very much on their peers for ideas is also reflected in the content of their essays. It is suspected that the students may have copied ideas from the sample articles (one in English and two in Chinese) given to them before they wrote. For verification, the major arguments presented by the students were tabulated (see Appendix A). The arguments that appeared in the students' papers were divided into two categories: those that appeared in the sample articles and those that did not. The former is further divided into two types: those that overlapped with arguments appearing in the English article, and those that overlapped with arguments appearing in either the English or the Chinese articles (since it was hard to tell which of these two sources was used by the students), as shown in Table 2 (also see Appendix B).

Table 2
No. of Arguments in Student Essays That Appear in Sample Articles

| | L1 group ^a | L2 group ^b |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| No. of arguments appearing in English sample article | 23(62%) | 22(48%) |
| No. of arguments appearing in English or Chinese sample article(s) | 31(84%) | 29(63%) |
| Total no. of arguments in students' essays | 37(100%) | 46(100%) |

Note. ^an = 10, ^bn = 12.

This table shows that, for both the L1 and L2 groups, a high percentage of the students' arguments overlapped with those presented in the Chinese or English sample articles (84%, 63%). This suggests that the students might have used the arguments they read in the sample articles. The students may have done this because they agreed with the views expressed in these articles, but a more plausible explanation is that the students were simply copying ideas from the sample articles instead of doing their own thinking.

Table 2 also shows that, for both the L1 and L2 groups, a very large portion of the arguments in their essays coincided with those offered in the English sample article (62%, 48%). This heavy reliance on the English article may be an indication of the students' need for linguistic facilitation. They may have

had some original ideas of their own or may have received some ideas from the prewriting group discussion, but they were hindered from using these in their essays due to their level of English competence. They probably resorted to copying ideas from the English article in order to avoid the trouble of finding the right words and sentence structures for expression.

The above analyses suggest that both groups appeared to have relied heavily on the sample articles, especially the one in English, for the content of their writing. Therefore the prewriting group discussion may not have been effective in helping the students generate ideas.

There is another explanation for the students' failure to make much use of the prewriting group discussion. According to the researcher's analysis of the quality of the prewriting group discussion, the L1 group was able to display greater depth in the exploration of the issue of teachers' right to go on strikes; they considered the legal aspects, realistic perspectives, examples of how other countries have dealt with this problem, the issue of the current government employee placement system, etc. However, an examination of the arguments presented in the students' writing samples revealed that the above elements were rarely incorporated into the writing. This might be due to the fact that these elements called for abstract and sophisticated expressions which were beyond the students' proficiency level. Another possible explanation is that the complicated aspects of the strike issue brought up by the L1 group called for more in-depth exploration than what this group was actually able to accomplish in the allotted time. Inability to clarify these complex ideas in the prewriting stage might have caused the students to exclude them in actual writing. Therefore the effect of the prewriting discussion was minimized.

The above analysis appears to confirm the importance of integrating reading into the writing curriculum, as described by Krashen (1984) in his review of writing research. Students need to enrich their minds by exposing themselves to other people's ideas through reading. The students' heavy reliance on the English article further suggests that linguistic facilitation is also crucial for EFL writers. Therefore reading materials in the target language are vital; they provide not only ideas for the content but also linguistic resources as vehicles for expression.

Question 2: Does the use of the L1 or L2 in prewriting group discussions and peer response sessions have differential effects on the quality of persuasive writing?

The means and standard deviations of the scores given by the two raters on **persuasiveness** and **organization** are given in Table 3. The raters used a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 representing the

lowest score and 4 the highest.

Table 3

Means & Standard Deviations of Scores on Persuasiveness & Organization

| | Assignment 1 | | Assignment 2 | |
|-----------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| | <u>M</u> | <u>SD</u> | <u>M</u> | <u>SD</u> |
| L1 ^a | | | | |
| Persuasiveness | 1.85 | .75 | 2.55 | .72 |
| Organization | 1.80 | .75 | 2.55 | .83 |
| L2 ^b | | | | |
| Persuasiveness | 1.79 | 1.03 | 2.50 | .74 |
| Organization | 1.92 | 1.18 | 2.54 | .81 |

Note. ^an = 10, ^bn = 12.

Analyses of variances show that the scores of the L1 and L2 groups on **persuasiveness** and **organization** did not differ significantly in the first assignment, indicating that these two groups had the same entry-level writing proficiency. After the prewriting discussion and peer response session, the scores for Assignment 2 improved significantly on both **persuasiveness** [$F(1, 20)=12.49, p<.05$] and **organization** [$F(1, 20)=10.22, p<.05$] for both groups. This suggests that the instructional treatment had a positive effect on the students' writing. In addition, no significance was found in the two language groups on either **persuasiveness** [$F(1, 20)=.01, N.S.$] or **organization** [$F(1, 20)=.34, N.S.$]. The differential use of language in the prewriting group discussion and peer response session did not seem to result in any significant differences between the two groups.

A possible explanation for the lack of difference between the two groups is that the effects of the teacher-led instruction conducted before the prewriting discussion and peer response session exerted much more influence than these two activities (in which the two groups were treated differently). This interpretation is suggested by the following analyses and findings.

1. This experiment spanned only 11 class periods (each 50 minutes long). The prewriting group discussion and peer response session, the only two stages in which the two groups received differential treatment, lasted only 25 and 30 minutes respectively. The time spent on these two activities constituted only 10% of the total experimental time. Prior to this experiment, the subjects had never worked in writing groups, thus

they might have needed more time to learn to work effectively in order for the treatment to show an observable effect.

2. The researcher's assessment of the quality of the feedback that the students provided during the peer response session also supports the above explanation. In general, the quality of the comments was not satisfactory, and many students also told the researcher about their difficulty in giving facilitative feedback. Since the subjects had little practice in the past, the 50 minutes the researcher spent on teaching them how to respond to writing might have been insufficient. Perhaps neither language group acquired adequate ability to give facilitative feedback within the relatively short duration of the study. Therefore, the language chosen for communication in the peer response session could not have made a significant difference.

3. As mentioned in the previous section on Question 1, the students' heavy reliance on the sample articles and their own knowledge for ideas suggests that they did not make much use of the prewriting group discussion. In addition, their inability to translate the sophisticated ideas they exchanged during the prewriting discussion into English may also have made the prewriting group discussion less useful. Both of these factors may have minimized the difference between the writing performance of the two groups.

Question 3. Are there differences between the L1 and L2 groups in their attitudes toward peer response?

The subjects' attitudes toward peer response were indicated through their responses to the following three statements on a questionnaire.

1. Peer feedback helped me revise.
2. My classmates have the ability to provide good feedback.
3. I like to provide feedback to my classmates.

Table 4 shows that 80% of the L1 group and 50% of the L2 group agreed that peer feedback helped them revise. The L1 group seemed to believe more firmly in the value of peer response, while the L2 group seemed less sure. Two of the six subjects in the L2 group who wrote extra comments about Statement 1 on the questionnaire expressed doubts about the effectiveness of peer response. One of these students said that peers were not able to point out mistakes, while the other said that peers were capable of identifying only grammatical errors.

The L1 group showed more confidence in their peers' ability to provide effective feedback (with 50% indicating agreement with the statement), while the L2 Group was less certain (with only 27% showing agreement). Four of the eight in the L2 group who

Table 4
Students' Attitudes Toward Peer Response

| | Agree | Uncertain | Disagree |
|-----------------|-------|-----------|----------|
| Statement 1 | | | |
| L1 ^a | 80% | 10% | 10% |
| L2 ^b | 50% | 42% | 8% |
| Statement 2 | | | |
| L1 | 50% | 40% | 10% |
| L2 | 27% | 73% | 0% |
| Statement 3 | | | |
| L1 | 30% | 60% | 10% |
| L2 | 58% | 17% | 25% |

Note. ^an = 10, ^bn = 12.

made extra comments about Statement 2 expressed doubts about their peers' ability to provide feedback in a second language. Among these four students, two said that their peers were able to correct grammatical errors but nothing else, while one said peers were only able to detect spelling errors and not provide other forms of feedback. Another two respondents said that they would trust some peers but not others to give useful feedback in a second language.

The above suggests that the L1 group seemed to have more positive attitudes toward peer response. However, data from Statement 3 show that fewer students in the L1 group liked to provide feedback (L1, 30%; L2, 58%). Sixty percent of the L1 group were unsure if they liked to provide feedback. All six students in the L1 group who wrote extra comments about Statement 3 mentioned that they distrusted their own ability to provide good feedback. Even though the L1 group seemed to have more confidence in the benefit of peer response and their peers' ability to provide effective feedback, they may not have liked providing feedback because they themselves did not think they could do it effectively. Thus, it appears they liked receiving feedback more than giving feedback.

Conclusions and Implications

This study brought some insights into the efficacy of using small group discussion in EFL writing classes and the role language plays in group discussions. The conclusions and implications drawn from this study may be of value for researchers and teachers.

Conclusions

The following summarizes the findings from this study.

1. The students appeared to obtain ideas for writing more from the teacher-provided sample articles and from themselves than from their peers. Apparently the prewriting group discussion did not exert great influence on the content of the students' essays.

2. Many of the arguments presented in the students' essays overlapped with the ideas that appeared in the teacher-provided sample essays on the assigned topic, especially the essay in English. There may be two reasons for this. First, the students failed to do independent thinking and instead took the easy way out by copying ideas from these essays. Second, the students copied from the sample essays because they were unable to express, in English, their own ideas or those that their peers shared with them. They needed linguistic facilitation to do so and they failed to get it from their groups, this being especially true for the students in the L1 group. Thus the prewriting group discussion was not as effective as originally intended.

3. The differential use of language in the prewriting group discussion and peer response session did not result in any significant differences between the L1 and L2 groups in the organization or persuasiveness of their essays. This may have occurred because the teacher's instruction that preceded the two activities exerted more influence than these two activities.

4. Compared with the L2 group, the L1 group appeared to have a more positive perception of the facilitative effect of peer response on revision and their peers' ability to provide effective feedback. However, the L1 group appeared less enthusiastic about providing feedback. Perhaps they preferred receiving peer feedback to giving it.

Implications

A few implications can be drawn from this study. The ability to work effectively in prewriting group discussions or peer response sessions takes time to develop, since students need to learn how to explore ideas for writing, how to elicit ideas from group members, how to give and receive feedback, how to evaluate writing, etc. If the training period is as short as three weeks, the teacher may not expect the students to benefit much from participating in group activities. The teacher may have to do extensive modeling and monitor the students' progress regularly.

The results also suggest that writing should not be taught

separately from reading, since the students in this study tended to draw heavily on teacher-provided sample articles. The need to integrate reading and writing has been confirmed by Eisterhold (1990). English reading materials are especially important because they provide not only ideas to stimulate thinking but also linguistic scaffolding for vocabulary, syntax, rhetoric, style, etc. The teacher should realize that, while prewriting group discussion may promote development of ideas and peer response sessions may help students discern writing strengths and weaknesses, there may nonetheless be a gap between what the students want to write and what their L2 ability allows them to accomplish. Language barriers need to be removed by providing more linguistic facilitation.

In addition, the results indicate that the students may not have done very much independent thinking since the content of their essays overlapped considerably with that of the sample articles. This suggests that students need to develop critical thinking skills, the importance of which has been confirmed by Haiman and Slomianko (1985) and Kurfiss (1988).

As to whether the L1 or L2 is more beneficial in prewriting group discussions and peer response sessions, teachers may not see any difference in the beginning stage when students are still learning to work in their groups. Therefore teachers should not feel frustrated by this; instead, they should be prepared to train their writing groups on a long-term basis.

In this study, only organization and persuasiveness were assessed when raters evaluated the writing samples. However, these two aspects are only two among the many that comprise effective persuasive writing. Appropriate word choice, acceptable grammar, style, etc., are also qualities that teachers should aim for. Further research is needed to determine what effect the use of the L1 or L2 has on student writing produced in writing groups.

This study attempts to provide useful input for teachers who use, or want to use, writing groups. However, it has its limitations. The small sample size for each of the treatment groups must be taken into consideration, since the researcher sampled only three out of the four prewriting discussion groups and four out of the ten peer response groups. The short duration of this experiment is another limitation. The training provided by the researcher may not have been sufficient to help students respond to writing effectively. This factor may have lessened the effectiveness of peer response on the performance of both language groups. In future research, sample size and duration of the study could be increased to strengthen validity.

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Appendix A

Major Arguments

Pros

1. If teachers are unsatisfied, they would not be willing to work hard.
2. Going on strike is an effective way for teachers to get what they want.
3. A teachers' strike gives students a chance to learn how to fight for one's rights and what democracy means.
4. The Constitution gives everyone the right to fight for what he/she deserves.
5. If the government does a good job, people will not condone strikes.
6. Teachers should have the right to strike, just like blue-collar workers.
7. Since teachers have a special status in our society, they should be given a chance to voice their views.
8. Serious consequences would result when unfair treatment exceeds teachers' level of toleration.
9. Teachers' rights have not been well protected by the government or any other agencies.

Cons

1. A Teachers' strike violates students' rights.
2. Teachers are models of virtue and play an important role in our society. Their strike will damage the public's image of them.
3. Teachers should seek other channels to solve their problems.
4. Students might imitate their teachers and go on a strike. They might learn to get what they want by improper means.
5. Teachers should organize unions to protect their rights or seek legislation to achieve their goal.
6. Teachers are employed by both the school and students. Therefore they have to solve their own problems, instead of violating their employers' rights.
7. Teachers' strikes cause social instability.
8. Teachers cannot strike because they are not blue-collar workers.
9. Our country is different from Japan or the U.S., and therefore our teachers cannot strike like their teachers.

Appendix B

Arguments Presented by L1 & L2 Groups

| | | L1 group | L2 group |
|-----------------|-----|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| S1 ^a | Con | 1* ^b , 2*, 3* | Pro 1, 2, 3 |
| S2 | Con | 2*, 4** ^c , 5* | Con 1*, 4**, 7, 9** |
| S3 | Con | 2*, 3*, 5*, 6 | Con 1*, 2*, 4**, 7 |
| S4 | Con | 1*, 2*, 3*, 4**, 5*, 7 | Con 1*, 2*, 3* |
| S5 | Con | 1*, 2*, 5*, 8** | Con 1*, 3*, 7 |
| S6 | Pro | 3, 4** | Con 1*, 2*, 5*, 7 |
| S7 | Pro | 4**, 5, 9* | Pro 1, 4** |
| S8 | Pro | 4** | Pro 1, 2, 3, 6*, 7, 8 |
| | Con | 1*, 5*, 8** | |
| S9 | Pro | 2, 6* | Con 1*, 2*, 3*, 5*, 10 |
| | Con | 2* | |
| S10 | Con | 2*, 3*, 4**, 5*, 7 | Pro 2, 4**, 9* |
| S11 | | | Con 1*, 2*, 3*, 4**, 5*, 8**, 11 |
| S12 | | | Pro 2, 9* |

Note. ^aSubject 1. ^b*=Idea which appeared in the English sample article. ^c**=Idea which appeared in either the English or the Chinese sample article. N = 22.