The Theoretical Construction of a Dynamic Assessment Mode in Chinese Tertiary EFL Writing Class with Online Teaching and Scoring Systems

Yanhong Zhang (zh-yanhong@163.com), Luoyang Normal University, China

Abstract
Based on Vygotsky's (1989) sociocultural theory of mind, and with reference to the theories of dynamic assessment, three constructional principles for writing assessment were proposed in light of process writing theories. Based on such principles, a theoretical dynamic assessment mode was constructed for Chinese tertiary EFL writing class, incorporating such interventional measures as the establishment of a web-based writing teaching system, the adoption of an online automated essay scoring system, and the design of scaffolding strategies for each stage of writing. It is proposed that the success of such an assessment mode will lie in the construction of an English writing learning community, along with a more sensible distribution of the jobs among students and between the teacher and students. Other fundamentally important factors are also discussed.

Keywords: EFL writing, dynamic assessment, theoretical mode, scaffolding intervention, zone of proximal development

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, summative tests prevail in college English writing classes all over mainland China. With uniform content and rigid criteria, such assessment modes focus too much on the learning results, ignoring the learning process, thus they are not conducive to the promotion of the students' writing competence. Issued by the Ministry of Education of China in 2007, *College English Curriculum Requirements* specifically supplemented the contents of the teaching evaluation, with emphasis on the process and developmentality of assessment. Therefore, it is high time to explore and establish a new assessment mode in college English writing classes. On the other hand, sponsored by the Ministry of Education of China, ever since the year 2004 all the universities and colleges have been attempting to build network-based college English instructional models, bringing the teachers their most-needed resources and technical support. Now it is possible for them to realize their dream to give their students prompt feedback or guidance both individually and collectively. Thus the technical environment is already prepared for the introduction of the notion of dynamic assessment into college English writing classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dynamic assessment (DA hereafter) is a newly-rising way of evaluation within the past several decades. It challenges conventional views on instruction and assessment by arguing that they must be unified into a single activity in which various forms of support are provided in order to reveal the scope of learners' abilities while simultaneously aiding their development (Lidz & Gindis, 2003). DA procedures can be considered then as those in which assessment is accompanied by "an instructional intervention" (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002, p. 23). There are a variety of research orientations in this field, but "process-orientation" and

"integration of instruction and assessment" are their most distinct characteristics, with their focus on the influence of sociocultural and other non-intellectual factors upon the individuals' potential.

DA is grounded in Vygotsky's (1989) Sociocultural Theory of Mind (SCT hereafter), especially his conception of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD hereafter), which rests on his two important, interrelated constructs: mediation and internalization. According to SCT, individuals' responsiveness to the support or mediation that is sensitive to their current level of ability reveals cognitive functions that have not yet fully developed. Moreover, appropriate mediation enables individuals to exceed their independent performance, and this in turn stimulates further development (Vygotsky, 1986, 1998). DA adopts the view of Vygotsky that the main duty of education is not to prove that there are problems in the learners' learning, but to find the reasons behind such problems, and accordingly help the learners to set up new goals for development. The function of the DA is not only about helping the learners to accomplish a specific task, but constantly guiding the learners transcending beyond their current level of ability, since development itself does not have an endpoint (Feuerstein, et al. 1988).

Therefore, DA can not only play the traditional role as done by summative assessments, but it can also work as a reflective pedagogical approach. Poehner (2007) argues that the term "assessment" in DA is qualitatively different from how it is typically understood in psychology and education. In lieu of understanding assessment as the observation and recording of individuals' behaviors for the purpose of inferring underlying abilities, assessment in the dynamic sense involves transformation of those abilities through dialogic collaboration between learners and assessor–teachers, or mediators. However, DA sessions will vary according to learner development so that over time learners engage in increasingly complex tasks with less mediation. Consequently, the challenge the practitioners of DA are faced with is to adjust their ways of supportive intervention and increase the difficulty of the learning tasks to a proper level according to the growth of the learners' development.

CONSTRUCTIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR WRITING ASSESSMENT

Based on the above theory, especially the idea of Poehner (2008), the design of any DA mode for college English writing will be appropriate if following such principles:

Integration of Assessment and Instruction

DA emphasizes the inseparability of assessment and instruction (Grigorenko, 2009; Lantolf, 2009; Lantolf & Poehner, 2007), arguing that the comprehensive evaluation of the students' ability requires instructional mediation, which will promote the development of their ability at the same time. In turn, in order to guide the students in the process of their development, a careful study of their individual ability is essential before instruction. Thus assessment and instruction is a development-oriented dialectical unity. According to the DA principles, a full description of a student's writing ability should not depend solely on the observation of his performance in one single writing activity; instead, it is necessary to further promote his development through implementing specific forms of intervention or social interactive activities in the process of his writing. In the entire implementation process of the assessment, teachers should pay close attention to the students' underlying problems in writing, and accordingly design various relevant supportive interventions they possibly need; and then

through the observation of their response to such mediational activities, teachers should make a keener judgment on their writing ability, and devise the "scaffolding-type" interventional activities for the next step of instruction. In turn, the students' performance in each session will test in time the effectiveness of the teachers' instructional intervention, stimulating them to improve their design of the interventional activities constantly. In this way, such an evaluation mode can assess both the students and the teachers at the same time, promoting both the development of the learning and the improvement of the teaching.

Design of Graduated and Serialized Interaction

Currently pursued are several dynamic approaches to psychoeducational assessment. Lantolf and Poehner (2004) explained that these models differ in how they approach mediation, with some adhering to scripted prompts and hints, and others encouraging open-ended dialogue between mediators and learners. They referred to the former models as interventionist DA, and the latter models as interactionist DA, which both exemplify the implementation of Vygotsky's (1986) well-known proposals of ZPD and scaffolding.

Although interactionist DA can explain the students' psychological development process in greater details, it is more labor- and time-consuming, and more suitable for classroom assessment with relatively fewer students. Since large sizes are prevalent in college English classes in China, interventionist DA paradigm seems to be more appropriate. Accordingly, it is better to adopt interventionist DA model in the writing activities suitable for the whole class, and interactionist DA model in the necessary personalized guidance activities. On the whole, an ideal DA mode for college English writing class should take account of both the standardized procedural design of the former and the idea of interactiveness in the latter, so that it is possible for the teachers to provide timely effective scaffolding intervention for the students in their writing.

Improvement of Interactive Environment

From the perspective of Vygotsky's SCT, cognitive development is a social interaction process, and the students' learning disabilities might be rooted in the poor social interaction environment. Through instructional intervention and guidance, the students' cognitive development areas can be broadened. On that ground, in any DA mode for college English writing class, all the interactive activities should be designed through the teachers' negotiation with students, so that the teachers could understand better to what the extent the students can control such newly acquired abilities, and accordingly devise new forms of interactive activities for the next step. Thus the interaction between the teachers and the students can be constantly improved.

CONSTRUCTING A DA MODE ALONG WITH SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONAL ACTIVITIES

According to the above principles, to construct a proper DA mode for EFL writing class, teachers can integrate the interventional assessment activities into the entire process of the students' writing by designing relevant scaffolding instructional activities according to the characteristics of each stage and the students' actual demand. Such work can be done with the help of the platform of a web-based writing teaching system and an online automated essay scoring system. Currently EFL class sizes for non-English majors are usually too large for the

teachers to communicate with all the students sufficiently and timely; besides, since there are usually no special writing courses for non-English undergraduates in mainland China, it is rather difficult for the teachers to attend to the needs of each individual student and conduct personalized dynamic evaluation. Brown & Ferrara (1999) proposed a concept of "community of learners", in which participants work together to set up a common goal, and then seek to accomplish it collaboratively. Within the community there exist a diversity of overlapping ZPDs, and each learner can advance in a different rate along a different course. Such a convergence of ZPDs constitutes a ZPD for the whole class. Gibbons (2003) explored the possibility of constructing a group ZPD. Poehner (2009) argued that organizing classroom activity in group DA enables teachers to explore and promote the group's ZPD while also supporting the development of individual learners. Vygotsky (1998) himself ever mentioned the same idea as well. This kind of practice is similar to the construction of one-to-one ZPD interactive activities in that the mediator has to adjust his supportive intervention according to the response of the whole group of learners, but it is different from the one-to-one ZPD interactive practice in that more learners work in collaboration with the mediator to accomplish a task collectively. Such an idea of learning community and the above-mentioned research practice are both enlightening for the construction of the DA mode for current college English writing class: teachers can take each class as a single unit for intervention in designing their instructional activities so as to realize the promotion of the ZPD for the whole class. The Internet brings the best resources and technical support for the teachers to provide their students well-timed feedback and guidance both collectively and individually.

In addition, according to a survey among the students in our daily classroom teaching, it is found that the students' complaints concerning the teaching of writing can be summarized as follows: first, they often have nothing to "say" in writing, and even if they do have something to "say", they cannot "speak out" for the lack of the corresponding ability to express themselves; the second problem they are confronted with is the shortage of effective reference materials for writing, due to the fact that with limited time for English study, they always find it difficult to select and utilize fully the reference resources among the "sea" of information from the Internet and paper literature; finally, they report that they always lack the initiative to write, and that since they cannot see their progress in writing in time, they will lose confidence and interest in writing. Taking all these factors into consideration, it is proposed that the design of the DA mode for EFL writing class should incorporate such interventional activities as appropriate writing strategies instruction, sufficient and effective writing reference resources input and the provision of incentives to sustain the students' initiative to write, so that the construction of ideal "scaffolds" can be possibly realized. The following interventional measures might be helpful (as shown in Figure 1):
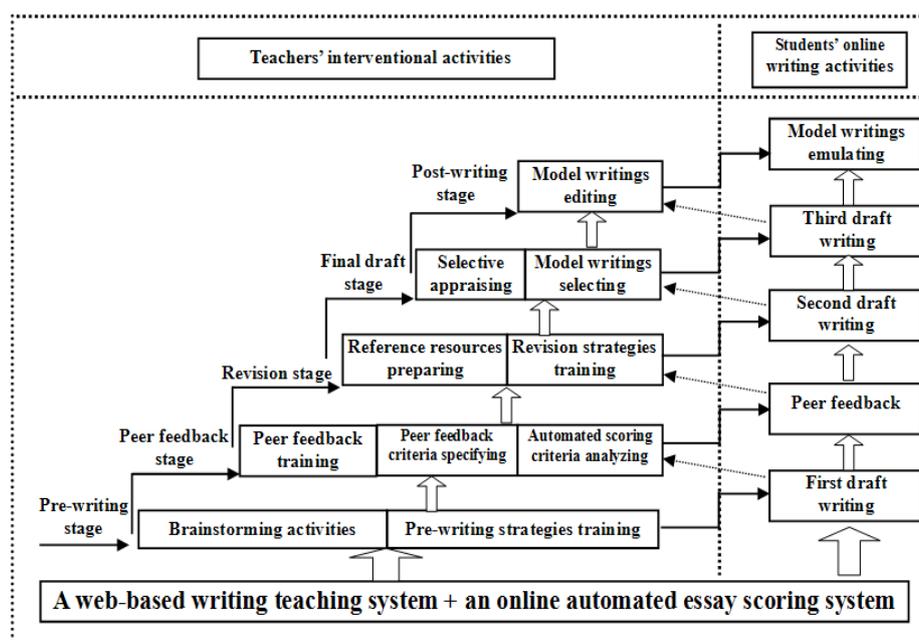
Figure 1. The flowchart of scaffolding interventional activities in the DA for EFL writing class

The Building of a Web-Based Writing Teaching System

Based on the detailed analysis of the traditional classroom teaching of English writing, and the thorough investigation of the students' English writing status and demands, a web-based EFL writing teaching system can be built as follows:

In the system, such columns should be available as *Assignments Announcement*, *Writing Skills*, *Writing Strategies*, *Sample Writings*, *Resources Sharing*, *Model Writings*, *Writing Forum* and *Messages to Me,* among others. The column of *Assignments Announcement* is set for teachers to upload the writing tasks, and meanwhile provide evaluation criteria and methods for each piece of assignment. *Writing Skills* column provides necessary writing techniques, commonly-used sentence patterns in English writing and frequently-occurred errors analysis. A primary function of *Writing Strategies* column is to help the teachers to carry on online surveys of the students' writing strategies; its another function is to enable the teachers to give the students suggestions for specific revisions and practicable writing strategies after they complete their first draft or while they conduct group discussions for peer feedback. *Sample Writings* is the column for the teachers to upload their collection of relevant typical English or Chinese articles from the Internet and paper literature. *Resources Sharing* provides the students other online reference resources to help them revise their first draft, such as websites related to the theme assigned, wonderful online open lectures concerning writing, and so forth. With the help of such resources and peer feedback, the students complete their second draft independently. The teachers check their second drafts, point out their merits and drawbacks, and give them specific suggestions for further improvement; and most importantly, they will upload the chosen well-written ones to the *Model Writings* column for the students' reference, guiding them to accomplish their third draft. *Writing Forum* is mainly for the students to exchange resources and seek help and advice among themselves. *Messages to Me* is a column for the teachers to answer the students' questions and provide necessary strategies guidance concerning their writing problems encountered in the process of writing.

The Adoption of an Online Automated Essay Scoring Tool

While making specific reference to Vygotsky's understanding of cognitive development, Güthke (1993) argued that individuals do not have just one ZPD for general intelligence or learning ability, but multiple domain-specific ZPDs. His argument is suggestive of the possible fact that different students may have different ZPDs in the different dimensions of writing. In other words, a student rich in ideas may lack the necessary language output ability in English, or he may not be familiar with those cohesion means used commonly in the native speakers' writings. So it is necessary to consider the investigation of the students' performance in different dimensions of their writing, so that it will on the one hand be convenient for the teachers to find out the students' specific ZPDs in different aspects of writing; on the other hand, it will facilitate the students to identify more accurately their problems in English writing. Therefore, it is important to redesign the grading criteria of English writing because it will not be of great help to simply provide the students with a holistic score. An online automated scoring tool, Writing Roadmap 2.0 (WRM2.0 hereafter) launched by CTB McGraw-Hill, might be one of the tools helpful to realize the identification of the students' ZPDs in different dimensions of writing.

As a relatively well-developed online automated essay scoring system, WRM2.0 can provide the users with both scores and comments. According to its scoring rubrics, it can supply the users with a holistic score and scores for five dimensions of their writing: organization, development (ideas and content), sentence structure, word choice/grammar usage, and mechanics. Beside such scores, it also gives the users specific comments in detail. Furthermore, WRM2.0 has several Instructional Tools to perform some tutoring functions, such as *Hint*, *Tutor*, *Thesaurus*, and *Grammar Tree*, which can help the students find the direction for their improvement in spelling, organization, word choice and grammar. WRM2.0 also allows the teachers to comment on the students' writings freely in its *Score Items*. Since the year 2011, CTB McGraw-Hill has also launched a Chinese version of the system. Such efforts will make it more convenient for the Chinese non-English majors since most of them are more comfortable with Chinese comments after they get the scores.

For the teachers, one important feature is that the system can provide them with some useful statistics, such as *Student Profile Report*, *Writing Summary Report*, *Writing Gain Reports*, among other figures and numbers, so that the teachers can get a glimpse of the students' performance quickly, saving a lot of trouble and time in commenting on the students' writing and summarizing their proficiency levels. WRM2.0 can also provide them with the proficiency summary of the whole class in the form of pie and bar charts. Besides, it can also provide the writing status of each student in *Roster Report*, helping the teachers to supervise the logging and writing of the whole class. In short, WRM2.0 can help both the teachers in their teaching and the students in their writing, as stated in its slogans.

The Design of Procedural Interventional Activities for Each Stage of Writing

In light of process writing theories, specific interventional activities for each stage of writing might be helpful if designed as follows:

At the pre-writing stage: According to the theory of situated learning, in order that all the students could find something to "say", the teacher need only provide a theme or a situation for students to reflect upon and then decide on a specific topic for their own writing, instead of the traditional way of assigning a specific topic for all students prevalent in college English

writing classes. Emig (1971: 20) stated that as an initial stage in the whole process of writing, the pre-writing stage will be vital for the success of any writing. Zhang Zaixin et al (1995) believed that at the pre-writing stage, by cultivating the effective use of certain writing strategies among the students, they may learn to excavate subjects and ideas for writing, and consequently improve the sterility of their English writing in ideas. To that end, the teacher's instructional intervention at this stage should focus on the pre-writing strategies guidance and brainstorming activities organization, helping the students to write down whatever comes pouring into their mind in order that their ability might be promoted to "dig into their mind" and extract ideas. In order to strengthen the interaction and facilitate the opportune communication between the teacher and the students in big-class instruction, the teacher can provide online writing skills instruction, and answer the students' online questions with the help of the web-based writing teaching system. With such scaffolding help from the teacher, the students complete their first draft in WRM2.0, which will immediately provide them with evaluation in the form of scores and comments. Such timely assessment can also help the teacher to get a general picture of the students' writing performance along with the effect of his or her interventional efforts, so that he or she may get prepared for the subsequent intervention in the students' writing.

At the peer feedback stage: After the students complete their first draft, the teacher can divide them into small groups to evaluate their own compositions among themselves. According to Vygotsky (1998), the mutual cooperation between students will be of great importance in promoting the ZPD of the whole group. Wigglesworth & Storch's (2009) comparative experimental research concerning collaborative writing in second language contexts revealed that collaboration impacted positively on the learners' accuracy of writing. Hence the teacher's responsibility should also include the improvement of the students' ability to cooperate with others and the cultivation of their reader consciousness in the process of writing, in order that they may learn to assimilate ideas and techniques from their peers in time and make up for their own problems. The teacher's interventional measures here at this stage may include the following three aspects: the organization of the students' group discussion and necessary peer feedback training, the specification of feasible scoring criteria according to the characteristics of each writing task, and the analysis of the scoring criteria of WRM2.0 for the students' better use of such an automated scoring tool in their autonomous writing.

In order to make the principles for peer feedback perspicuous and operable, in light of Williams' (2004) *Holistic Evaluation of Drafts,* Villamil & De Guerrero's (1996) "writing prompts for peer revision of narrative and persuasive essays", and Nelson & Murphy's (1993) research conclusion, the teacher can direct the students' attention to such macroscopic-level problems as those in idea development and structural organization of their peers' writings. As to the language problems, the students may only need to write down their general impression at the end of their peers' writing, or if they are sure enough, they may underline or modify the language mistakes in their peers' writing. Meanwhile, the teacher can select some of the students' works and survey their feedback randomly to check how well they have appreciated such scaffolding interventions from the teacher. In order to motivate the students to provide their peers with better feedback, the teacher shall not hesitate to praise those conscientious peer feedback providers in face of all the classmates. Peer feedback activities can take various forms, including the feedback within a group, between or among different groups, or random feedback within the whole class.

At the revision stage: Based on the response from their peers, the students are required to revise their first draft. The teacher has two tasks to perform to support the students at this

stage: one is to build an online English writing reference resources database; the other is to conduct revision strategies training activities among the students, providing them with available writing strategies for reference, so that they may find it easier to complete their second draft by themselves.

According to Krashen's (1985) comprehensible input hypothesis, a decisive factor in second language acquisition is to get access to massive comprehensible, interesting and related purpose language. Therefore, the above mentioned EFL writing reference resources database should be an open one, which can be expanded dynamically. In addition, all the materials in the corpus should be collected based on the student's actual needs and proficiency level of English. For variety, they may be some web sites related to the writing theme, or some model writings, or even simply some well-written sentences, either in Chinese or in English. In view of the existing research in literature and the current situation of EFL teaching practice in most colleges and universities in China, and considering the student's actual learning time and reading comprehension ability, the teacher should adapt such reference materials and cut them down to reasonable length, so that the students can be expected to finish reading them within certain period of time. Nevertheless, such materials must be classic, providing excellent examples or ideas for the students to refer to, so they might be short and concise popular science articles, or some vivid and humorous stories, or some wonderful and enlightening thesis chapters, or excerpts from classic literary works, or some news reports, and so forth. The teacher can also choose some excellent model writings from CET4 (College English Test, Band 4) or CET6 (College English Test, Band 6) with related or similar subjects. In short, here the teacher should play the role of a filter, sorting and collating all the resources in the collection.

The reason for the presentation of such reference corpus to the students at the revision stage is that it might be easier and more helpful to call the students' attention to such resources if presented at a proper time (after the students have finished their first draft, for example). In the traditional EFL writing classes in China, where the teachers usually adopt the Product Approach, model essays analyses will also be an important part of the classroom activities. However, since such activities generally take place before the students actually begin their writing, such practice may produce the following negative effect upon the students' writing behavior: first, since there have been some fixed repertoire presented before the students think seriously about the subject, they would be liable to be imprisoned in thinking; additionally, since they have not begun any writing activities, the students will not give enough conscious attention to the "sparkles" (such as wonderful ideas, well-written sentences, or delicate choice of words, and so on) in the model writings; and without such "consciousness", learning will not occur (Schmidt, 1990).

At the final draft stage: Considering the limited time and large class sizes, the teacher can select some of the students' second drafts in WRM2.0 and provide necessary comments according to holistic or dimensional scores given by the system. For example, he or she may choose the same numbers of writings from high-scorers, middle-scorers, and low-scorers; or he may focus on one dimension of the writing (such as choice of words), and choose those typical examples for the students to learn from. In whatever way he or she selects to comment, one task the teacher cannot ignore is to select some of the students' second-drafts with the teacher's comments and upload them into the web-based writing teaching system, so that all the students might read them and find something enlightening enough for their own writing of the third draft.

At the post-writing stage: After the students have revised their writing for the third time with all the reference material provided, the teacher may survey the students' writing again in the online automated essay scoring system, choose some of the high-scorers' writings or some greatly improved writings, edit them in detail, and then upload them into the *Model Writings* column of the above mentioned web-based writing teaching system. The purpose for the establishment of such an online corpus of edited model writings is to provide both an opportunity and a platform for the students to exchange with and learn from their peers independently after class, because it has proved in daily EFL writing teaching that the presentation of the students' model writings is helpful in at least two ways: on the one hand, it can set good examples for the students and encourage them to do better or to learn from their peers; on the other hand, while reading their peers' writings, the students may forget their fear and feeling of inferiority as what they may feel while reading the famous writers' masterpieces, which seem to them far and unavailable "signposts".

Described above is the design of a complete session of DA for EFL writing class. In order to track the students' development in the process of their writing, through classroom observation and online survey, the teacher need to pay special attention to the changes regarding the types of problems the students encounter, the mediation they require to overcome these problems, their responsiveness to mediation, and their efforts to gain greater autonomy. And before the next round of assessment and intervention, the teacher can organize a panel of student representatives, investigating their suggestions concerning all the instructional interventions at each stage of their writing. Based on their response and performance in the previous session of DA, the teacher can divide students with similar writing problems into one group, and design special scaffolding interventions according to their specific real needs in the next session. For example, for those poor in their ideas, the teacher may help them by providing them with cubing techniques training (as stated in Wu & Zhang, 2000), that is, the teacher will select for them some articles discussing the same problem from different perspectives, in order that they may learn to think carefully and observe the same problem from various angles. For those not good at organizing their writing materials, the teacher may give them a special lecture on the characteristics of English writings in structural organization, especially the commonly-used cohesive devices in the natives' writings, demonstrating to them how to improve the organization of their writing with the help of some excellent English essays. In short, the formation of each group is not fixed, with their members rearranged dynamically with the ongoing development of the students' writing ability in different DA sessions.

It is worthy of notice that the above mentioned scaffolding interventions from the teacher will not make the writing task itself easier for the students, but they might be helpful for the students to finish their specific writing task. The short-term goal of such interventional efforts is to help the students realize their transformation within one intervention session from other-regulation (depending on the teacher's/expert's instruction) to self-mediation (in the form of self-correcting by independently emulating the model writings provided by the teacher) in one specific writing task. After several sessions of such DA interventional endeavors, they are expected to achieve a long-term goal: through their continuous self-reflecting, the students will gradually learn to "internalize" the external knowledge (such as all kinds of knowledge of writing and writing strategies) and convert it into a tool in their conscious control, gradually transferring it from one task to other similar writing activities. In this way, they may progress continuously and grow into "an expert" – an independent learner with complete self-regulation, realizing their complete autonomy in writing and constant transcendence beyond their current levels.

According to the suggestions of Newman et al. (1989), during all DA intervention sessions, learners are encouraged to take on as much responsibility for task completion as possible, and the mediator/teacher remains ready to catch them when they "slip over the edge" of their competence. Therefore, in the entire process of writing assessment and intervention, including the brainstorming activities at the pre-writing stage, peer feedback activities, and the students' independent work on their second and third drafts, the teacher's roles may switch from a writing strategies director to a writing reference resources provider, or to a sustainer of the students' initiative to write, or to a counselor for students' writing problems. Only in this way can such a student-centered EFL writing class give full play to the students' subjective initiative to write, helping them learn to exchange their ideas with their teacher and other classmates in time, and consequently construct their own writing ability step by step.

In the entire DA system in operation, initially the teacher may bear most of the work; but along with the enhancement of the students' writing ability, he may gradually withdraw the "scaffolds", urging the students to complete their writing task independently. The teacher should provide graduated and contingent scaffolding instructional mediation according to the developmental needs of the students in the process of writing, meanwhile ensuring that both the design of the writing task and the ways of intervention successfully work within the students' ZPD (because an individual's ability and the corresponding developmental needs always emerge suddenly). And at appropriate times the teacher shall relinquish control to the students, helping them move to complete autonomy as soon as possible. This may thus give full play to the "interventional" function of the "sociocultural tools" (in this model mainly including writing resources collation and strategies guidance, and the collaboration between the teacher and the students, and so on), so that such "interventional tools" could regulate and shape the students' motivations, stimulating them to stride for their established goal.

The success of the DA mode for EFL writing class designed in this paper will lie in its construction of an English writing learning community, in which not only the teacher but also the students should perform an active role, along with a more sensible distribution of their jobs among themselves. As a result, both sides might be stimulated to take active part in such a culturally constructed activity as writing, in which better interaction can be formed among students and between the teacher and students. However, it is noted that to guarantee the success of such a DA mode, special attention should be paid to the quality of mediator-learner dialoguing, the coherence of DA interactions, and the object of DA programs (Poehner, 2008).

CONCLUSIONS

With most previous work on DA focusing on face-to-face interventionist or interactionist DA, there is a need for work on computer- or internet-mediated DA, thus an attempt has been made in this paper to construct a theoretical DA mode for classroom EFL writing instruction with the help of information technology. To realize the coherence of DA interactions, the web-based writing teaching system designed here tries to incorporate the characteristics of a process writing environment as well as of a DA environment, with the resources provided in it working both as a kind of reference materials and also scaffolds for the students, so that the students can always get what they wish to from the system at any time of their writing. Besides, all the proposed interventions might be considered both as teaching techniques and as scaffolds, since the research within the field has demonstrated that DA might also be taken as a reflective pedagogical approach, in which the teacher can always examine the effect of their teaching, or instructional intervention in terms of DA research. Sharpe (2006) defined

scaffolds as "the precise help that enables a learner to achieve a specific goal", so some scholars might suspect that some of the instructional interventions designed in this DA mode are not necessarily scaffolds because they seem not to be targeted at the students' specific problems, such as the open database of model writings. In fact, with the teacher's specific illustrations in the classroom, or their specific personalized interventions with individual students after class, the students will understand what they shall do with such "general" interventions. By the same token, some scholars may wonder whether the idea of a group ZPD and thus a group-applicable scaffold conflicts with the research showing that different students often need different scaffolds for the same problem (see Lantolf, 2011), in reality, it is more reasonable and economical to design the instructional interventions targeted at the whole group with similar problems, and then design more or different scaffolds for those group members who show no progress in one session of DA, till they fulfill their independent learning. Anyway, one-to-one face-to-face intervention common in DA practice is far too costly in large classes in China, which is also one of the reasons for the work done here in this paper.

On the whole, the DA mode constructed in this paper for Chinese tertiary EFL writing classes tries to embody the focus of DA theory on "the process-orientation" and "the integration of instruction and assessment", giving prominence to the influence of sociocultural and non-intellectual factors upon the individual's potential, and making up for the possible negative effect of the traditional ways of evaluation on the students' writing behavior. In this way, the educational function of evaluation highlighted in DA theory might be brought into full play, promoting the development of the students' writing ability and duly the all-around development of the students' English competence in the long run.

However, because at present the SLA researchers have just stepped into this domain, and few scholars have ever attempted the design of a procedural DA mode in the field of college English writing teaching in China, the DA mode designed in this paper is expected to be verified and improved in the long-term teaching practice. One topic worthy of further study in the design of any DA mode for EFL class is how to balance between the teacher's intervention and the students' self-reliance. The teacher might need to devote more time to the design of the course objectives, the organization of appropriate individualized writing activities, and the provision of all forms of feedback. The teaching management departments should also learn to integrate gradually new ideas of and approaches to writing evaluation into the curriculum design according to the specific teaching environment. In addition, the construction of a better hardware environment, the creation of a favorable atmosphere for study, and the students' awareness of self-reliance, will all be the fundamental guarantee of the long-term successful operation of such a new writing evaluation mode.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Brown, D. L., & Ferrara, R. A. (1999). Diagnosing zones of proximal development. In P. Lloyd & C. Fernyhough (Eds.), *LEV Vygotsky critical assessment* (pp. 225-253). London: Routledge.

Emig, J. (1971). *The composing processes of twelfth graders*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Feuerstein, R., Rand, Y., & Rynders, J. E. (1988). *Don't accept me as I am. Helping retarded performers excel*. New York: Plenum.

Gibbons, P. (2003). Mediating language learning: Teacher interactions with ESL students in a content-based classroom. *TESOL Quarterly, 37*, 247-273.

Grigorenko, E. L. (2009). Dynamic assessment and response to intervention: Two sides of one coin. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 42*(2), 111-132.

Güthke, J. (1993). Current trends in theories and testing of intelligence. In J. H. M. Hamers, K. Sijtsma & A. J. J. M. Ruijssenaars (Eds.), *Learning potential assessment: Theoretical, methodological and practical issues* (pp. 13-18). Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Higher Education Department of Education Ministry. (2007). *College English curriculum requirements* (1st Ed.). Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. London: Longman.

Lantolf, J. P. (2009). Dynamic assessment: The dialectic integration of instruction and assessment. *Language Teaching, 42*(3), 355-368. doi:10.1017/S0261444808005569

Lantolf, J. P. (2011). The sociocultural approach to second language acquisition. In Atkinson, D. (Ed.) *Alternative approaches to second language acquisition* (pp. 24-47). London: Routledge.

Lantolf, J. P., & Poehner, M. E. (2004). Dynamic assessment of L2 development: Bringing the past into the future. *Journal of Applied Linguistics, 1*, 49-74.

Lantolf, J. P., & Poehner, M. E. (2007). *Dynamic assessment in the foreign language classroom*. University Park, PA: CALPER Publications.

Lantolf, J. P., & Poehner, M. E. (2011). Dynamic assessment in the classroom: Vygotskian praxis for second language development. *Language Teaching Research, 15*(1), 11-33. doi:10.1177/1362168810383328

Lidz, C. S., & Gindis, B. (2003). Dynamic assessment of the evolving cognitive functions in children. In A. Kozulin, B. Gindis, V. S. Ageyev, & S. M. Miller (Eds.), *Vygotsky's educational theory in cultural context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nelson G. L., & Murphy, J. M. (1993). Peer response groups: Do L2 writers use peer comments in writing their drafts? *TESOL Quarterly, 27*, 135-142.

Newman, D., Griffin, P., & Cole, M. (1989). *The construction zone: Working for cognitive change in school*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Poehner, M. E. (2007). Beyond the test: L2 dynamic assessment and the transcendence of mediated learning. *The Modern Language Journal, 91*(3), 323-340. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00583.x

Poehner, M. E. (2008). *Dynamic assessment: A Vygotskian approach to understanding and promoting L2 development*. Berlin: Springer.

Poehner, M. E. (2009). Group dynamic assessment: Mediation for the L2 classroom. *TESOL Quarterly, 43*(3), 471-491.

Schmidt, R. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics, 11*, 129-158.

Sharpe, T. (2006) 'Unpacking' scaffolding: Identifying discourse and multimodal strategies that support learning. *Language and Education, 20*(3), 211-231.

Sternberg, R. J., & Grigorenko, E. L. (2002). *Dynamic testing: The nature and measurement*

of learning potential. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Villamil, O. S., & de Guerrero, M. C. M. (1996). Peer revision in the L2 classroom: Social-cognitive activities, mediating strategies, and aspects of social behavior. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 5*(1), 51–75. doi:10.1016/S1060-3743(96)90015-6

Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). *Thought and language.* (A. Kozulin, trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1989). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1998). The problem of age (M. J. Hall, trans.). In R. W. Rieber (Ed.), *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky: Vol. 5. Child psychology* (pp.187–205). New York: Plenum.

Wigglesworth, G., & Storch, N. (2009). Pair versus individual writing: Effects on fluency, complexity and accuracy. *Language Testing, 26*, 445-466. doi:10.1177/0265532209104670

Williams, J. (2004). Tutoring and revision: Second language writers in the writing center. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 13*(3), 173-201. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2004.04.009

Wu, J., & Zhang, Z. -X. (2000). A study of the feasibility of prewriting in teaching composition. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research, 3*, 213-218.

Zhang, Z. -X., Wu, H. -Y., Wang, X. -L., & Zhang, J. -X. (1995). The major problems in English writing teaching in China. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research, 4*, 43-50.