Chapter 14
A Case for Peer Review
Inclusion in Writing Assessment

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ABSTRACT
As technology becomes increasingly available for educational purposes, expectations should be to integrate it into pedagogical theory and practice (Garrison, 2011). For native English speakers, the task of reviewing another student’s work is daunting (Fordyce & Mulcahey, 2012). Even with step-by-step guidelines, students still fail to take complete advantage of this beneficial component of writing. Many students feel under-skilled to provide self-evaluation, much less for their peers. Moving to the English Language Learner (ELL) classroom, the assignment becomes increasingly problematic (Myles, 2002). During the spring semester of 2013, the researchers conducted a study implementing a technologically-based forum for one of the most important—yet under-utilized—skills in writing development: peer review. This chapter discusses the theory and process of the study, the limitations that inhibited successful results, and how the limitations should be addressed in the future to encourage further realization and growth of both paper-based and online peer review.

INTRODUCTION
Peer review is a commonly used best practice for process writing and student-centered instruction (Goldstein & Conrad, 1990; Kroll, 1991; Zamel, 1985). There are numerous ways to facilitate face-to-face peer review (FFPR) which promote negotiation for meaning and reflection (Forman & Cazden, 1985; Neman, Griffin & Cole, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). Such strategies modify the one right answer and task completion attitudes towards writing and promote social constructivist and process-oriented approaches to learning (Min, 2004). Peer review requires one writer to read another writer’s approach to the same prompt, which leads to comparison, reflection, discussion and explanation of choices (Liu, Lin, Chiu & Yuan, 2001). Additionally, it promotes
incidental “noticing” of mistakes and vocabulary and grammatical constructions of benefit to the reviewer (Lundstrom & Baker 2009).

Research Rationale

While teaching the use of peer review checklists, the researchers noticed that students in their ESL writing classes required additional support to provide critical feedback to peers (Stanley, 1992). No marks were awarded for the review process in the curriculum, and the researchers observed that some students haphazardly ticked boxes on the checklists provided. Moreover, they often added surface level comments (Leki, 1990), such as “good ideas” and “bad spelling.” Thus, the purpose of this study was to discover and suggest methods to facilitate peer review tasks that scaffold both writer and reviewer into sharing meaningful comments for the benefit of added perspective, while improving critical thinking with content-rich responses to writing prompts. The secondary purpose was to incorporate Online Peer Review (OLPR) methods to heighten learner engagement and lower the affective filter, as students vary in their levels of comfort with regard to face-to-face peer review (FFPR) (Zhao, 1998).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Roles of Teachers and Learners in Peer Review

Writing is not a “naturally acquired skill, but culturally transmitted as a set of practices in formal instructional settings or other environments […] practiced and learned through experience” (Myles, 2010, pg. 1). That said, many students suffer from the expertise myth, the assumption that readers need expertise in categories in which they might not be skilled; for instance, correcting grammar to increase comprehensibility versus identifying and developing concepts with logical organization (Willey & Gardner, 2010). Brown et al. (cited in UNSW, 2007) explain that through obtaining divergent views, students receive the benefit of feedback from multiple readers who perform various roles, such as those of teacher or moderator. In other words, there is no one right answer when offering peer feedback; there is but a list of criteria to consult. To deepen learners’ understanding of their writing tasks, successful peer review tasks have students create criteria based on what they have learned, as a method of empowerment (Orsmond & Rieling, 2010).

To achieve learner empowerment, teachers must act as monitors in FFPR and OLPR (Bonk, 2006), not as experts with the right answers or with the only viable feedback for improvement. It is imperative that teachers give students adequate time to process the writing prompt and share responses with peers, then reflect and rewrite before receiving corrective feedback from instructors (Hayes & Flower, 1980). It is also critical that instructors encourage students and emphasize that English Language Learners (ELLs) are adequately skilled to conduct peer review. Frequently, students complain that they lack the ability to review writing (Obah, 1993) and passively rely on instructor input (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Although the teacher provides the final writing mark and has the authority to judge in this regard, in peer review students receive marks for following the steps of the writing process and adhering to criteria learned in class. According to Reid (1994), assessment is not based on whether the review(s) agree with learners’ responses, nor should it be an appropriation of ideas and voice. Feedback details the degree to which the assignment criteria have been followed, while offering advice to improve clarity and interest.

Anonymity

Because ELLs come from different L1 origins and cultural backgrounds, they have various standards for public versus private communication tech-