WRITING PARTNERS PROGRAM

Case Study of ELL Students & Beginning Coaches

WRITING PARTNERS PROGRAM

Initially, in Spring 2013, paired bridge students with the undergraduate students in the tutor training course.

This presentation's research is from the Spring 2015 group of 17 pairs of students; the ELL students in this group were all Chinese.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the possible connections between Second Language Acquisition Theories and writing partner experiences?

How does the writing partner model benefit coaches in training and ELL students?

AFFECTIVE FILTER HYPOTHESIS— STEPHEN KRASHEN (1982)

Hypothesis by Stephen Krashen which emphasizes the negative effect of anxiety on language learning.

Affective filter negatively effects comprehensible input (listening) and output (speaking).

APPLICATION TO ELL WRITERS

Speaking is especially anxiety-producing for ELL students (Young, 1990).

Speaking is not a primary component of English teaching in China (Ma and Kelly, 2009).

CONFIDENCE GAINED THROUGH SPEAKING

Many of the Chinese students mentioned speaking in English as being a very important component of this program.

"We did speaking and writing in English all the time; almost all the speaking topics were not prepared, we just talked about our weekend, our projects, and even funny things. . . So I think that's very useful."

" I started to talk with my classmates even [though] they are not Chinese. "

DIMINISHED ANXIETY ON BOTH SIDES

All coaches (17) reported feeling more confident about working with ELL students as a result of their writing partner experience, working with the same student all semester.

" Coach

I was so scared I wouldn't be able to understand my writing partner at all, but it hasn't been a problem. **"**

" I have more confidence that I can communicate and understand students who speak English as a second language "

INTERACTION HYPOTHESIS— MICHAEL LONG (1996)

Posits comprehensible input is crucial for language learning.

The effectiveness of comprehensible input is actually *increased* when interlocutors are *unable* to understand each other and must negotiate until mutual comprehension is reached.

"It is not simply the outcome of negotiation. . . But the actual participation in the negotiation that facilitates [language] acquisition" (Williams 82).

INCREASED INTERACTION

As the semester went on, coaches noticed an increase in their partner's input.

Coach

" There wasn't much collaboration happening at the beginning. . . . As we continued throughout the semester, [my partner] became a true partner. He provides input. "

"My partner has come more comfortable asking me questions. . . . He has wonderful ideas, and we often work on making sure they are coming across."

OBSERVATIONS: NOTICED INCREASED INTERACTIVENESS

Most pairs became noticeably more interactive as the semester progressed.

"The first session that I observed was a little cold and both parties seemed uncomfortable. However, the second session [at the end of the semester] ran much smoother. . . .dialogue went on the entire session."

"Learning definitely seems to be easier for people who are relaxed, rather than the uptight, shy, self-conscious people I have seen come in for sessions."

INTERACTIVE COACHING STRATEGIES

By working with their partners, coaches noticed their interactive coaching ability improve.

"[Having a writing partner] has motivated me as training as a coach. It solidified that a session is a two way dialogue, and we can learn from each other."

Coach

SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY: LEV VYGOTSKY

Social cognitive theory emphasizes the importance of collaboration between peers to maximize learning for both groups.

Collaboration between peers adds value on both sides.

"I am always afraid of starting writing, but he encourages me to start it."

"It makes me feel I am not alone. . . .When I cannot think of any new ideas, I know I have a coach who can help me."

ELL Student

"We can improve, both of us, and I can develop my English skills."

INCREASED COACH MOTIVATION

"Having a more personal connection with your writing partner than you have with clients gives you more motivation to do your best because you can see the impact you have."

"I always leave our sessions promising her I'd brush up on my skills too, and often the first few minutes of our sessions, I explain to her what I learned. I have been encouraged to keep learning."

Coach

ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT & INSTRUCTIONAL SCAFFOLDING (VYGOTSKY)

Learning occurs in the zone of proximal development through the act of helping a learner accomplish tasks with assistance (scaffolding), until the learner can do them independently.

The focus moves from whether to be more or less directive for ELL students to "providing the level of directness that is appropriate for each learner" (Williams 86).

SCAFFOLDING IN ACTION

"She catches herself without me saying anything now. . . . I attribute this growth to pointing out sentences that I see an error in, and she had to figure out what was wrong. We also went over these topics many times."

"I got to know her writing, and I could tell when she was trying out new phrases, words, and sentence structures. . . As the semester progressed, our sessions focused less on grammatical mistakes and more on idea development and constructing arguments"

SUCCESS OF PROGRAM-- TUTORS IN TRAINING

" To be honest, it was a little like baptism by fire— working with a writing partner was intimidating, but definitely helped in the long run. It helped me feel more confident and prepared. "

"This experience was vital to my training to become a writing center coach.
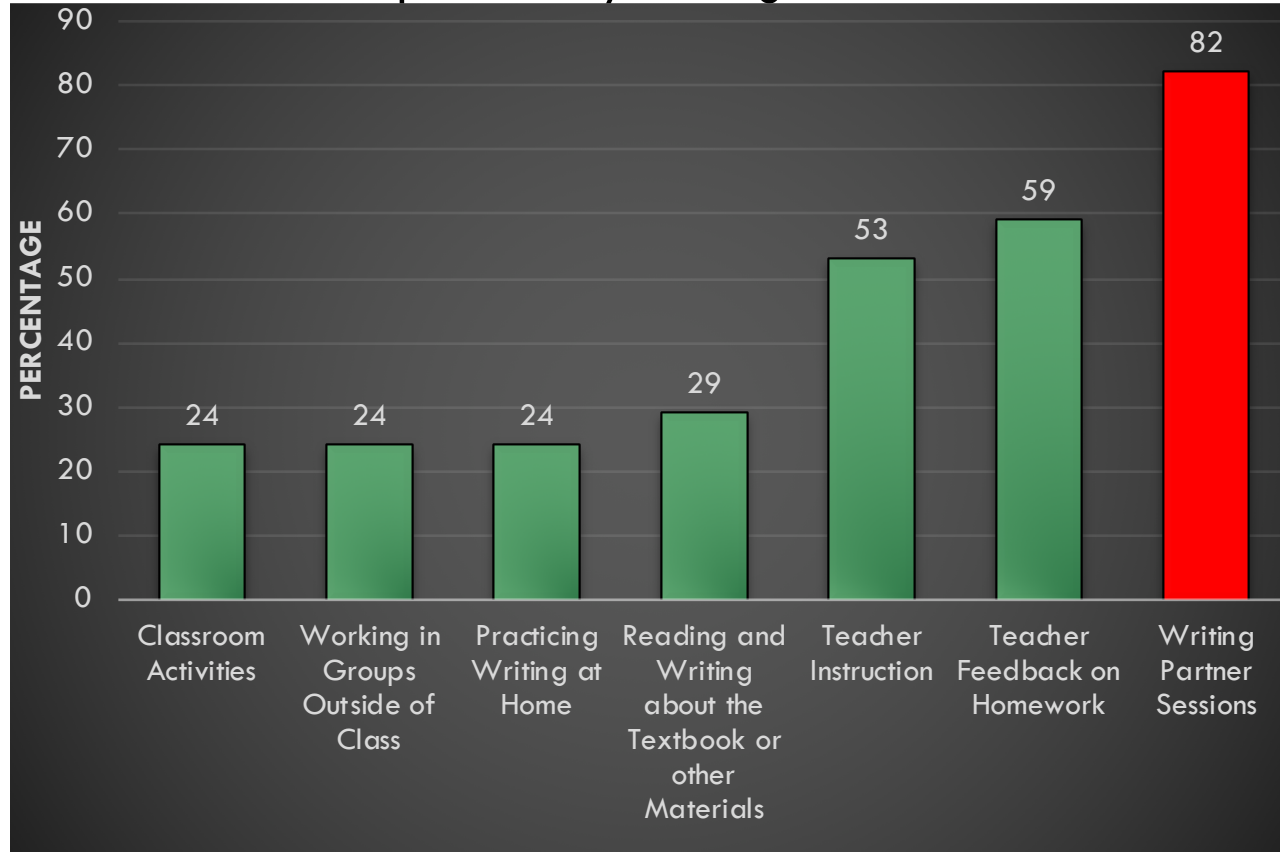
Coach

"We were able to really establish a relationship and our sessions were very enjoyable. It was also great to be able to see and track my writing partner's progress as the semester went on. The only drawback was that it was only for one semester.

Coach

SUCCESS OF PROGRAM— ELL STUDENTS

Spring 2015 international writing partner students were asked, "Out of the following components, which do you think have been very important for the development of your English skills this semester?"

ELL Student

"NOT JUST MY COACH"

ELL Student

" For me, my writing partner is not just my coach, she is more like a friend of mine. She helps me a lot, like wording and organization of my paper and presentation. She always does the brainstorm with me and tells me how I can be better. We have many things in common, so I won't feel stressed when talking to her. "

CONCLUSION

Pairing tutors in training with writing partners is a dynamic teaching tool, which can benefit both the coach and the client.

Specifically, pairing first-year ELL students with tutors in training increases the benefit to coach and client.

Second Language Acquisition Theories can supply a powerful lens in which to view writing center practice.

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