A Case Study of Dynamic Assessment in EFL Process Writing

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Abstract

Dynamic Assessment (henceforth DA) stems from the mutually constitutive relationships between methodology and epistemology. Its root is the concept of development in Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (henceforth ZPD). The central feature of DA is that it does not separate instruction from assessment, but instead, is in favor of a teacher-student unity that works jointly towards students’ future improvement through their ZPD. The paper introduces DA and produces a simple framework (or a process) for English writing instruction based on the principle of DA. A case study has been done using the framework. Reflections and results of it prove that the dialogic way of teaching is of great help in enhancing learners’ writing interest and improving their writing competence. This research not only gives great enlightenment to education practice, but also is one creativity in the research of English writing instruction.

Key words: Dynamic Assessment; process writing; framework

1. Introduction

Focus of EFL writing instruction in China has changed from the end product to the writing process in the past several years (Best, 1995). According to many researchers, process writing instruction suits better than traditional methods in meeting the needs of the modern information society (Deng, 2003; Jia, 1998). Then lots of researchers contribute most of their efforts to perfect EFL writing process instruction, and a great number of practitioners try to apply the steps of writing process—generating ideas,
structuring, drafting, revising and editing, into their writing courses in the hope of better enhancing learners’ independent writing ability than traditional approach (White & Arndt, 1991).

Though process writing approach has been used widely in classrooms throughout the world, the way to respond to learners’ writing, or the way to assess learners’ compositions becomes an emergent issue. Nation-wide researches about EFL writing assessment indicate that some practitioners have adopted some modified assessment methods, such as self assessment, peer assessment, and teacher conference, etc., but the limitations are obvious. First, the number of empirical research papers on assessment of process writing is few. According to Yao & Cheng’s (2005) statistic research on the development of English writing in China since 1980s, there are only 3 pieces (Chen, 1994; Yang, 1996; Zuo, 2002) of such kind papers among the 165 referred pieces. Second, the design of assessment lacks proper supporting theory. Yang (1996), for example, made his research merely based on foreign researchers’ assessment practice (Zamel, Fathman, Whalley, Hyland, etc.). Third, the research of assessment is confined to either several assessment methods in one step of writing process or one assessment method during the whole process. Yang (1996), for instance, only used teacher assessment to evaluate students’ composition from grammar error correction and content comment in the steps of revising draft and editing. Fourth, although the available research findings could show various assessment methods’ advantages in promoting English learners’ writing ability, there are still some requirements from English learners, involving being puzzled in how to begin writing and what to write, having trouble in using grammar properly in their compositions, being confused of the criteria of good writing, etc. (Cai & Fang, 2006).

Traditional summative assessment attempts to summarize students’ learning at some point in time, say the end of a course, but can not provide the immediate, contextualized feedback useful for helping teacher and students during the learning process (Garb, 2008), so the dynamic and holistic feature of process writing approach can not be fully exploited. Laura (1995), when talking about the problems in writing instruction, stressed the importance of assessment method in process writing instruction, “Instruction and assessment must be of the same philosophy. It is unfair to assess process writing with traditional assessment. Furthermore, assessment and evaluation must be viewed as integral, planned parts of the writing curriculum; students need to be actively involved with the teacher in understanding, assessing, and evaluating the writing process.”

Dynamic Assessment is described as a way of assessing the true potential of children that extends the interactive nature of leaning to the process of assessment. The teacher and the students come into a dialogue to find out the students’ current level of performance on any task and share with each other the possible ways in which that performance might be improved on a subsequent occasion. This deliberate and planned mediational teaching and the assessment becomes an integral and continuous process.

Compared with the former mentioned traditional summative assessment, DA is more suitable for process writing, because in DA the teacher acts as an improvement promoter and provides immediate and situated feedback during the whole procedure; moreover, the focus of DA is students’ future development, not the outcome of the past development.
But as a newly emergent instruction pedagogy grown up from a well-developed set of theories, DA is not yet widely practiced and is still virtually unknown to many psychologists and educators (see, e.g., Elliott, 1993; Lidz, 1992; Tzuriel, 2000, 2001, 2002). According to Thorne (2005: 399), DA, a procedure that “unites the goals of better understanding a learners’ potential through structured sets of interactions and fostering development through those interactions, is just emergent into social-cultural-based L2 language research”.

In China, up to now, except for quite few preliminary DA theory introduction (Tang, 2004), discussion of the strategies for how to practice DA (Peng Jinding, 2004) and the prospect of application of DA in general education and special education (Wang & An, 2005), no practical experimental application has been mentioned in foreign language teaching classroom. Enlightened by principles underpinning DA, as well as the few practice examples in L2 field in foreign countries (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Poehner, in progress), the author wants to make a completely new attempt to improve our EFL writing instruction by implementation of principles and methods introduced in the DA.

In the present study, Dynamic Assessment is applied into EFL process writing. The author creates various methods for different stages in the continuous writing process and proposes a DA framework for EFL writing process based on Elliott’s DA procedure. Although this is just an explorative research, the author hopes that the proper implementation of the framework can help to achieve the following two objectives:

(1) Learners’ writing ability can be substantially and comprehensively improved.
(2) Learners’ motivation of writing will be markedly improved.

2. Theoretical basis of DA

Dynamic Assessment is a concept of sociocultural theory practiced mainly by Feuerstein, but its theoretical forefather is Vygotsky whose notion of the ZPD is one of the key constructs to the approach.

Sociocultural theory is a theory of the development of higher mental functions and it offers a framework through which cognition can be systematically investigated without isolating it from social context. For cognition development, sociocultural theory argues that the unit of analysis for the study of development is not the individual acting alone, but the interpersonal functional system formed by people and cultural artifacts acting jointly.

According to the sociocultural theory, human leaning is mediated leaning. Through mediation, usually in the form of dialogue, human cognition develops from other-regulation (the assistance from other significant people, for example a teacher) to self-regulation (independent completion of a given task) (Wu, 2006). In the other-regulation process the students skip the distance, which is called Zone of Proximal Development, between their present development level and the mediator’s. In ZPD, the whole picture of learners’ development not only includes their actual level of development, but also their responsiveness to mediation which can provide insight into their future development.
Vygotsky himself did not use the term DA, which is based on the theory ZPD; it is a notable contribution of Feuerstein’s work. Feuerstein regarded DA as a way of assessing the true potential of children that differs significantly from conventional tests. DA is an interactive approach to psychological assessment that embeds intervention within the assessment procedure. And the most important two characteristics of it are: 1) inseparability of assessment and instruction, 2) construction of future development. Thus in fact DA is a future-in-the-making model where assessment and instruction are dialectically integrated as the means to move towards an always emergent future rather than a fixed end-point.

3. DA framework and Process Writing

EFL writing, is a complicated social activity, comprising many abilities, such as choosing suitable topics according to certain audience, generating logical and clear ideas, structuring rich and proper content, demonstrating accurate language expressions, etc., and achieved by independent thinking skills, such as classifying, evaluating, synthesizing, etc. The abilities and skills mentioned above cannot be gained by isolated and static knowledge transmission or one-time task-giving and correcting methodology, but “process writing” approach, which can provide a holistic and dynamic writing experience and can provide possibilities of dynamic and processed mediation from the teacher, or dialogues between teacher and learners or between peers.

Dynamic Assessment procedural framework proposed by Elliott (2000) is a practicable approach which can be applied into process writing to dig the dynamic essence of process writing fully and facilitate the cognitive development of English learners. According to Elliott, the procedural framework of DA is a chain of pretest-teach-posttest. Before pretest, the teacher should define the aim, which shows what students should be capable of doing. Then it is to pretest, in which students try to finish the given task, and the teacher observes carefully and finds problems. The third step is to teach, in which the teacher designs some mediation activities aiming to solve the existing problems in students’ performance. The last is to posttest, in which the students are asked to try the task again based on the teacher’s intervention, and the teacher adopts appropriate method to evaluate students’ performance.

Combining Elliot’s procedural framework of DA with features of EFL writing, the author designs a practical DA framework for EFL process writing. The purpose of the design is not just for getting feedback from the learners’ work; more importantly it is for promoting learners’ writing ability through such feedback. In this sense, the framework proposed does not contribute to writing assessment but mainly to writing instruction.

The dynamic assessment framework, exactly, dynamic mediation process, emphasizes the easily-neglected, but most important three stages: 1) topic-choice stage, 2) idea-generation & structuring stage, and 3) macro-revising stage, though other stages such as drafting, editing are also included in the writing process. In each of the above stages, DA components have been designed as three steps: 1) pre-task, 2) mediation, and 3) post-task.
“Pre-task”, task(s) done before mediation, is expected to create learners’ ZPD, and can increase their sensitivity to assistance and willingness to get assistance. By giving “mediation” to learners in the form of either dialogues between teacher and students, or mediational tools (guidelines, samples, reading materials etc.), their internal developmental processes would be awakened. “Post-task”, the imitation of externally obtained skills or knowledge, can contribute to an obvious improvement, which subsequently would become part of learners’ independent developmental ability, in learners’ work. More detailed description of the framework is given in the following parts.

In topic-choice stage, the teacher assigns a general writing task, so that learners have enough freedom to focus on a self-interested sub-topic under which they can write something unique. After learners’ own attempt for a topic (pre-task), the teacher proceeds with topic negotiation—mostly in the form of dialogues, in which he might provide some hints, leading questions, suggestions, explicit feedbacks, etc., as mediation. And learners can also exchange and revise topics (post-task) in the mediation made by both teacher and their peers.

In idea-generation & structuring stage, first the teacher demonstrates some necessary idea-generation strategies, for example, branching, and structuring techniques, such as scratching. Second, learners are assigned a task to generate ideas and redefine the writing purpose. Last, they should make outlines for their compositions according to the purpose. Unlike the traditional way of writing class task, in DA framework the attempt of idea-generation & structuring serves as a pre-task, and mediation is arranged immediately afterward. To play the role of a mediator, the teacher can observe while walking around in the classroom and, if necessary, review and negotiate individual outlines with the learners. Other mediation methods include whole-class demonstration and evaluation of sample outlines, strategy-explanation, etc. Peers also can be encouraged to review each other’s outlines (mediation stage). After the scaffolding by the teacher or peers, learners start to revise their own outlines again.

When learners bring their finished drafts in the next class, there comes the stage of revising, and the most likely first and also the most important stage is macro-revising (other objectives of revising can also be made according to learners’ practical level, say, conciseness). In this stage, content and organization of the drafts are expected to be negotiated and improved. Drafting task done independently outside the classroom, as a pre-task, has inevitably provided experiences for the learners to realize both their limitations and potential, and aroused their stronger curiosity and sensitivity about reading or appreciating peers’ or others’ products and a stronger desire to get help from the teacher. Mediational help from the teacher and peers at this time include: teacher-guided appreciation and analysis of samples, instruction of relevant writing strategies and techniques; peer-to-peer interactive reading or discussing (web-based interactive reading and comment as in authentic classroom proves to be a good method) etc. After the mediation, modification becomes a want-to-do activity for the learners. Remarkable achievement is supposed to appear in this post-task activity.

The procedure of micro-revision usually follows macro-revising, but it will not be discussed in this paper.
Table 1. DA Framework of EFL Process Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing stages</th>
<th>Pre-task</th>
<th>Mediation</th>
<th>Post-task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic choice</td>
<td>Assigning task and independent topics choice</td>
<td>Dialogues and mediational tools</td>
<td>Independent modification of selves' topics again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea-generation &amp; structuring</td>
<td>Independent idea-generation &amp; structuring</td>
<td>Dialogues and mediational tools</td>
<td>Independent modification of selves' structures again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising (macro- and micro-revising or other focuses)</td>
<td>Independent draft writing</td>
<td>Dialogues, mediational tools, and other means</td>
<td>Independent modification of selves' drafts again</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Case study

4.1 Participants and setting

The subjects in the study are 30 English majors in Grade 2005 Class 1 in College of Foreign Languages. Most of them have English learning experience for 7-9 years. English writing is the required course for the sophomores of English majors. According to the syllabus, they have two English writing classes each week and 18 weeks in one term. The case discussed is an “exposition” writing practice which is the first task for long article-writing with the required length of no less than 1000 words. The duration of this task is supposed to be 3 weeks, 2 periods for each week.

4.2 Procedures

4.2.1 Topic-choice

The value of the task is the first consideration in task assignment. To be authentic, relevant, interesting and challenging are our criteria for choosing topics. The objective of topic-choice stage is to help learners to produce topics worth writing.

In this case the audience is supposed to be foreign peers who are expected to exchange culture by reading learners’ articles via our website (we have established a culture-exchanging website for the purpose of stimulating learners’ motivation of writing). The topic of this exposition practice is “My Hometown”.

Let’s take one of the instruction practices in our study as an example. First the teacher gives the following writing task:

Teacher: Today we are going to write an exposition essay about your hometown. Let the foreign peers know what your hometown is like. The possible writing focuses might be your hometown’s customs, food, clothes, special product, building and so on. In a word, you can choose any aspect that you think is worth writing, of course, worth reading.
Then learners begin to decide their own writing topics. Learner A names her writing topic as *Travel in My Hometown*. Learner B names it as *A Developing Land—My Hometown*.

When learners decide their writing topics, the teacher goes around the classroom with a problem-finding eye, and provides some assistance if necessary.

(1) Teacher (T): (say to Learner B, when finding there is some problem with his topic) Is this your decided writing topic? *A Developing Land—My Hometown*.

Learner B (LB): Yes.

T: Don’t you think it is a little broader?

LB: (think for several seconds) Yeah, … developing should include many aspects. OK, I change it into *The Life Styles in My Hometown*.

T: Not bad, it is a little narrower now. Life Style is a somewhat general or common phrase. Do you think it can really attract readers’ eyes?

LB: It should be more concrete?

T: (nod and smile) Life style includes many aspects, such as food, clothes, building…

LB: Ok, I choose building. In recent years, the buildings in my hometown have become more and more beautiful.

T: As you refer to building, let us think together about how many kinds of buildings are there?

LB and T: Housing building, … commercial building and factory workshop, … official building, … entertainment building, …

LB: Ah, it is too large! And some are not familiar to me at all.

T: Now, you can choose one with which you are familiar.

LB: (think for several seconds and become excited) Yes, simply, I write about housing change in my hometown, and take my home as an example.

T: Good idea! Then your writing topic should be…

LB: *The Housing Change in My Hometown*.

After offering mediation to some learners, the teacher concludes the existing problems of learners’ writing topics, and gives instruction to the whole class.

Let us take LB’s topic choice for example. The first one *A Developing Land—My Hometown* is too broad. Second we narrow it into *The Life Styles in My Hometown*, but this one is not attractive. Third we change it into *The Changing Buildings in My Hometown*, but the topic refers to something we are not familiar with, so it is difficult to write well. Then comes the last one *The Housing Change in My Hometown* which is not only familiar to us, but also personal or unique, so it can attract readers’ interest.

What has been described above tells us that a good topic should be 1) unique, 2) focused, 3) attractive, and 4) valuable.
Based on teacher’s instruction, learners revise their topics independently first, and then review mutually to modify their writing topics. Learner A revises his topic from Travel in My Hometown to The Main Places of Interest in My Hometown, then to The Hills in My Hometown. When Learner B read Learner A’s topic, the following dialogue occur:

(2) Learner B (LB): In my opinion your topic is still a little broader. “Hills” is too large. Don’t you think so?
Learner A (LA): You mean I should choose some specific one to write, yes?
LB: Yeah, for example the most popular one.
LA: There is a real special coal hill in my hometown. Perhaps I should choose this one.
LB: Great, then your topic will be very unique.
LA: Yes. The Coal Hill in My Hometown.

Learner A, as an illustrative example, has traversed the gap between his original level of understanding “topic-choice” and a higher level of understanding by the intervention from his teacher and his classmate. The higher understanding might be internalized in his future practice of the similar kind.

4.2.2 Idea-generation & structuring

Idea-generation & structuring is viewed as the key point in helping learners prepare content and organize structure in the writing process prior to composing. Idea-generation is the stage to stimulate thinking and gather writing ideas. Though rich content needs out-of-class reading and fact collecting, preliminary ideas have to be ignited by some generating techniques, such as brainstorming, branching, clustering, debating, free writing, and cubing.

In this study the author takes “branching” as an example in this stage to illustrate how DA is carried out. Branching is a visual way of generating ideas which can show logical relations between and among ideas. Learners can literally draw a tree with the stem, limbs, and twigs and put the topic in the stem, then put the ideas to the limbs or twigs according to their relations.

In the writing class with the writing task of My Hometown, the teacher presents the four steps with which learners can draw a tree:

(1) Write your topic in the middle of a piece of paper and draw a circle around it.
(2) Think of related ideas and write them down near the circle. Connect each to the circle with a line. These ideas are called the primary branches.
(3) Think of ideas (facts, details, examples, etc.) related to each of the primary branches (twigs).
(4) Go on with the process until you are satisfied.

Then the teacher takes Popularity of American Fast Food (Qi, 2004: 66) as an example to lead learners to branch together, and the tree is drawn as following:
Based on the teacher’s direction and the experience of branching with the teacher together, learners begin to draw their own trees. In this process, the teacher, as a mediator, goes around the classroom and is ready to offer assistance to learners. Let us take one fragment of teacher’s mediation as an example. Learner B’s draft tree is like the following:

(3) Teacher (T): Can I look at your branching?
Learner B (LB): (happy) Yes, of course!
T: The first layer of branches on your tree includes external appearance, inner layout, building materials, and change effect. Your topic is about change. Now there is just one branch named with change in what we referred. Do you think it is logical to put them at the same level?
LB: (think deeply) Uh, … except for change effect, maybe the other three can be categorized into one class…
T: Good! Then all of them is about what?
LB: Housing itself.
T: Yes, I think you’ve got it. OK, name the class.
LB: (think for several seconds) How about change aspects?
T: (smile) Not bad. Correct your branching.
(After learner B changes his tree, the dialogue goes on.)
T: We know that everything existing will affect whatever around it, but its existence is not groundless. Yes?
Learner B corrects his tree again and decides it as the following:

In the process of interpreting learners’ branching, the teacher concludes several problems and gives instruction to the whole class. Those are 1) Try to think about possible aspects related to your article thoroughly, for example, when thinking about effects, naturally you should also say something about reasons; 2) The same layer of branches should be at the same level, so after listing some twigs, you should think carefully whether they can be drawn under the same branch; 3) Learn to think from both objective and subjective points, because this is the most dialectical way of thinking.

Learners can exchange their branching in groups according to teacher’s instruction, especially the notes mentioned above.

Through the self attempt in pre-task stage, mediation by dialogue and negotiation with their teacher and peers, learners have improved their abilities of drawing mind maps, which in turn, as a psychological tool (in Vygotsky’s concept) contributes to the transformation of their own thinking.

4.2.3 Revising
Macro-revising will be illustrated as an example here. “Macro” in its Greek origin means “large”; therefore macro-revision involves looking at the whole essay in terms of such determining factors as the subject, audience, and purpose, identifying major problems and fixing them so as to bring about better unity and development. There are many ways to help in this aspect. One way we are going to describe in detail is teacher-guided sample analysis.
In order to train learners to be effective writers and assessors, the teacher illustrates the criteria of good exposition (in a macro way) through sharing a sample composition with the whole class, and explains why this article is nice in terms of content and organization. Three most relevant Mediated Learning Experience components from Feuerstein et al. (1988) have been considered in the activity: they are Intentionality, Reciprocity, and Transcendence.

**Intentionality:**
The characteristic of this component is that the mediator (the teacher here) has a clear objective of the activity and adapts the activity level to the learners’ ZPD. In our case objectives and activities are planed as below:

Objectives: Make the learners (1) understand the criteria of a good exposition in terms of content and organization; (2) be able to enrich their drafts in content and improve them better in organization.

Activity: Appreciate or analyze a sample article to realize the objective.

The teacher tried to moderate the difficulty level of the sample article from the following aspects:

- **Difficult level:** Choosing one article of a student from the learners’ upper grade.
- **Content:** Choosing from the same writing activity (to exchange culture with foreign peers about “My hometown”, and the topic of the sample is “Pancake in Taian”.

**Reciprocity:**
The interaction and negotiation of meaning between the learner and the mediator is the key in this component.

Situated dialogue is used in the process of article appreciation and analysis. The following are some of the questions the teacher use in the mediation in the case.

1. Since you have finished reading the article, what is your general impression of the article? If it is good, why do you think so? And in what aspects it is good?
2. What do you think of its organization?
3. Does the article have a clear central idea (thesis)?
4. Is the central idea well supported and developed?
5. Is each paragraph clearly related to the central idea? Is the topic sentence of each paragraph well supported with relevant and sufficient details?
6. Are the paragraphs arranged in the most logical sequence?
7. What do you think of its content compared with yours?

**Transcendence:**
This goal-related component emphasizes that the impact of the situated activity should go beyond the “here-and-now” consideration, and stretch into the future.

Toward the end of the dialogue, what should be mastered in the activity should be restated, recapped. What’s more, the teacher’s most significant responsibility is to enable the learners to compose independently a well organized and rich-content exposition in the future.
Teacher’s summary includes the following three layers (Mercer, 1995):

(1) “We” statements, which are often used when teachers are trying to represent the past experience to the present.

Examples: Up to now, we have finished the analysis of the sample. We have analyzed its organization…We have …

(2) Literal recap, which includes a summary of the immediate objective of the activity.

(3) Reconstructive recaps, which indicates the transcendence of the concrete learning. In our case, the reconstructive recap starts from the summarized guide list shown in the following.

**Table 2. Standards of Macro-revision—Criteria for Good Writing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Surface</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* The paper is focused on a particular subject.</td>
<td>* The introduction gets the reader’s attention and prepares the reader for what is coming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* The purpose of the paper is clear to its readers.</td>
<td>* The organization is easy to follow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* The thesis is well supported.</td>
<td>* There is clear transition from one idea to the next.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Individual paragraphs are coherent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* All details develop the purpose of the paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* The conclusion draws the paper to a close, summarizes main point, and reemphasizes the paper’s purpose.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Revised based on Qi, 2004)

With this guide list, as a second step, students start their individual, or peer-to-peer revising, and it is supposed that by the teacher-guided mediation students not only understand the criteria of a good exposition article, but can combine what they have experienced in sample reading and what has been extracted by the mutual negotiation into their own writing and their (possibly) subsequent peer revising.

Other activities such as peer-to-peer revising, teacher-student conference are all complementarily used in this stage.

5. Findings and discussion

5.1 Findings

The aim of the DA-oriented instruction is to improve students’ writing ability substantially and heighten their confidence, and thus stimulate their motivation in future writing. To evaluate its effect, reflections from the students and teachers are made after each stage. And a general evaluation is made at the end by the following leading question:

Is DA beneficial in promoting your EFL writing abilities and in what aspects?
28 out of the 30 students claimed that they had made satisfactory progress. Just as one student expressed in the last session in her reflection:

I have finished my article at last! At first, I feel very difficult, even impossible for me to finish a 1000-word article, but with the guidance of the teacher, I followed each step and gradually produced a satisfactory article. I am very happy, thank you, my teacher.

The following are results and reflections in accordance with each focus.

1) Topic – focusing improvement
Students’ topics about their hometown have experienced a process of changing, a process of narrowing down and focusing, and a process of uniqueness-pursuing. Many final topics are really original and fresh. Examples of the topics are given below:

1. Eight Famous People in My Hometown—Penglaige
2. Birthplace of the Cricket Culture—Sidian Ningyang
3. “Ke Jia” (hakkas) Culture in Gangzhou
4. The Culture of “GanShi”—“赶尸”
5. The Earth House(围屋) in My Hometown
6. Paper-cut in my Hometown
7. A Special Product in Laiwu—Sausage
8. Qi Jiguang’s Home Village
9. Mysterious Wedding Ceremony in My Village
10. The Town of Roses in China

2) Surface and content improvement
After the two stages of negotiation: idea-generation & structuring and macro-revising, students’ compositions have greatly improved both in surface and content. The improvement can be shown by the comparison between the draft and revised version.

According to Faigley and Witte (1981), English learners’ composition changes through revision fall into two categories: surface changes and text-base changes. The former refers to preserving meaning; the latter, which is called content changes in the case study, refers to altering summary and affecting meaning. In each category of improvement further classification of changes are provided. Moreover, in the present study length changes are also regarded as one component of improvement.
Table 3. Types of Revision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surface Changes</th>
<th>Content Changes</th>
<th>Length Changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Additions</td>
<td>Additions</td>
<td>Number of words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deletions</td>
<td>Deletions</td>
<td>Number of paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitutions</td>
<td>Substitutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permutations</td>
<td>Permutations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributions</td>
<td>Distributions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidations</td>
<td>Consolidations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reorderings</td>
<td>Reorderings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Modified based on Faigley and Witte, 1981)

Based on careful comparison between all the subjects’ drafts and revised versions, the author calculated the amount of changes for each term. The results are shown in the following frequency table.

Table 4. Frequency of Types of Revision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Surface Changes(average)</th>
<th>Content Changes(average)</th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Additions</td>
<td>8 (6%)</td>
<td>24 (17%)</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deletions</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
<td>20 (15%)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitutions</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
<td>12 (9%)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permutations</td>
<td>10 (8%)</td>
<td>5 (4%)</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributions</td>
<td>6 (5%)</td>
<td>9 (7%)</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidations</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reorderings</td>
<td>8 (6%)</td>
<td>24 (17%)</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Figures of Length Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Pre-task Version (Draft)</th>
<th>Post–task Version (Revised Version)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of paragraphs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of words</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>1100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures in Table 4 show that learners’ revised versions are much richer, more concise and more logical than their drafts, especially in the content. In vertical direction of Table 4, the rate of content changes covers 70%, and the top three in the content column are additions 17%, reorderings 17%, and deletions 15%. The figures mentioned above tell us that the greatest benefit students get from Dynamic Assessment framework in process writing is content improvement. More additions show more richness in the content; more deletions show more concisenesses; and more reorderings show more logic. In surface
column, besides additions 6% and reorderings 6%, the change that can strike us is the permutations 8%, and this figure indicates that students’ compositions become neater after the mediation. In lateral direction of Table 4, the subtotal figures of additions 23%, deletions 16%, and reorderings 23% can also illustrate students’ writing improvement of richness, conciseness and logic in both surface and content.

Figures in Table 5 show that both number of paragraphs and number of words in the post-task versions double that in the pre-task version. This change indicates that after the mediation from the teacher or peers, students really know what to write and how to write long enough.

Not only the above statistic figures but also students’ reflection shows that they have got such progress: organizing ideas centering on the topic, arranging the whole passage systematically, and developing adequate details, especially after the activity of Teacher-guided Sample Analysis. Through reading and appreciating the article of their fellow student, many students wrote as the following:

I have the same topic of her, “Pancake of My Hometown”, but I never think of so many things that can be related to pancake, for example she even talked about the historical events relevant to pancake.

From the article, I found I have too little information and knowledge of my topic. I will collect more facts and knowledge about my writing subject after class.

I rearrange the order of my article based on the teacher assessment, and it seems more logical and natural.

3) Greater confidence in writing better
Since the mediation has been performed around their potential level, and bent on their further development, students in the case showed increased interest and confidence in writing. Take sample reading for example. Since the sample article(s) is/are written by their fellow student(s), they can see the gap between their current level and the desired clearly, and thus analyze the possibility of catching up.

We did a simple end-of-class survey with only one question after the above-mentioned Teacher-guided Sample Analysis activity. “What have you gained by the sample reading?” 28 students handed in their answers. 56 percent of the students (the largest category) mentioned that they found the large gap between the sample writer and themselves, but what interests us most is that up to 48 percent of them (the second largest category) mentioned that they were confident to write better.

Writing in fact is not as difficult as I thought from the reading of the sample. Appropriate words and good organization are two key factors.

I found a good article can also be written by simple words if it has a good organization and
rich content. I must try again to make it better!

I realize I spent too little effort on my composition compared with the sample writer. But I think if I write seriously I can work out a better one.

5.2 Discussion
The study is designed to test the effect of using Dynamic Assessment framework on students’ writing ability and motivation by providing mediation as a vehicle for promoting students to span the ZPD established by the distance between them and their teacher or peers in a writing task and achieve the aim of enhancing their writing competence. The findings confirm the realization of the central objectives: 1) Learners’ writing ability can be substantially and comprehensively improved; 2) Learners’ motivation of writing can be markedly stimulated.

Feuertein (1988) said, “human beings are open rather than closed systems, meaning that cognitive abilities … can be developed in a variety of ways, depending on the presence and the quality of appropriate forms of interaction and instruction”. In our case study, in the students’ open systems, the teacher establishes students’ Zone of Proximal Development through the interaction and instruction in a cooperative and equal way with the tool of dialogue.

The results of these activities assure us that the EFL process writing integrated with Dynamic Assessment can improve students’ writing competence and build up their writing confidence in the following chain reflection. In the students’ ZPD, the teacher’s mediation stimulates students’ responsiveness through which their enthusiasm of engagement in the writing process rises, and the span of the ZPD happens, so the immediate result is students’ improvement from their present cognitive ability level to the future level. Face to face interaction with the teacher shows students’ progress to themselves clearly and completely, thus their confidence in writing better in the future is built up, and the possibility of transferring what they learn in this writing task to the future similar one or more complicated one is definitely reasonable.

The explorative study lays a path uniting EFL Process Writing instruction and Dynamic Assessment approach, and establishes a solid basis for broadening the integration of DA into other teaching tasks and methods. As a study of some initial and promising attempts, there are still some uncertainties and limitations of it, including: 1) The case is the first session of long-article writing and lasted only three weeks, and the number of participant is only 30, so the effect of DA framework for regular writing instruction needs further study. 2) The extent to which participants are influenced by other activities or factors are not clear, such as the perspective of possible online-cross-cultural communication, the possibility of exchanging final-articles with classmates in our English-writing website and the teachers’ experience in writing instruction, etc. 3) Since different students have different degrees of responsiveness to assistance, the effect of mediation varies from student to student. The extent to which different students benefit from the mediation needs further investigation. But one point is definite, that is valid Dynamic Assessment is marked by its relevance to and usefulness in instruction for the benefit of
the students and it should be viewed as part of the teaching process but not merely as its inevitable end point.

6. Conclusion

Dynamic Assessment framework proposed in the study attaches great importance to the whole process of writing practice, especially the first three stages that are usually neglected by most EFL teachers. In the process-oriented instruction, the effort made for promoting writing is not a static, separate and unilateral endeavor of either the teacher or the learner; in contrast, it is a dynamic, continuous and mutual effort. Unlike other assessments, which set their objective as evaluating the level of students or providing feedback for their study, the ultimate goal of Dynamic Assessment is promoting development. By interpreting the potential of learners (pre-task), assistance is made via the interaction between mediators and learners aided by language (dialogue) or other mediational tools (mediation). Since the mediation is made in the Zone of Proximal Development of learners, remarkable progress is likely to occur.

The present study has really got some valuable results and surely can provide some enlightenment to EFL writing in China. But there are still some uncertainties and limitations needing further research.

References


(Continued on p. 73…)