

Peer Response as an Authentic Assessment in a Process Approach Writing Classroom (Theoretical Perspective)

Henri Fatkurochman

henrifatkurochman@yahoo.com

Muhamammadiyah University of Jember

Abstract

Penilaian sejawat sebagai salah satu penilaian autentik menumbuhkan daya tarik tersendiri dalam pelajaran *writing*. Karena karakternya yang alami, penilaian sejawat mampu memberikan informasi dan bukti perkembangan peserta didik yang dapat digunakan dosen untuk mengevaluasi proses belajar di kelas *writing*. Artikel ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana penilaian sejawat digunakan untuk mengakses perkembangan kemampuan menulis mahasiswa Indonesia, faktor-faktor apa yang secara mendalam harus dipertimbangkan oleh dosen dalam implementasi *peer response group*, dan apa implikasi penilaian sejawat pada pebelajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing.

Kata Kunci : penilaian sejawat, penilaian autentik, pendekatan proses

Peer response as an authentic assessment has been a growing interest in writing pedagogy. Because of its natural character, peer feedback conveys information and evidence of students' progress that can be taken by lecturers to evaluate the process of learning in writing classroom. This article explores how peer response is utilized to assess Indonesian university students writing development, what factors that should be deeply considered by lecturers in implementing peer response group, and what implications of peer response for EFL students.

Keywords: Peer response, authentic assessment, and process approach..

Introduction

Understanding the context is certainly important for the English teachers and educators in order to plan effective approaches and methods, applicable strategies and techniques, and reliable evaluations and assessments. All of these efforts are consequently able to achieve meaningful instructions in the teaching of English. Shortly, context "informs the decisions we make as teachers" (O'Neill, Moore, and Huot, 2009, p. 59).

The teaching of English writing in Indonesian universities, specifically, remains problematic. The usual phenomenon that emerged is a great number of students who participate in the class. In this condition, lecturers must spend much time to give feedback on individual students' writing draft. It possibly made them provide minimum feedback or general corrections on spelling and grammatical error rather than giving commentary on the aspect of rhetoric. Another problem that might be faced is concerning to the writing test used to evaluate the writing quality. The summative test is frequently recommended to obtain information of the writing

product without assessing the process. In fact, many lecturers are experienced to provide their students models of text, instruct them to write, and assess their final drafts rather than monitoring and evaluating the progress of students' writing ability. When lecturers only grade the product, it reflects nothing about the writing process. This traditional assessment that merely evaluates the outcomes of writing skill does not accommodate pedagogical principles. As a result, students have always been engaged in illiteracy because they can easily download from internet and copy paste the published papers for their task submission.

To achieve holistic evaluation, an authentic assessment is quite necessary in the English as a foreign language writing classroom. This assessment attempts to gain information and evidence about the process (Huot, 2002; Williams, 2003). However, it should occur in a meaningful and real life context (Clark, 2003). In line with this opinion, Hyland (2003: 212) claimed "without information gained from assessments, it would be difficult to identify the gap between students' current and target performances and to help them progress." Based on the opinions, the assessment that emphasizes process can be implemented to gain significant information in writing instruction.

Peer response as an authentic assessment has been commonly practiced in teaching and learning writing. Although students are not as professional as their lecturers in providing feedback, it provides meaningful interaction between the writer and the reader. By effective training, this would be very helpful for students in revisions. This assessment can also be opted in the classroom with so many students by which the lecturers are lack of time to give feedback on individual students' paper.

This article attempts to explore how peer response is utilized as an authentic assessment in the EFL writing classroom in Indonesian university setting, what factors should be considered in the implementation of peer response, and what pedagogical implications for EFL students.

Writing Assessment: Toward a New Paradigm

The varied terms are used to refer to assessment applied in the process-based writing instruction: alternative assessment (Richard and Renandya, 2002), authentic assessment (), and instructive assessment (Huot, 2002).

In the teaching of writing for learners of English as a foreign language, the application of alternative assessments, such as peer feedback, writing conference, and portfolio, has been increased (Richard and Renandya, 2002). It has brought new procedures in evaluating writing ability. Since traditional assessment is considered irrelevant with the nature of writing process, authentic forms of assessment become alternatives attracting many practitioners in current practices.

In contrast to traditional forms of assessment such as standardized-tests or teacher-made tests, alternative assessments are more student-centered providing students with a tool to be more involved in their learning and giving them a better sense of control for their own learning. The alternative assessment procedures also provide teachers with useful information that can form the basis for improving their instructional plans and practices (Richard and Renandya, 2002). Garcia and Pearson, as quoted by Macias (2002: 339), pointed out "the main goal of alternative assessment is to gather evidence about how students are approaching, processing, and completing 'real life' tasks in a particular domain. The interest in the use of these forms of assessment in the classrooms reflects the changing paradigm in education in general and in second language learning in particular. This paradigm focuses on communication skill, learner-

centered, integrated skills, emphasis on process, open-ended and multiple solution, and tests that also teach (Richard and Renandya, 2002).

Table 1. Writing Assessment Paradigm

Old Paradigm	New Paradigm
Focus on language	Focus on communication
Teacher-centered	Learner-centered
Isolated skills	Integrated skills
Emphasis on product	Emphasis on process
One answer, one way correction	Open-ended, multiple solution
Test that test	Tests that also teach

(Adopted from Richards and Renandya, 2002: 335)

Macias (2002: 339) points out that the procedures of alternative assessment are nonintrusive, reflecting the curriculum, providing information on strengths and weaknesses of each individual student, providing a menu of possibilities, and multiculturally sensitive. In line with Macias' opinion, Huot (2002: 69) proposed the term "instructive assessment" in teaching writing in which it involves the student in all phases of the assessment. He argues that instructive evaluation demands the students and lecturers connect the ability to assess with the necessity to revise, creating motivation for revision that is often so difficult for them to obtain. This kind of assessment works to mitigate the gap between the often competing roles of students and writer, since instruction in evaluating writing provides students the rights and responsibilities that only lecturers have in traditional writing.

Many theories in foreign language learning have much adapted from second language learning, but those cannot be entirely reflected on the foreign language learners because of different purpose and orientation, process, and socio-cultural phenomenon (Hyland and Hyland, 2006; Manchon, 2009). Therefore, foreign language teaching and learning needs inquiry of education.

Concerning to writing pedagogy in foreign language setting, Cumming (2009: 226) suggests that the inquiry must be directed to three interfaces: theories, literacy conceptualizations, and approaches. He wrote:

..., future inquiry into foreign language writing is bound and obliged to address three interfaces that have emerged from previous inquiry, and in the process, to expand current definitions of how foreign language writing develops, what it involves and how it should be taught and assessed. One interface is through theories that link individual, psychological variables and development to personal-historical, socio-structural and cross-cultural factors. A second interface is through expanded conceptualizations of literacy that link conventional school-based and academic tasks to new technologies, multimedia communications and diverse notions of literacy at work and in society. The third interface is through approaches that link assessment closely to pedagogy, promote the development of learners' self awareness and abilities through the lifespan, and enhance teacher

education, ongoing professional development and cross-cultural understanding (2009: 226).

Based on Cumming's opinion, alternative assessment in the writing classroom should focus on student's writing ability, literacy enhancement, and pedagogical practices. Thus, assessing students' writing is not only a matter of grading and scoring, but it also involves in motivating, evaluating, revising, collecting evidence, and finding information.

Peer Response as an Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment indicates an assessment that emphasizes the process of learning. The other terms of authentic assessment is alternative assessment, performance assessment, portfolio assessment, informal assessment, situated (or contextualized) assessment, and assessment by exhibition.

Authentic assessment in writing classrooms needs basic principles, so that lecturers and instructors are able to implement and develop it for improvement. Huot (2002: 105) states that the new principles of writing assessment should be site-base, locally controlled, context sensitive, rhetorically-based, and accessibility. The principles are explained as follows.

1. Site-based

An assessment for writing is developed in response to a need that occurs at a specific site. Procedures are based upon the resources and concerns of an institution, department, program or agency, and its administrators, faculty, students, or other constituents.

2. Locally controlled

The individual institution or agency is responsible for maintaining, revising, updating, and validating the assessment procedures that should be carefully reviewed according to clearly outlined goals and guidelines on a regular basis to safeguard the concerns of those affected by the assessment process.

3. Context-Sensitive

The procedure should honor the instructional goals and objectives as well as the cultural and social environment or agency and its students, teachers, and other stakeholders. It is important to establish and maintain the cultural integrity necessary for the authentic reading and writing of textual communication.

4. Rhetorically-based

All writing assignments, scoring criteria, writing environments, and reading procedures should adhere to and supportable rhetorical principles integral to the thoughtful expression and reflective interpretation of texts.

5. Accessibility

All procedures and rationales for the creation of writing assignments, scoring criteria, and reading procedures, as well as samples of student work and rater judgment, should be available to those work is being evaluated.

Peer response, just as portfolio, protocol analysis, dialog journals, and other authentic forms of assessment, is claimed to be an alternative writing assessment in the writing instruction (Huot, 2002; Ferris, 2003; Elbow, 1982). In the EFL classroom of Indonesian university students where they have similar culture, peer review is possible to implement. The process of peer review could be considered a type of formative assessment (Coffin, *et al.*, 2003). In peer review,

the lecturer obtains evidence that reflects progress in writing. Since the goal of learning is not only learning how to write in English but also writing to learn, response from the reader is much needed in the process to produce a piece of writing.

Peer review as an authentic assessment might be meaningful in writing pedagogy. It provides an important way to open communication between the writer and the reader. An advantage of implementing peer response is that the students can communicate to share their ideas. In one side, it would give benefits for the writers to obtain feedback from the audience. For the readers, on the other side, they would also learn how to write from reading. Quoting Elbow, Penafiora (2002: 351) wrote: “when students write for their peers, they become very concerned about what they say and how they say it. Students may not be as skilled as their teacher at responding to each other’s work, but they are excellent in providing the one thing that the writers need most—an audience”. Weigle (2002) argues that in a networked classroom where peers are giving each other frequent feedback on their writing, the most successful papers may not be the ones with the most well-formed sentences and felicitous word choices, but the ones whose authors have reflected on their peers’ comments and have used this feedback to hone their arguments and ideas to meet the expectations of the audience. In Clark, *et.al* (2003: 213), it is stated: “feedback, or formative assessment, is given when students are still engaged in the writing process”. Peer response may also important to provide students’ understandings on their own writing and process of assessment:

Participating in assessment may give students greater insight into, and understanding of the assessment process itself, and also the kinds of writing that are valued within a particular discipline. It provides students writers with a wider range of judgments about their writing. Where students are involved in decision-making about assessment, in principle this may become less hierarchical ... In some cases... students’ participation in assessment is consistent with processes that they are engaged in their professional lives (i.e. evaluating the work of others in various way). More pragmatically, in cases where peer assessment reduces lecturers’ involvement, it saves lecturers marking time (Coffin, *et al.* 2003: 94).

Hyland and Hyland (2006: 206) argued “feedback plays a pedagogical role by pointing forward to other texts students will write, assisting students to work out the text’s potential and to comprehend the writing context, and providing a sense of audience and an understanding of the expectations of the communities they are writing for”.

Based on those opinions, peer review, whether it is designed in group or in pair, can primarily be used in formative assessment that purposes to evaluate the process of how students compose their writing drafts. Moreover, involving students in assessing the writing draft is part of learning because by assessing they can reflect it on their own.

Implementation of Peer Response

There are general principles in implementing peer response. Ferris (2003: 165) summarized them into the following suggestions for appropriate utilization of peer response. They are: (1) utilizing peer feedback consistently, (2) explaining the benefits of peer feedback to students, (3) preparing students carefully for peer response, (4) forming pairs or groups

thoughtfully, (5) providing structure for peer review session, (6) monitoring peer review sessions, and (7) holding students responsible for taking peer feedback opportunities seriously.

The first suggestion leads to specific questions and decisions. Firstly, how often peer-work should take place. Peer work can be determined at regular points in the multiple-draft writing cycle. Secondly, it relates how much class time peer response activities should be allotted. The answer of this issue is depending on the amount of the class time needed in the instruction.

The second suggestion is explaining the benefits of peer feedback to students which is considered to be important. The distrust and worry are possibly be felt by some students. The image of incompetence and harsh of their criticism made students do not enjoy working in groups with peers. Therefore, lecturers are suggested to acknowledge and address these concerns from the beginning of the writing course. Ferris (2003: 70) wrote a number of practical benefits of peer feedback:

- 1) Students gain confidence, perspective, and critical thinking skills from being able to read texts by peers writing on similar tasks.
- 2) Students get more feedback on their writing than they could from the teacher alone.
- 3) Students get feedback from a more diverse audience bringing multiple perspectives.
- 4) Students receive feedback from non-expert readers on ways in which their texts are unclear as to ideas and language.
- 5) Peer review activities build a sense of classroom community.

The next suggestion is preparing students carefully for peer response. Based on some studies, training students on what to look for and how to give useful feedback is effective if training is given intensively and if the training steps are repeated systematically (Ferris, 2003: 169).

The fourth suggestion concerns with how to manage students work collaboratively. Lecturers may form the group based on language background, gender, and ability. However, the best way to make effective work is forming writing community.

The fifth is providing structure for peer review session. The simplest way to do this activity is writing questions on the board or on an overhead for the students to discuss. Another effective way is to have students read peers' paper silently and to provide written responses on a peer feedback form, and then give them time to discuss feedback orally (Ferris, 2003: 171).

Monitoring peer review session is the sixth suggestion that must be done in the classroom. Lecturers can monitor on their desk while students are staying on task. Their involvement is not intrusive, but they can response to any question that might arise or deal with any interaction problems. Review is actually a reading activity. The relation between reading and writing is commonly acknowledged. Writing and reading are, in fact, inseparable. Harmer (2004: 28) even states, "to make students easy in writing is to let them read examples". While Raimes (1983: 51) pointed out that reading can do far more in the teaching of writing than simply provide subject matter for discussion and for composition topics. Moreover, he noted:

..., any reading the students do relates to writing in that what they read was once written. When they read a professional writing, they interact with the finished product. When students read each other's writing, the product is not perfect; the advantage is that students can intervene in the process, questioning, commenting on, and supporting each other's work in progress (1983: 51).

Williams (2003: 166) states moderately, “reading may be a necessary factor in writing skill, but it is not a sufficient factor”. Based on these opinions, writing is closely related to reading. Thus, utilizing reading activity in writing teaching learning process may give beneficial impact on students writing proficiency.

In peer review activity, students usually read critically their peer drafts to evaluate and the student-writer receives feedback for the improvement of his draft. During peer review session, they can communicate each other to confirm and evaluate their peer writing drafts. After providing written feedback, the reader and the writer discuss it before conducting revision.

The last suggestion deals with how to build students’ responsibility in giving feedback. This should be in certain mechanism, so students are realizing how peer feedback is valuable for them. Ferris (2003: 175) proposed the following way.

- 1) Giving students a few minutes to write individual responses of their experience after peer feedback session.
- 2) Having students to submit their drafts and revisions include peer feedback form and then responding students’ draft.
- 3) Building peer feedback into the grading scheme.
- 4) Asking students to compose a 1 to 2 page cover memo that details how they used peers’ suggestions in revisions and or explains why they choose not to incorporate these suggestions.

The technical ways explained above can be implemented in the EFL writing classroom if teachers with students and students with students work collaboratively. Therefore, it is necessary to build intensive as well as effective communication between teachers and students.

Implications for EFL Students

The implementation of peer response as an authentic assessment can theoretically be applied in the EFL university writing classroom. In many Indonesian universities that have a great number of students, peer response is possibly utilized to assess students’ writing with at least three purposes: practice, pedagogic, and pragmatic. For practical purpose, peer response asks students to learn writing from reviewing their peer’s draft and giving feedback. So, they can reflect what they have done on their own paper. The pedagogic purpose of using peer feedback is asking students to get more involved in process of teaching and learning. Lecturers can give teaching, training, and advising on students. The next purpose that would be pragmatic is helping lecturers in managing a big writing class.

The second reason why peer response can be implemented is that Indonesian university students have similar culture in terms of culture of learning and language use. In foreign language classroom, students have relatively the same way of learning and experience. They also use the same language. So, it would be easier for them provide feedback to their peer’ writing and communicate that feedback in review session. They do not face cultural factors that would be barriers in building their communication skill. Cumming illustrates the different instructional situation between foreign language education and second language education as follows:

Student learner group in foreign language education mostly have homogenous language and cultural backgrounds because they tend to be the majority population in a particular country and to be mainly in academic rather than vocational streams of education. As a result, they tend to possess similar (though

often limited) attitudes toward, experiences with and aspirations for future uses of the foreign language.

In contrast are situations of so-called second language education, where students acquire the additional language in social contexts where that language is widely used outside of formal classroom instruction... Second language education is characterized by diverse learner populations, often with mixtures of first languages and previous educational backgrounds as well as differing status, mobility and intergroup relations in respect to the majority language they are learning (in Manchon, 2009, 212).

Based on the illustration above, it indicates that the differences of cultural backgrounds which frequently emerge constraints disturbing the implementation of peer response in second language context is not relatively found in foreign language education. However, Indonesian students are not common in providing a balanced side of comment.

Once lecturers decide to use peer response, they can assist by modifying the following techniques suggested by Hyland and Hyland (2006: 54-55): (1) explain the purpose and advantages of peer response, so students understand the objective, (2) train students in effective peer response strategies written and verbally, (3) Make a group of pair or three students carefully, (4) Place closely-related students in one group for enjoyment, (5) Give students sufficient time to provide written feedback before they meet in pairs or as a group, (6) If using electronic feedback, e-mail or web posting is better used rather than chat room to give students ample reflection and response time, and (7) adjust peer response procedures based on feedback from students.

Conclusion

Peer response is necessary to utilize in assessing the development of writing ability for EFL students because it gives pedagogical practices and autonomy for learners to monitor and evaluate the process of writing. By peer response, process approach could be covered in order to gain competency targeted by curricula. Another aspect that can be found is that the experience in providing response can emerge not only writing skill, but also communicative skill and the spirit of literacy.

However, there are some factors should be considered on the implementation of peer response. The first place concerns with the culture of learning. Our university students in majority are not used to provide criticism. Based on experience, they only wish to give positive comment, but not negative one. It is part of Indonesian culture. So, explaining about the values of positive and negative sides of comment is necessary in order they realize that criticism should be provided in balance and giving them effective training in providing feedback should be recommended. The second one deals with gender. Gender-mixed group in peer response if it is not carefully arranged would make problem of communication. To avoid the problem, the same gender in group response can be done.

Peer response can be utilized in the EFL university writing classroom in the following way: (1) explain the value, purpose, and advantages of peer response, (2) train students in effective peer response strategies written and verbally, (3) Make a group of pair or three students by similar gender (male and male/female and female), (4) Place closely-related students in one group for enjoyment, (5) Give students sufficient time to provide written feedback before they

meet in pairs or as a group, (6) Use electronic feedback, e-mail or web posting if it is possible to do, and (7) adjust peer response procedures based on feedback from students.

Last but not least, by implementing peer feedback in the EFL university writing classroom can provide lecturers authentic evidence to assess students' writing ability.

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