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Upper Secondary Students’ Opinions of the Value of Peer Response

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Abstract

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Abstract: Peer response is a method which is widely used on higher levels of second-language learning in Sweden, such as universities. The approach is not used as much in upper secondary school; and, the aim of this paper is to investigate upper secondary students’ opinions of the value of peer response. The aim is also to investigate if the teacher’s grading differed between the first version of a text and the final version that had been revised after peer response.

Research has shown that there seems to be more negotiation of meaning when students are working collaboratively and this can lead to better revisions of written texts, especially in terms of content development. On the other hand, collaborative writing can also create anxiety in some students who therefore dislike peer response. This investigation has shown that students taking part in the investigation are generally positive towards the approach. They also believe that giving and receiving feedback can help them improve their writing. There are, however, a few students who dislike it and want the texts to be read only by the teacher. The investigation has also shown that students mainly focus on formal aspects such as spelling and grammar when giving feedback to each other, whereas content was rarely commented on. Moreover, the results have shown that many of the students’ grades improved on the final version compared to the first version. In conclusion, this investigation indicates that peer response could be used as an alternative, or complement, to ordinary teacher-student feedback in upper secondary school.

Nyckelord: Peer response, collaborative writing, process writing, negotiation of meaning, scaffolding, feedback, second-language development.
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1. Introduction and aims

To a second-language learner, written assignments are not easy, and writing does not come naturally. Writing is a complex process that involves “a set of complicated cognitive operations” (Hedge 2000:203) such as generating ideas, selecting appropriate language, making a draft, reading and reviewing. After the written assignment has been read and reviewed, it sometimes also has to be revised and edited before the final version of the written text is handed in to the teacher for assessment.

Whether it concerns written assignments or other activities in the classroom, teachers face the difficult task of encouraging students to assume more responsibility for their learning (Hedge 2000:86). It is very important that second-language learners are actively involved in the learning process, and one way of involving students is through peer response (Spear 1988:6). In peer response groups concerned with written assignments, students share their working drafts with other students and students provide each other with feedback so that the texts can be improved before handing in the final versions to the teacher. When students are working collaboratively with writing they are engaged in defining problems, and they are critically exploring solutions to these problems. Collaborative working allows students to train their skills in listening, talking and reading, as well as writing. They also learn to assess their own performance (Spear 1988:6).

Students need some form of feedback that shows them how others look upon their writing, and what kind of revisions have to be made in order to strengthen their writing (Goldstein 2004:64). Peer response is a method that can be taught, and it could be used as an important tool in improving students’ writing. While peer response is widely used on higher levels of second-language learning in Sweden, such as universities, the approach is not used as much in upper secondary school. The aim of this paper is to investigate second-year upper secondary students’ opinions of the value of peer response. The aim is also to investigate if the teacher notices improvements in, for example, content, sentence structure, word choice and grammar that will change the grading of the final version of the written assignment as compared to the first draft.
2. Background

2.1 Product-centered writing contra process writing
If one considers written assignments in school, teachers have previously focused more on product, that is on form and the finished text, rather than on meaning and the process of writing itself (Björk & Räisänen 2003:14). Today, changes in pedagogy have given us a classroom where the attention is drawn to the whole process of writing, which also includes any kind of work that has to take place before we reach the goal of a finished text – such as conducting background research and writing drafts that will be revised a number of times after they have been read with critical eyes. Traditionally, the main concern of writing has been grammatical correctness, or to test a student’s knowledge on a certain subject, but nowadays we no longer consider writing only as a testing instrument, but also as a tool for the development of language proficiency and critical thinking. Writing is a process that involves reflection, learning, discovering, understanding, and communicating ideas and emotions (Björk & Räisänen 2003:15-16).

2.2 Four theories that support peer response activities
When it comes to first-language learning there are some convincing arguments in favour of collaborative writing, but the studies carried out in this field do not necessarily apply to second-language students (Nelson & Murphy 1993:135). Therefore, the goals of peer response groups are generally more easily achieved in first-language writing, while second-language peer response groups are bound to face more difficulties in achieving success, because of the handicap of not having the second language as their mother tongue.

There are four theoretical stances that support the use of peer response activities in the second-language writing classroom from a cognitive and psycholinguistic perspective. These four stances are process writing theory, collaborative learning theory, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, and interaction and second language acquisition (SLA). These four theoretical stances match each other, and to some degree have common characteristics (Liu & Hansen 2002:2).

2.2.1 Process writing theory
The first stance that supports peer response is process writing theory, which emerged as a response to the traditional view of writing as a “product-oriented activity” (Liu & Hansen
Process writing theory surfaced in the late 1960s and early 1970s with Mofett 1968, Emig 1971, and Elbow 1973, and has influenced second-language writing profoundly. Its focus on the process of writing as “dynamic, nonlinear, and recursive” (Liu & Hansen 2002:3) has encouraged students and teachers to look upon the writing process as something that occurs in many stages. These include brainstorming subjects, writing, rewriting, and revising after feedback, i.e. all the components that are included in peer response activities. Through process writing, and peer response, students get a number of opportunities to go through their writing, and to receive feedback on their writing. This process of going through a text multiple times builds “audience awareness; helps make reading-writing connections; and builds content, linguistic, and rhetorical schemata” (Liu & Hansen 2002:3).

2.2.2 Collaborative learning theory
Another stance, with Bruffee as a leading proponent, that supports peer response is the collaborative learning theory. The theory is based on the assumption that “learning, as well as knowledge itself, is socially constructed” (Liu & Hansen 2002:3). This means that we learn more effectively if we have a chance to negotiate meaning with others. Negotiation of meaning occurs when second-language students work together as a group, and are pushed to “produce comprehensive output” (Hedge 2000:13) by, for example, repeating or rephrasing so that they can make themselves understood within the group. Collaborative writing and revising can lead to decision-making on how to best improve written texts and provide students with an opportunity to discuss and compare what they have learnt, and how to apply it (Liu & Hansen 2002:4).

2.2.3 Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development
A third stance is Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, which is based on the belief that an individual can widen his or her existing competence through the guidance of someone more experienced. The space between what the individual can do independently and what he or she can do with the help of someone else is called the zone of proximal development (ZPD), and the helpful environment within the ZPD is known as scaffolding (Liu & Hansen 2002:4-5). Collective scaffolding occurs in group work since each student, as an individual, is a novice, but all knowledge put together within the group makes its members experts when teaching each other. One of the positive effects of scaffolding seems to be “long-term language development” (Liu & Hansen 2002:5-6).
2.2.4 Interaction and second language acquisition (SLA)

The fourth stance, which concerns research on interaction and second language acquisition (SLA), offers clear evidence that working in groups and negotiating meaning leads to increased comprehension. Increased comprehension, in turn, leads to faster and better acquisition of the targeted language (Liu & Hansen 2002:6). Moreover, it pushes learners to produce comprehensive output (see 2.2.2), which is a necessity for second language acquisition to take place.

2.3 Benefits of peer response

2.3.1 Negotiation of meaning

One of the benefits of peer response is that learners are given opportunities to negotiate meaning by asking questions and to discuss what changes can be made to improve their written text. Peer comments on and questions about a first draft can inspire students to widen their approach to a subject, as well as to anticipate questions from the reader and, as a result, incorporate answers in the final version (Flash 2005). Research shows that when peer groups are cooperative, there appears to be more negotiated interaction, which leads to better revisions of written tasks. At times, peers’ comments can be more specific than the teachers’, which also helps in revising drafts (Liu & Hansen 2002:26). Teacher feedback is often given in written form and not discussed face to face with students. Consequently, the feedback may be difficult for students to understand when they are to revise a text. This kind of written feedback may lead to students not correcting what the teacher wanted them to correct. Teachers may also focus more on grammatical concerns when giving feedback, whereas peers tend to focus more on content and rhetorical concerns (Liu & Hansen 2002:26), which helps the writer in developing a more substantial text.

2.3.2 A real audience for students’ writing

Another benefit of peer response is that students are provided with a real audience for their writing, who can comment and give suggestions on how to improve the text (Flash 2005). Group interaction gives the students a feeling that writing is not “just what you end up with” (Spear 1988:4), but an opportunity to write for and suit a real audience who has an opinion on the choice of subject, the purpose of the text, and how well the writer’s ideas are conveyed to the readers of the text.
Whereas experienced writers are well aware of their purpose with a text and can anticipate readers’ expectations, less experienced writers are more worried about formal aspects such as punctuation, word choice, and grammatical correctness, which they believe are the teacher’s main concern (Spear 1988:7). Peer response groups provide a more realistic environment that helps inexperienced writers to see beyond formal errors, and to focus on, for example, a content that is more suitable for the text’s intended audience.

### 2.3.3 A sense of ownership

A third benefit is that peers’ comments can be ignored in a way that teachers’ comments cannot, and this gives students a sense of ownership of their writing (Nelson & Murphy 1993:141). Teachers are viewed as authorities on the subject and any comments on content, or vocabulary choices, may lead students to change their texts, and as a consequence the texts might not be felt to be their own anymore. After substantial feedback from the teacher, a student’s text may improve a lot, but the students’ view of the teacher as the one who knows best, who “holds the authority of both experience and the grade book” (Kraemer 1993:137), makes it difficult to ignore the comments of the teacher in the same way as peers’ comments, and the question remains: to whom does the text belong after having been revised, the teacher or the student?

### 2.3.4 Autonomous learning

A fourth benefit of peer response concerns the encouragement of students to take more responsibility for their second language learning. To promote second language learning, including second language writing development, students need to engage in interactive activities (Liu & Hansen 2002:6-7). Students do not only negotiate meaning through peer response, they are also allowed to show what they know about writing. Peer response activities can help students to take responsibility for their own learning as well as to develop critical thinking skills with respect to their own writing when looking at others’ writing. Group activities also help in solving writing problems that might not have been possible to solve if the students had worked individually, since all group members bring different knowledge to the group and the collective knowledge, i.e. what they all know together, increases (Liu & Hansen 2002: 3).
2.4 Negative aspects of peer response

2.4.1 Students’ uncertainty about mastering the second language

When it comes to negative aspects of peer response, one has to consider that second language learners are in the process of learning a new language (see 2.2). The students may not trust their peers’ responses to their writing, or mistrust their own capability of giving response to peers. When first language students give feedback to each other’s writing they benefit from knowing the structure of the language, and therefore they might feel more secure in their role (Nelson & Murphy 1993:135-6). This, i.e. not having mastered the second language, can also result in poorly given peer response to a draft, and, as a consequence, actually weaken a text when students incorporate their peers’ comments.

Students’ uncertainty as to their capability of expressing themselves in their writing can also manifest itself in an unwillingness to share their writing with the group members. Students generally want the help and advice from their peers but some might be afraid of looking foolish in front of their classmates because of their poor writing, as they believe (Spear 1988:24). The same doubt as to their capability might hinder the students from criticising or evaluating their peers’ texts and, consequently, render the whole purpose of peer response meaningless.

2.4.2 Group dynamics

In some students, peer response may evoke a feeling of anxiety, resulting in them becoming rather defensive when their work is being criticised. This discomfort may lead to a breakdown in communication (Liu & Hansen 2002:11-12). Not feeling comfortable within the group could also contribute to students not seeing the benefits of sharing their written assignments with others, and their expecting ugly comments from their peers about how bad their written assignment is. These expectations of being criticised may also restrain students from giving constructive criticism to their peers in return, since it could evoke the same feeling in their peers. In order to preserve harmony within the group, members may avoid bringing up problematic issues. As a result, the process of improving the writing may never take place (Spear 1998:24).
2.4.3 Time

Another negative aspect of peer response concerns time. A typical language teacher has many areas - literature, vocabulary, grammar, and speaking and listening tasks, to mention some - to cover during a school year, and peer response activities are time-consuming. A teacher has to put an incredible amount of “reflectivity, time, and effort” (Brunjes 1993:22) into peer response groups if they are to be successful.

Some teachers might be tempted to view response groups as a time-saving device they can use in order to reduce their own workload, and there is a belief that peer response activities increase efficacy in a product-centered classroom (Brunjes 1993:22). The main concern of product-centered writing is grammatical correctness, sentence structure, spelling and punctuation (see 2.1). If peer response groups are used only to eliminate these kinds of errors in a text, the method might be time-saving for the teacher, who does not have to spend the same amount of time correcting formal errors as before. This, however, is not supposed to be the point of peer response groups.

The main purpose of peer response is to concentrate on the process of writing. A teacher has to consider this process as much more complex and time-consuming than simply writing a text individually and then letting the peers check the text for grammatical errors before it is handed in for assessment. Teachers who want to introduce peer response in the writing classroom also have to consider the fact that it may take months of preparation to create an environment where the students feel comfortable enough to give and receive response from each other (Brunjes 1993:47).

2.5 Teachers’ and students’ roles in the classroom

In the traditional classroom, teachers and students have certain roles that provide a comfortable classroom where everyone knows what they are supposed to do. In the writing classroom, students are normally supposed to produce a piece of text that the teacher, in turn, will read and evaluate (Ause 1993:162). Both activities usually take place in isolation in contrast to peer response activities where knowledge is created and evaluated collectively. Traditionally, teachers are expected “to pour ready-made, pre-packaged knowledge into their students” (Spear 1993:20), but in peer response groups students take on responsibilities that usually belong exclusively to the teacher; this interferes with the roles students and teachers are used to playing.
Teachers are used to controlling learning in the classroom, and handing over part of that control to the students, by using peer response, can be frightening for both teachers and students. A main concern of both teachers’ and students’ is whether the latter are in fact able to see the problems in their peers’ written assignments (see 2.4.1), as well as the fact that the students themselves have to take responsibility for their learning (see 2.3.4). There are students who are convinced that the only way to learn is from the teacher, and that group work takes time from the direct teacher instructions they believe they learn the most from (Spear 1988:3).

If peer response is to be introduced in the classroom, and have a chance to work out, teachers and students have to abandon their stereotypical roles where the teachers’ “greater knowledge and experience justifies them as judges and critics” and the students perceive themselves as “followers and suppliants” (Spear 1988:55).

The aim of this paper is to investigate Swedish upper secondary students’ opinions of the value of peer response as a method of improving written English assignments. Another aim is to investigate if peer response leads to improvements that actually affect the grading of the final versions of the assignments as compared to first, individually written drafts.

3. Methods
My investigation is based on a questionnaire handed out in an eleventh grade class during two English lessons. This took place in connection with tasks where the students were supposed to give peer response to each other’s writing. The first task was designed for the purpose of this investigation only; the second task was part of ordinary lesson activities. The purpose was to find out what kind of response the students gave one another, if they thought that peer response could help them in their writing, and if peer response affected their relationships with the other group members. As to the improvements between the first drafts and the final versions of their assignments, I let their teacher grade both versions.

3.1 Subjects
The students who took part in my investigation were 17 eleventh grade students at an upper-secondary school in a medium-sized town in central Sweden. The class consisted of 16 male students and one female student. Initially, the idea was that the students should read and write
comments on each other’s writing, and revise the texts, as homework. The only part that was supposed to take place in the classroom was the group discussions, so that the investigation would not take too much time away from the ordinary lessons. But after discussing this with my teacher trainer, we decided on letting the students do all the peer response and revising in class in order to eliminate the risk of their not handing in the assignments on time.

3.2 Instructions to the students

In the first meeting with the students I informed them of how peer response works, since they had never used this method before. I explained that they were supposed to write a first draft of a text individually during one lesson and, that each text would be discussed in groups of three or four students the next time they met for class. I pointed out that the group discussions should focus on how the texts could be improved and, that the students would have a chance to revise their texts according to the suggestions from their peers before they were handed in for final grading. Examples given to the students of what to look for in their classmates’ writing were:

- What do you think about the content; could something be added or taken away?
- What is the main purpose of the text?
- What is positive/negative in the text?
- Is the text coherent; how are the paragraphs linked together?
- What about sentence structure; can short sentences be linked together, or can long sentences be split?
- Are words and expressions appropriate to the style of the text?
- Are there any spelling/grammar/punctuation mistakes?

I emphasised the importance of remembering that the suggestions from the peers on how to improve the texts were just suggestions and, that each and everyone had to decide for themselves what to incorporate in the final version of the text. I also emphasised that the students should be ‘nice’ to each other when giving criticism, but not be afraid to point out mistakes in their peers’ texts.
3.3 Written assignments and peer response

The students had to write two different texts that were discussed in peer response groups on two different occasions. The first assignment was free writing based on a picture, and a sheet featuring different pictures to choose from was handed out in class (see Appendix 1). The students were told that if they should have difficulties in choosing a picture to write about they could write about something else. The time at their disposal to complete the assignment was approximately 60 minutes. Given that this is not much, one could not expect the students to write long texts; ¾ of a page to a full page seemed reasonable.

16 students were present at the first peer response session and gave feedback to each other’s writing. However, only 15 students received response on their writing from their peers since one student did not have a text. The class was divided into four groups of four students that would yield a comparable mix of students’ proficiency levels within the groups. I sat in on the groups initially to make sure that everybody knew what they were supposed to do. After all students had given and received feedback on their assignments, they were asked to answer a questionnaire regarding these activities (see Appendix 2). The last part of the first assignment was to revise the text after receiving feedback from the peers. 16 students were present and handed in their final versions, but 4 students chose not to answer the last part of the questionnaire, i.e. the one concerning the revisions of assignments.

The second assignment was to write a summary of a text, an assignment not as free in nature as the first one. The text “The Yankees are coming!” is an extract of 125 lines (four pages) from the novel *Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell and concerns Atlanta’s surrender after 117 days of siege in 1864. It focuses on how the main character of the novel, the spoiled Scarlett, is searching for a doctor to help deliver the baby of her friend Melanie. “The Yankees are coming!” is part of the course literature, and the students listened to it before writing the summary. Because of this, the time remaining to write the summary was only about 45 minutes.

In the next lesson, the same procedure of giving response to each other’s written assignments was applied as on the first occasion. This time the students knew what to do, so it was not necessary for me to take part in the group discussions. After responding, the students answered the same questionnaire on giving and receiving feedback as the first time. The reason is that I wanted to determine if their opinion had changed between the first session of
peer response and the second time. On this occasion, 16 students were present and gave feedback to each other, but only 13 chose to answer the questionnaire. On the last occasion we met, the students had once again a chance to revise their texts, and 11 students handed in their final versions, but only 9 chose to answer the last part of the questionnaire, i.e. the one concerning the revisions of the assignments.

3.4 Questionnaire
Since peer response is not used much in upper secondary school, I was mainly interested in finding out the students’ opinion of the value of peer response. I gave all the students who participated in the survey a questionnaire that was divided into three sections: Giving peer response, Receiving peer response, and After revising (see Appendix 2). The questions in the questionnaire mostly relate to what has been mentioned in the background section about positive and negative aspects of peer response.

My first intention was to let the students answer the questionnaire after they had done revisions of the first assignment, and once again after their revisions of the second assignment. I soon realised that the students might not remember then what they had given feedback on, and how they felt about receiving feedback from the peers, so the original idea was abandoned. Instead, I let the students answer the first two parts directly after they had given and received feedback on their writing, and saved the last part until after revisions had been made.

3.5 The teacher’s part in the investigation
Another aim of this paper was to investigate if the teacher noticed differences between the first drafts of the assignments and the final versions that would be significant enough to affect the grades. For the sake of objectivity, copies of the first versions of the assignments were made for the teacher and handed in directly after the writing class. They were evaluated before the assignments had been revised according to peers’ suggestions. The final versions were graded separately a week later. The teacher made all the assessments of the students’ writing.

3.6 Limitations
The preferred design of this investigation would have been to set up writing workshops where the students could have experienced all aspects of peer response. These aspects would have
included: discussions within the group to generate ideas on what topic to write about; discussions on what to include in their writing and research regarding the chosen subject; several peer response opportunities, with subsequent revisions, as the text evolves; evaluation of group collaboration; and ultimate revisions after teacher feedback. This was not possible due to time constraints. Instead, I had to focus on the part where peer response was used to eliminate writing errors. Even here it would have been preferable to have more than one occasion per assignment where the students could give each other feedback so that the texts could have been further developed. However, these limitations are not expected to affect the outcome of this study in an undue manner, which is mainly to concentrate on the students’ opinions of the value of peer response in improving their writing.

4. Results and analysis

In this section, I have chosen to deal with my research questions in the same order as they appear in the questionnaire. The first part thus concerns giving feedback, the second part concerns receiving feedback, and the third part concerns the revision of the written assignments. Question number four from the last part of the questionnaire (see Appendix 2) will be dealt with separately since it concerns what the students thought of peer response in general. I have also chosen not to evaluate and discuss the research questionnaire handed out for the second assignment separately. Any changes in opinion between first and second assignment will be addressed in the same section. Any changes in the grading between first and final versions of the assignments will be dealt with last.

In the following sections, I will include examples of some of the answers in the questionnaires. When referring to the first questionnaire, and when quoting sentences from it, I have used the abbreviation Q.1 (questionnaire 1), and when referring to the second questionnaire, and quoting sentences from it, I have used Q.2. When dealing with differences between the first and the second version of the written assignments, I have used the abbreviations V.1 (version 1) and V.2 (version 2). Finally, when quoting students’ comments, I have eliminated formal writing errors in their answers.

4.1 Giving peer response

The first part of the questionnaire concerned student response to each other’s writing. As mentioned in section 3.3, 16 students both gave peer response on the first assignment and
answered the questionnaire. When it came to the second assignment, 16 students were present and gave feedback, but only 13 chose to hand in the questionnaire.

**4.1.1 What kind of peer response did the students give?**

The first question on the questionnaire concerned what kind of response the students gave to each other’s writing. The main aim was to find out whether the students focused more on formal errors such as spelling or grammar, or if they would also comment on, for example, content and style. According to Q.1, 14 students out of 16 commented on spelling errors and 9 on grammatical errors in connection with the first assignment. By contrast, only 2 students commented on content. Another area that seemed to be prioritised was word choice, which 8 students commented on. The remaining comments that were given concerned, in order of frequency, sentence structure, word order, and punctuation (see figure 1).

![Figure 1](image)

The results from Q.2 show that 8 of 13 students commented on spelling, and 6 students on grammar. Nobody commented on content. The remaining comments that were given concerned, in order of frequency, sentence structure and word choice. There were also no comments on punctuation and word order (see figure 2).

![Figure 2](image)
According to Q.1, almost all of the students commented on spelling errors in connection with the first assignment, and a little more than half of them on grammar, whereas only 2 of the students commented on content. According to Q.2, almost 2/3 of the students commented on spelling in connection with the second assignment, a little less than half on grammar and as many as half on sentence structure, whereas nobody commented on the content.

The differences between the surveys can be explained by the nature of the two assignments. Since the first assignment was in the form of free writing, spelling errors are more common there compared to the second assignment, which was a summary and more bound to another text. The use of direct quotations and access to the original text possibly eliminated some spelling mistakes. The difference between the frequency of comments on sentence structure, with the higher percentage in the second assignment, may also be linked to the more formal nature of the summary. The fact that content was not commented on at all in the second assignment, but commented on by some students in the first assignment, probably also reflects the nature of assignments e.g.: as could be expected, all texts had more or less the same content in the second assignment.

As to the fairly low number of students commenting on grammar errors, including word order, compared to spelling errors, in both the first and the second assignments, this might be explained by students’ uncertain command of the second language. Almost all of the texts in both assignments contained grammar errors to some degree. As noted by Nelson & Murphy (1993:135-6), one of the key issues that separate first-language writing response groups from second-language groups is the latter’s insecurity in giving feedback due to not having
mastered the second language. One of the main areas of difficulty when learning a new language is grammar.

As both surveys show, the students seem to focus especially on formal aspects of writing when it comes to peer response. This points towards the traditional view of writing as a product-oriented activity mentioned by Liu & Hansen (2002:3), but it can also be due to the nature of the peer response elicited in this study. Whereas peer response groups are supposed to focus more on the whole process of writing, including brainstorming on subjects, and to have a number of opportunities to go through their writing (Liu & Hansen 2002:3), this study has only concerned a small part of the peer response package.

4.1.2 Does responding to peers’ texts make the students more aware of different writing errors, and what kind of errors in particular?

On the question whether or not they became more aware of different writing errors from looking at their peers’ texts, 7 out of 16 students answered yes, and 9 students answered no in Q.1. After the second occasion of giving feedback to each other, only 4 students out of 13 answered that they had become more aware of different writing errors. Given that 3 students chose not to hand in the part of Q.2 that concerned the giving of response, it is difficult to tell if the overall opinion had changed between the first and second round of peer response.

If one assumes that the view has not changed that much between the first and the second occasion of answering the questionnaire, a little more than half of the class did not find that their peers’ texts made them more aware of different writing errors. One important key factor to take into consideration when it comes to those students who answered no on Q.1 and Q.2 is proficiency levels. Some students are at a high proficiency level (cf. the student text in Appendix 3) where their giving response to other students does not make them more aware of writing mistakes because they are already, to some degree, aware of them and know how to avoid them. Other students are at a low proficiency level (cf. the student text in Appendix 4) and may not be able to detect the problems in a text; hence they also have difficulties in becoming more aware of different writing errors. The difference in students’ proficiency levels could possibly gain from being taken into account by the teacher when putting the groups together for peer response sessions. In order for students to find peer response resourceful, groups might benefit from being fairly homogeneous when it comes to proficiency levels.
The students who answered yes on Q.1 and Q.2 were also asked to specify what kind of writing errors they became more aware of. Here are some of the answers:

- Poor sentence structure (Q.1)
- Spelling and sentence structure (Q.2)
- Mostly grammar mistakes (Q.1)
- Content and style (Q.1)
- Words and grammar (Q.2)

As mentioned in section 4.1.1, students seem to mainly be concerned with errors in grammar and spelling. Most of the examples the students have mentioned in their responses in both Q.1 and Q.2 concern these areas.

Another question was whether the students felt that giving feedback to other people’s writing could help them in their own writing. 13 students answered yes in Q.1, 2 answered no, and one student was not sure but added “not this time” (see figure 3). In Q.2, 11 students answered yes and 2 students no (see figure 4). Even if one considers the possibility that the 3 students not handing in Q.2 would have answered no to the question, the students thinking that giving peer response can help them in their own writing would still be high.

![Figure 3](image-url)
This result may seem a bit surprising since more than half of the class responded to the preceding question that giving response did not make them more aware of writing errors. If the students did not become more aware of writing errors, why did they believe that giving peer response could improve their writing? One explanation could be that the two assignments used in the investigation did not make them more aware of errors, but that peer response used on other assignments possibly could.

4.1.3 Do students find it difficult to give feedback on other students’ writing?
While first-language students benefit from knowing the structure of the language when giving peer response to each other, second-language learners are in a different situation (see 2.4.1). Therefore it seemed only natural to ask the students if they found it difficult to respond to other students’ writing and if so, what they found difficult. Out of 16 students handing in Q.1, 10 answered that they did not find it difficult, while one student did not answer the question at all. In Q.2, 5 students out of 13 answered no, and 3 students chose not to answer the question. This means that on both occasions, 5 students found it difficult to respond to their peers’ writing.

As expected from previous answers, some of the difficulties concerned finding grammar and spelling mistakes, but the survey also revealed other problems students had: criticising classmates, difficulties in expressing the message that they want to convey, and fear of making mistakes when correcting their peers’ texts. One student also mentioned that it was difficult since s/he did not know English very well, and therefore could not be expected to correct other students who make fewer mistakes than herself/himself. The following are some examples of comments from the students who answered no in Q.1 and Q.2:
No, not if I know the others well, but if I do not it is harder because I get more unsure of myself (Q.2)

-It was not that difficult, but it may be more difficult after we have written some more (Q.1)

-No, it is very good (Q.1)

-No, I usually correct errors for my friends on the Internet (Q.1)

As the survey shows, the students found it difficult, to some degree, to respond to their peers’ writing. This includes even some of those who answered no in Q.1 and Q.2. Mostly, the difficulties were due to the fact that they felt insecure about expressing themselves in a foreign language and were afraid of not being able to detect the errors in their peers’ texts. Apart from showing some uncertainty, however, the students who answered no in Q.1 and Q.2 were in the majority, and this came as a surprise since the students had never used this method before.

4.1.4 Does peer response affect the students’ relations with each other?

One of the difficulties of responding to each other’s texts was what students experienced as criticism of their peers, and some of them stressed the importance of knowing classmates fairly well when commenting on their errors (see 4.1.3). Research shows that most students want the help and the advice from their classmates when it comes to eliminating writing errors (Spear 1988:24), but peer response groups can also provoke a feeling of anxiety, and students can become rather defensive when their work is being criticised (Liu & Hansen 2002:11-12). According to both Q.1 and Q.2, only one of the students thought that peer response groups affected their relationship with one another. The majority of the students did not see this as a problem and answered that they could talk to each other without problems. However, one of the students who answered that it did not affect their relations also answered that s/he really did not know, but that “this is school and you can’t let that affect your friendship”.

This investigation shows that the large majority of the students in this class did not think that there were any problems with working in peer response groups because they knew each other quite well. They had, after all, studied English together for one and a half years. However, the result might not have been the same if the survey had been conducted in a tenth grade class at the beginning of the school year. Tenth grade students do not usually know each other very well.
4.2 Receiving response

The second part of the questionnaire concerned receiving response from the other group members. 15 students received feedback on their writing on the first occasion and answered the questionnaire. One student did not have a text that s/he could receive any feedback on, but took part in the group discussions of the other texts. 16 students were also present on the second occasion of receiving peer response, but only 13 answered the questionnaire.

4.2.1 Students’ opinions about peers reading their texts

In order to receive feedback on a written text students have to be willing to show their texts to the other group members and let them comment on all aspects, both positive and negative. Peer response activities interfere with the roles that students and teachers are used to playing (see 2.5). The students are used to letting only the teacher read what they have written, and some students prefer it that way (Ause 1993:162).

Many of the students participating in this survey answered in both Q.1 and Q.2 that they were positive towards letting other students read their texts, but there were a few who did not know what they felt about it. Out of the 15 students that answered Q.1, 3 answered that they prefer the teacher only to read their assignments. These students clearly stated that they found it hard to let somebody else besides the teacher read their texts. In Q.2, 2 out of 13 students answered that they prefer the teacher to read their assignments, but they also added that if only the teacher reads their assignments they do not benefit from discovering their mistakes themselves, and as a consequence might not learn from writing assignments in the same way.

In addition, one student who at first had been positive about peers reading the assignments changed her/his mind a little and recognised that it was a bit hard to let her/his classmates read the texts, but concluded by saying “but it is not the end of the world”. Some examples of comments from the students regarding their peers reading their texts are as follows:

- I do not mind the peers reading my text, but it is good that the teacher does it, because she sees many errors (Q.1)
- Both should read it and give response (Q.1)
- It is good because it shows me what other persons think about it (Q.1)
- Yes and no. It depends on what we have written (Q.1)
- I do not mind as long as I don’t have to read it for them (Q.2)
- I do not like it! (Q.1)
- I find it hard when somebody else than the teacher looks at what you have written (Q.1)
- It is good to see what other people that do not work with the text think about it (Q.1)
- It is good, but I prefer the teacher (Q.2)
- I do not know (Q.2)

The results of the survey indicate that a majority of the students considered that it was beneficial to let the other students read the texts, or at least that they did not mind that they did. Yet, there were students who did not approve of their fellow students reading their work, but preferred it to be read by the teacher only. This unwillingness to share their writing might be due to the students’ uncertainty regarding their ability to express themselves in writing, as mentioned in 2.4.1. It could also be due to group dynamics, in that they might expect their peers to criticise them too harshly because of their, as they believe, poor writing (see 2.4.1 and 2.4.2).

Flash (2005) mentions that one of the benefits of peer response is that students are provided with a real audience for their writing, an audience who can comment and give suggestions on how to improve the text. Some of the students mentioned in their answers that it was good to have somebody to write for, because it showed them what other people thought about the text. This seems to confirm the claim made by Goldstein (2004:64) that students need some form of feedback that shows them how others look upon their writing.

4.2.2 Students’ opinions about discussing their writing in groups

Peer response is not only to let somebody see the text that one has written and have them correct what they believe is wrong in the text. Peer response is also about discussing the text with group members so that the peers have a chance to explain what they mean when pointing out particular writing problems. These discussions also allow the writer to explain what the text is about and what its purpose is. It is in such group activities that students start to negotiate meaning by asking questions and discussing changes to improve the text (see 2.3.1). Even if research shows that negotiation of meaning is beneficial for second-language learners, it does not necessarily follow that the students like it. This is why one of my research questions is what the students think about discussing their writing in groups.
As it turned out, this was the area where the opinions seemed to have changed the most between Q.1 and Q.2. In Q.1, 7 students out of 15 answered that they liked to discuss their writing, 4 students said that they liked it to some extent, 3 students did not like it, and one student chose not to answer this particular question (see figure 5).

![Students' opinions about discussing their writing in groups, according to Q.1](image)

**Figure 5**

According to Q.2, i.e. after the second time they had received feedback on their writing, 10 students of 13 liked to discuss their texts, no one disliked it, 2 liked it to some extent, while one student chose not to answer (see figure 6). Even if one assumes that those 3 who did not hand in Q.2 would all have answered that they did not like it, the opinion would still have changed between Q.1 and Q.2.

![Students' opinions about discussing their writing in groups, according to Q.2](image)

**Figure 6**

When one compares the answers given in both Q.1 and Q.2 regarding the discussions of the texts within the groups with the answers concerning classmates reading the assignments, the former seem to be even more positive. Some of the comments are as follows:
- I like it, because it is a great help (Q.1)
- I like it, because then I can tell them how I have built up my story (Q.1)
- I like it because you get to know what you can do better (Q.2)
- It is good. I get to hear what is wrong directly from a friend (Q.2)
- I like it because it is easier to see and understand what is wrong if your friends tell you (Q.1)
- I don’t mind. I take all criticism positively, because you learn from it (Q.2)

Some of the comments by students who liked group discussions to some extent, and by those who did not like them at all are as follows:
- I like it to some extent, because then I have a chance of doing it better (Q.1)
- I don’t like it because I know that my text contains many errors, but I know it is very good to do it. (Q.1)
- It depends. If they only told you bad things it is not so funny, but if they tell Good things it is OK (Q.2)

Some of the students mention in their answers that it is easier to understand what is wrong in a text if a friend explains it. This could probably support the claim that some students may have difficulties in understanding teacher feedback, and that peers’ comments can be more specific at times (Liu & Hansen 2002:26).

In the class where the study was carried out, the overall attitude towards discussing writing in groups seemed positive. The survey also suggests that attitudes become more positive if the students get used to the method. Normally, students are not used to working in this way and it has been suggested by Brunjes (1993:47) that it takes time before students learn to trust their own ability, as well as their peers’ ability, to give feedback and to discuss it in groups. One reason for the change in opinion in my study could thus be that in the first group discussions the students did not know precisely what they were supposed to do. However, practice makes perfect, and in the second peer response session they may have felt more comfortable with the method, allowing the group discussions to become more constructive for that reason.
4.2.3 How do students react to criticism of their writing, and do they believe it can help them?

The survey demonstrated, according to both Q.1 and Q.2, that all students believed that one cannot take the criticism from the peers personally. As one student put it, “It is not the classmates’ fault, it is the spelling mistakes’ fault”.

As for the question whether the students believe that receiving feedback from peers can help them in their writing or not, a clear majority considered this to be the case. There are only 2 students who answered in Q.1 that they did not believe that receiving response from peers could help them in their own writing. One of the students added, “what they pointed out I already knew”. There is a possibility that this student was on a high proficiency level where s/he did not feel the need for help with the writing. As for Q.2, only one student answered that s/he did not believe that other students could help her/him improve her/his writing, without further comment.

There are some studies which show that if group dynamics are poor within peer response groups this can lead to a breakdown in communication (Liu & Hansen 2002:11-12). Group members may also take extra care to preserve the harmony within the group by avoiding bringing up problematic issues with the result that the process of improving the writing may never take place (Spear 1988:24). This does not seem to have been a problem in the class taking part in this investigation. The fact that almost all students thought that receiving peer response could help them in their writing suggests that the method could be used as an alternative, or complement, to ordinary teacher-student feedback.

4.3 After revising

The third part of the questionnaire concerned the revision of the assignments. Its main focus was on the changes that the students had carried out in their assignments after receiving response from their peers. Some of the students chose not to hand in the last part of the questionnaire; therefore, the number of respondents is a little lower here than for the previous parts regarding giving and receiving feedback. 13 students answered the third part of Q.1 and 9 the third part of Q.2.
4.3.1 Were the peers’ suggestions useful in improving the text, according to the students?

I have chosen to combine questions 1 and 2 of the third part of the questionnaire (see Appendix 2) in this section since the suggestions from the peers that the students found useful correlate with the changes the students claim to have made.

As for Q.1, 8 students answered that the suggestions from the peers were useful in improving the text, and 5 students answered that they were not. Out of the first 8 students, 7 students answered that they had used their peers’ suggestions, in the following order of frequency: grammar, spelling, sentence structure, word choice, content, and punctuation.

In Q.2, 7 students out of 9 answered that they found their peers’ suggestions useful. All of these 7 students used their peers’ suggestions when revising the text. The suggestions used, in order of frequency, concerned the following areas: spelling, grammar, sentence structure, and word choice.

What is most striking from Q.1 is that most of the students did not mention revising spelling errors, considering that 14 students had claimed to have commented on spelling errors when giving response (see 4.1.1). There also seems to be a low number of students who revised grammar errors. Here it seems realistic to assume that the uncorrected grammar errors had been made by those who said they did not find their peers’ suggestions useful, or by those who chose not to answer the questionnaire. The same might be true for word choice and sentence structure. As for those 5 students who did not find their peers’ suggestions useful, one added, “It seems like there was not very much that could be improved”.

There seems to be a better correlation between the results from Q.2 discussed here and the ones from Q.2 taken up in 4.1.1 than between the corresponding sets from Q.1. Spelling, grammar and sentence structure were commented on the most according to Q.2 (cf. 4.1.1), and this also seems to be what the students changed when they revised their second assignment.

When discussing the results of this part of the study concerning the revisions of the assignments one has to bear in mind that it is based on what the students have answered in the questionnaire. What they have actually changed in their texts might not be consistent with those answers. Alternatively, the apparent lack of correlation between the writing errors
commented on when giving response and the writing errors corrected in the assignments might imply that the suggestions from the peers were either wrong or that the students chose not to incorporate them.

4.3.2 Double-checking mistakes
The students were also asked if they had double-checked the correct way of writing in dictionaries or grammar books in connection with revising the assignments according to peers’ suggestions. In Q.1, 4 students answered that they had double-checked the suggestions before making a change, 8 students answered that they had not, and one student did not answer the question. In Q.2, 2 students answered yes, 6 students no, and one student did not answer.

The results could possibly be taken to illustrate that the students have a great deal of faith in their fellow students’ ability to correct mistakes, or that students are not used to using, or possibly unwilling to use, dictionaries and grammar books as a resource in their writing.

4.4 Students’ opinions about peer response in general
In a rather short period of time, the students wrote two texts that were read and evaluated by classmates. They also read and evaluated their classmates’ texts, in return. The texts were discussed in groups, and the students had a chance to revise them before handing them in for the teacher’s assessment. Therefore, one of the research questions had to elicit the students’ opinions about peer response in general, i.e. not only of the individual parts, but of the method as a whole.

There seemed to be a widespread opinion among the students that peer response was a good way of improving written assignments. Some students, though, mentioned that peer response has to be taken seriously by the group members, otherwise it is a waste of time. Other students also commented that it was fun to correct other students’ texts, as well as to discuss the texts in groups. This can be related to one of the purported benefits of peer response, namely that it allows students to show what they know about writing (see 2.3.4). Some of the students also answered that they learn more easily in this way, which is also something that has been discussed in previous sections.
On the other hand, as mentioned, there are students who strongly disliked other students reading their texts. Some students also mentioned that a combination of peer response and teacher assistance would be better. Finally, there are students who liked the method, but would not want to use it too often.

4.5 Differences between grades on the first and the final version in the written assignments

Since peer response had never been used before in this class, one of the most interesting research questions was whether the method would generate differences in, for example, content and formal aspects of writing between the first, individually written, draft and the final version that it would change the grading. The results of the grading, done by the students’ regular teacher, will be dealt with first. Examples from the assignments will follow.

The grades listed in the tables are so-called ‘judgements’, which are used in the assessment of assignments during the term. The abbreviations used are: ET (ej tillfredställande), meaning ‘not satisfactory’, T (tillfredställande), meaning ‘satisfactory’, and B (bra), meaning ‘good’. The -/+ signs added to the letters are used to either reinforce or weaken the judgement. For example, a B+ would indicate that the student has done the assignment very well.

The first assignment that the students completed was rather free in nature, since the students could choose from a selection of pictures to write a text about. The differences in grading between V.1 and V.2 are as follows:

Table 1. The grading of Version 1 and Version 2 in the 1st assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>V.1</th>
<th>V.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>T+</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>T-</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>V.1</th>
<th>V.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Not graded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>T+</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>T+</td>
<td>T+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>T+</td>
<td>T+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 1 shows, 9 students out of 16 improved the text after peer response discussions and revisions so that the grading changed to a higher grade. 6 students’ grades remained unchanged, and one student did not receive a grade due to the possibility of plagiarism.

One major factor that affected the changes in grading has to do with length and content. V.2 is, in general, longer and more substantial compared to V.1 (see Appendix 5 for an example). This might be due to the additional time that the students were given to revise the assignment, as well as that they individually added more content, because there was time left after incorporating the peers’ suggestions. It is also possible that the group discussions generated more suggestions and ideas about the chosen subject so that they affected the content. It is, however, not only the length and more substantial content that caused the change of grade between V.1 and V.2. Grammar, word choice, and sentence structure also improved. The following are examples from the free writing:

**Example 1.**

(V.1) Jimmie and his wife Ashley went up 8.00 pm and they went out for a walk as usually. When they had went round the corner come some guys in a car and kidnapped Jimmie and Ashley.

(V.2) Jimmie and his wife Ashley went up at 8.00 pm and they went out for a walk as usual. When they went around a corner some guys came in a car and kidnapped Jimmie and Ashley.

In this case *went up 8.00* has been changed into *went up at 8.00* but the choice word is still unidiomatic. Furthermore, the adverb *usually* has been changed into the correct adjective *usual*. Finally, in the second sentence the word *had* in *they had went* has been removed to yield the better *they went*, and the word order, as well as the tense, in *come some guys* has been changed for the better *some guys came*.

**Example 2.**

(V.1) They arrives and lands on the comet, but only one ship land safe the other one crashes on to the surface.

(V.2) They arrive and land at the comet, but only one ship lands safely the other one crashes on to the surface.
Here, the student had some real problems with when to use 3rd-person s in V.1, but these mistakes have been corrected in V.2. The student has also changed the incorrect safe into safely, and s/he has corrected punctuation errors. On the other hand, the student has also changed the correct on the comet into the incorrect at the comet and failed to notice the incorrect on to the surface.

Example 3.

(V.1) Marge my wife, she got blue hair and is werry kind to all, she doesn’t have a job she jest cleans the hose and make the dinner.

(V.2) Marge my wife, she got blue hair and is very kind to everyone, she doesn’t have a job she just cleans the house and makes the dinner.

This excerpt has still got some errors left, but the student has made many changes. All the spelling errors have been eliminated. The sequence kind to all has been changed into kind to everyone, and the word make has received a correct 3rd-person s in V.2.

The second assignment of a more formal character was to write a summary of the text “The Yankees are coming”. The grading of V.1 and V.2 is as follows:

Table 2. The grading of Version 1 and Version 2 in the 2nd assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>V.1</th>
<th>V.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>T+</td>
<td>T+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>T-</td>
<td>T+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>T-</td>
<td>T+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>T+</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>T</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>V.1</th>
<th>V.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>T+</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>T-</td>
<td>T-</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>T-</td>
<td>T-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>T+</td>
<td>T-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>T+</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>T+</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 2 shows, only 9 students received grades on both versions, and 6 of these 9 students improved the V.2 of the summary so that the grading has changed.

As in the case of the first assignment, the V.2 summaries are longer and more substantial in content than V.1, but not to the same extent as the free writing. The changes in grading
between V.1 and V.2 depend more on revisions of grammar errors. The following are examples from the summaries:

**Example 4.**
(V.1) The army was leaving. Southern has surrender.

She heard people croaked: ‘Lady-Water!’

(V.2) The army was leaving. Southern has surrendered.

She heard people croaking: ‘Lady-Water!’

Here the student has changed grammatical errors. S/He has changed the word form *surrender* into *surrendered*, and in the second sentence *croaked* has been changed into the progressive form *croaking*.

**Example 5.**
(V.1) All people run away from there house in to the wood there the Yankees now could find them.

(V.2) All people ran away from their house into the woods where the Yankees couldn’t find them.

In this case the student has made many changes, even if she/he has forgotten to put a s on *house* and could have eliminated *All*, or inserted *the* after it. In fact, s/he has revised the sentence so completely that it has changed meaning. The people have gone from running into the woods so that the Yankees could find them in V.1, to hiding in the woods so that the Yankees could not find them in V.2.

**Example 6.**
(V.1) But he couldn’t help her, he could not go from all those man for one little baby.

(V.2) But he couldn’t help her, he could not leave all these men for one little baby.

The writer of this sentence has chosen to replace *go from* with the more idiomatic *leave*, and *all those* has been changed into *all these* instead. Both versions are correct and depending a
little on the context. S/He has also changed singular man into plural men, which is the correct form in the context.

The survey indicates that peer response can be a useful tool in improving students’ writing. It also indicates that students’ grades can be improved if they are allowed to revise their assignments after receiving feedback on their writing. Whether the grading would have changed in the same way if the students had received feedback from the teacher and had had the same opportunity to revise the texts, one can only speculate about. Even if it would have, there would still have been a major difference: the students would not have discovered the writing errors themselves, nor have had the chance to discuss their writing in groups. Hence, negotiation of meaning, and collective scaffolding would not have taken place (see 2.2.3). One of the positive effects of scaffolding seems to be long-term language development (Liu & Hansen 2002:5-6), which is probably what most teachers intend for their students to take place. Peer response activities might create a heightened awareness in the students of difficulties in second-language learning, an awareness that can help them to improve their writing and, through the discovery of their own and other’s mistakes, to avoid mistakes from the outset.

5. Conclusion

To sum up the findings of this investigation, it has been shown that the kind of peer response the students gave on each other’s writing was focused mainly on the formal aspects of writing. Spelling, grammar, and sentence structure seemed to be prioritised, whereas content was hardly commented on at all. Despite this, the final versions were longer and more substantial in content compared to the first versions. This could be due to the fact that the students still had time at their disposal after making the revisions according to their peers’ suggestions, or that they developed the content individually, without any assistance from the peers. The improved content can also have been a product of constructive group discussions that generated more ideas.

The results show also that students’ grades differed between the first versions, which had been written individually, and the final versions, which had been revised after peer response. Taken together, 23 pairs of first and final versions of the two different assignments were
handed in for grading. In 15 cases, the revised version received a higher grade than the first version. No one received a lower grade after revising.

To the question whether they find it difficult to respond to each other’s writing, a majority of the students answered no, and there did not seem to have been anyone who believed that commenting on peers’ writing errors affected their relationship with each other. There was also a striking majority of students who believed that giving and receiving peer response can help them improve their writing. In general, the upper-secondary students taking part in this investigation were positive towards peer response. There were, however, a few students who disliked the method, mostly because they did not want the other students to read their writing but preferred it to be read by the teacher only. This could be due to the fact that they believed their own writing to be of such a low quality that it could generate much criticism from peers who were at a higher proficiency level. This fear could possibly be eliminated, to some degree, if peer response groups were fairly homogeneous with regard to proficiency levels. On the other hand, there have to be some differences in students’ proficiency levels in order for collective scaffolding to take place.
REFERENCES


Appendix 1
Appendix 2

Questionnaire on peer response

Second year upper secondary students

Guidelines: Try to answer all questions as truthfully as possible. You don’t have to answer the questions in English if you don’t want to. Swedish is OK.

Giving peer response

1. What kind of response did you give?
Ex: Content, style, sentence structure, word choice, spelling, grammar, punctuation.


1. Did you remember to give positive feedback?
   Yes    No

2. Did your peers’ texts make you more aware of different writing errors?
   Yes    No

   If yes, what kind of writing errors? Explain shortly.


3. Do you feel that giving response to other people’s writing can help you in your own writing?
   Yes    No

4. Do you find it difficult to respond to other students’ writing? If so, what do you find difficult?


5. Do you feel that commenting on your peers’ writing affects the personal relationship between you? If yes, how?

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

Receiving peer response

1. Did you receive positive feedback on your writing?

   Yes       No

2. How do you feel about letting your classmates read your writing? Would you prefer it to be read by the teacher only?

   ______________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________

3. How do you feel when discussing your own writing in groups? Do you like it, or not? Explain.

   ______________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________

4. Do you feel that receiving response from other people can help you in your writing?

   Yes       No

5. Do you take it personally when your peers criticise your writing, that is, does it affect your relationship with your classmates?

   ______________________________________________________

   ______________________________________________________

After revising

1. Did you find any of your peers’ suggestions useful in improving your text?

   Yes       No
If yes, which suggestions? If not, why?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. What changes did you make after receiving response from your classmates?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. If you made changes because of the peer response you received, for example in connection with spelling or grammar errors, did you double-check the correct way of writing in a dictionary or grammar book?

Yes

No

4. In general terms, what do you think of peer response? Is it something you would like to try more often?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Do you have anything you would like to add?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Appendix 3

The Yankees are Coming! [Version 1]

What we read in the text was about a woman whose name was Scarlett. It seems she was from a rich family; she was spoiled, not able of handling anything for herself. Now, in the middle of the war, with the Yankees coming, her friend is expecting a baby, and apparently, she will only let a doctor she knows handle the birth. His name is Dr Meade.

There were people running everywhere, carrying food of all kinds. Scarlett understood that the army had thrown the warehouses open so the people could salvage everything they could before the Yankees came. They’d probably rather die than let all that food fall into the hands of the Yankees.

She pushed her way through the crowds of people, and when she came in full view of the depot, she was shocked. There were countless wounded, bleeding and decaying men lying everywhere. She fought the urge to vomit and began walking down the long rows of men lying everywhere, making sure she didn’t step on some poor soldier. When she found Dr. Meade, they conversed for a while, and when she realizes the doctor couldn’t leave all the wounded men lying here, she also understood that she’d have to release the baby herself.

She will have do something for herself for once. How will things turn out?

Read the book and find out!
Appendix 4

The Yankees are Coming! [Version 1]
A summary of the “The Yankees” by Margaret Mitchell

Scarlett desperately try to find a Doctor for Melanie, she’s was to born a baby. When she has found the Doctor he said that he couldn’t come, because he must help all the soldiers on the battlefield. Scarlett running back to Melanie and told her that the Doctor couldn’t come. There is corps lying all over the streets. People scream that the Yankees are coming, the Yankees are coming everywhere. “A group of women were coming from the railroad and carry hams on their shoulders”. The town is panic and don’t know what to do.
Appendix 5

**The Poor Black Dude** [Version 1]

There was once this black dude called Viktor. He did anything he could to survive, but no one offered him any job. After many days of searching, even weeks of searching, he didn’t find anything. Weeks passed and he was starving, only eating garbage and disposal.

One day he found a guitar and earlier in his life he played guitar, so he knew how to play.

So he started to play and realized he still had it in him.

People around him noticed him and liked what they heard, and started to toss money to him.

He knew realized he could earn money by playing on the streets for bypassing pedestrians. He could now by enough food so he didn’t starve.

What he didn’t know was that the Ku Klux Klan had their hide-out across the street where he sat. And as everybody knows, they don’t like black people.

Days passed and he got more and more money,

**The Poor Black Dude** [Version 2]

There was once this black dude called Viktor. He did anything he could to survive, but no one offered him any job. After many days of searching, even weeks of searching, he didn’t find anything. Weeks passed and he was starving, only eating garbage and disposal.

One day he found a guitar and earlier in his life he played guitar, so he knew how to play.

So he started to play and realized he still had it in him.

People around him noticed him and liked what they heard, and started to toss money to him.

He realized he could earn money by playing on the streets for bypassing pedestrians. He could now by enough food so he didn’t starve.

What he didn’t know was that the Ku Klux Klan had their hide-out across the street where he sat. And as everybody knows, they don’t like black people.

Days passed and he got more and more money, but after awhile the KKK noticed Viktor, and they didn’t like this so they decided to erase him.

More days passed and the Black Dude got more and more “audience”.

During the night, he still haven’t got any place to sleep, so he slept on the street.

The people from KKK has waited for this night, to finally put an end to this madness, a nigger earning money next to their hide-out is not acceptable. So they walked towards the man and
put 5 bullets through his head and destroyed his guitar, leaving him all bloody with the guitar parts spread all over the place.
The next day, the regular people who came by to listen to Viktor, just came there to see him like this.
After some days, everyone acted like nothing had happen. It’s like Viktor never existed.