

Student and Teacher Perspectives on Peer Review of Student Writing

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Peer review is a very popular activity in EFL writing classes, but teacher and student perceptions of the usefulness of peer review in improving student writing is something that is not often explored. This paper aims to both find out and compare teacher and student perceptions about peer review. In order to engage this topic fully, a review of the research that has already been done about it is necessary.

Studies that investigated student attitudes toward peers have revealed that students have mixed feelings about it. A number of studies have reported that student respondents felt that the feedback from their peers was less reliable than that of their teachers because they felt their peers could not correctly identify all of the mistakes (Liu et al., 2006; Saito et al., 2004; Srichanyachon, 2012; Taferner, 2008). Another common observation was that they were reluctant to be critical and often preferred praise (Liu et al., 2006; Saito et al., 2004).

Despite these negative student perceptions, a number of studies that assessed the effectiveness of peer review revealed that a number of these assumptions were false. Azarnoosh (2013) investigated the difference between the quality of teacher's and student's assessment of student writing and found there was no evidence of friendship bias. Indeed, according to Matsuno (2009) peer reviewers had less of a tendency to be biased than teachers. Though a number of students in Liu and Chai's study (2006) considered peer reviewers unreliable, there were some respondents who acknowledged ways in which peer review was better than teacher feedback. For example, some students felt that teachers were more likely than peers to misunderstand their writing and change it into something different. They also found comments by their peers easier to understand.

All of the studies reviewed for this paper found that peer review was a useful complement to both teacher-review and self-review. Suzuki (2008) observed that, although peer revision yielded only half the number of text revisions that self-

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review did, it was a useful part of the writing process because it led to more negotiations. Indeed, it was suggested that peer revision should be used to make students more attentive to the content of their writing through negotiation and could act as a springboard to self-revision that would be more effective than self-revision alone. Moreover, many researchers have noted that student attitudes towards peer review change as they become more accustomed to it (Azarnoos, 2013; Taferner, 2008; Wakabayashi, 2008). Classroom training about how to properly conduct peer review was seen as particularly important for both improving student attitudes toward peer review and their ability to perform it effectively (Saito, 2008; Wakabayashi, 2008).

Research into the effectiveness of peer review has revealed that the true benefit of peer review is not so much the feedback itself, but the process of trying to give feedback. Researchers often state that peer review has a positive effect on student ability to engage in critical thinking which, in turn, makes them better able to revise their own writing (Kamimura, 2006; Rinnert et al., 2001; Srichanyachon, 2012). Lundstrum and Baker (2009) actually demonstrated this by asking the interesting question: “who benefits more from peer review, the reviewer or reviewed?” All participants in the study produced a short paper. Then, half of the participants in the study reviewed papers, but received no feedback, and the other half received feedback, but did not participate in the review. Afterwards, all of the students made revisions to their papers. The results showed that students who reviewed papers but got no feedback made more significant improvements than students who only received feedback. Thus, more benefit was found from trying to produce peer feedback, than from simply responding to it.

Though there are a number of studies that have dealt with student perceptions of peer review and a comparison of the effectiveness of peer review and teacher review, few studies have dealt with teacher perceptions of peer review and the extent to which these are similar or different from those of students. For this reason, this paper endeavors to answer these research questions:

To what extent do teachers and students agree about the main reason for doing peer review?

Do teachers and students have similar ideas about the extent to which peer review improves student writing?

Methodology

Context and participants

The study took place in the Science and Technology department at a major

university in Japan. A total of 10 teachers and 125 students participated in the study.

Survey design

Data was collected by deploying two surveys, one for teachers and one for students, generated on Google Forms. The teacher survey was sent out to teachers by email. Out of a department composed of 13 teachers, 10 replied making for a response rate of 77%. The teacher survey was composed of six items, two multiple choice questions and five open-ended questions. The multiple choice questions simply asked if the teacher did peer review in their classes and if they were willing to take part in the study. The open-ended questions were as follows:

- 1) How much class time do you spend doing peer review?
- 2) Do you make peer review a part of the students' grade? If so, how much of the grade?
- 3) What is your main reason for doing peer review?
- 4) Do you feel that peer review improves student writing? If your answer is "yes", explain why. If your answer is "no" explain why not.

The responses to items 3 and 4 were analyzed and common teacher attitudes towards peer review were identified. These were used in the creation of the student survey which was administered to students at the end of the Fall semester on a voluntary basis. Of the 149 students that received the survey 125 responded, resulting in a response rate of 84%. The student survey questions were written in both English and Japanese to ensure student comprehension. Based on the responses to 3 and 4 from the teacher survey, the following questions were asked. Students were asked about the extent that they agreed to each statement on a 5-point Likert scale. It is important to note that, while questions 1 to 4 were generated from teacher survey responses, 5 to 7 were based on common themes noted in the literature reviewed at the beginning of this paper:

- 1) To what extent do you agree with this statement: Checking other students' papers helps me to understand the teacher's expectations about the writing assignment.
- 2) To what extent do you agree with this statement: Looking for mistakes in other students' papers helps me to notice them in my own writing.
- 3) To what extent do you agree with this statement: I am motivated to write a better paper when I know that other students will read it.

- 4) To what extent do you agree with this statement: I can find mistakes in other students' writing better than I can find them in my own writing.
- 5) To what extent do you agree with this statement: I feel bad about pointing out errors in my classmates' writing.
- 6) To what extent do you agree with this statement: My teacher gives me guidance on how to do peer review properly.
- 7) To what extent do you agree with this statement: The advice that my classmates give me about my paper is useful.

Results

Teacher Survey

All ten of the teachers that took part in the study stated that they do peer review in their writing classes. The time that they claimed to spend conducting peer review sessions varied considerably, with three teachers having only 15-20 minute sessions, and the other teachers having multiple sessions for a total of around two hours throughout the semester. In regards to their ideas about the reasons for peer review, they commonly stated that it helped students understand the writing assignment. Another popular answer was that it helped students see their mistakes in other students' writing. As for the question of how peer review helped students improve their writing, common themes were that knowing that other students would read their writing motivated them to write better, and that it is often easier for students to find mistakes in another person's writing than in their own.

Student Survey

Table 1 below shows the mean and standard deviation of the responses to each of the seven 5-point Likert scale questions asked on the student survey. Generally, the responses to the questions were positive. In the set of questions related to the usefulness of peer feedback, it can be seen that the majority of students agreed with teachers that doing peer review helped them to understand the assignment expectations and they agreed even more strongly that it helped them find the mistakes in their writing. In terms of student opinions about how peer review helped them improve their writing, there was slightly less agreement than the other items, but responses were still positive. Many students agreed that having another student read their writing motivated them to do better and a slightly smaller number agreed that they could find errors more easily in another student's writing rather than their own.

Addressing the points posed in the relevant literature, students were ambivalent about whether or not they hesitated to give corrective feedback to their classmates.

They were, however, very positive about the support they received in doing the peer review and there was an overall feeling that their classmates' comments were useful.

Table 1 Student Survey Question Responses

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
Checking other students' papers helps me to understand the teacher's expectations about the writing assignment.	3.7	1.2
Looking for mistakes in other students' papers helps me to notice them in my own writing.	3.9	1.3
I am motivated to write a better paper when I know that other students will read it.	3.6	1.3
I can find mistakes in other students' writing better than I can find them in my own writing	3.5	1.2
I feel bad about pointing out errors in my classmates' writing.	3.0	1.3
My teacher gives me guidance on how to do peer review properly.	3.8	1.3
The advice that my classmates give me about my paper is useful.	3.9	1.2

Discussion

As the results indicate, the students surveyed had a positive attitude towards peer review and their ideas about it are largely in alignment with those of their teachers. As observed in other studies, respondents were a little hesitant to state that they could find mistakes in other students writing better than their own, possibly because they were unsure of their general ability to detect mistakes. Also, it seems that social aspects of peer review were less important for the participants in this study than those in previous ones. They did not seem to have much trouble pointing out mistakes in other students' writing. Overall, they showed a positive attitude to the usefulness of peer review and to the guidance they had received from their teachers on how to conduct peer review properly.

Conclusion

It can be seen that peer review was perceived positively by both teachers and students in this study. All of the teachers conducted peer reviews in their classes, though some spent more time on it than others. They also had views about peer review that were consistent with current research and that the majority of the student participants agreed with, especially in terms of the usefulness of peer review to improve student awareness of class expectations.

Limitations and further research

Though this study was able to discern the perceptions of teachers and students regarding peer review, it did not investigate the effect that peer review had on the quality of the students' writing. This could be done by measuring the effect that peer review had on the number of revisions that students made and the quality of those revisions. Moreover, the data collection was only done at the end of the semester. It would be interesting to administer both pre- and post- surveys at the beginning and end of the course to see if any changes were observable in student attitudes.

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