

ESL Student Perceptions of Two Peer Review Styles

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Abstract

This proposal outlines a research project that explores high-intermediate/advanced ESL student perceptions of two different models of peer review utilized in their Content-Based Instruction (CBI) classrooms. The participants were 14 international students. They were studying at the Program in Intensive English (PIE) at Northern Arizona University and were enrolled in one of two sections of a CBI class. The sections followed the same curriculum, but utilized two different styles of peer review. The first style of peer review contained the following elements: minimal student training, written comments mostly on a worksheet, oral peer review, focus on sentence-level edits and on global issues, and minimal teacher follow-up. The second style of peer review, however, used extensive student training, written comments on a worksheet and on the draft, oral peer review, focus on global issues, and teacher follow-up. A survey was used to determine the extent to which students perceived peer review to be useful in their writing process. The anticipated benefit of this study is to obtain a better understanding of how L2 students perceive the usefulness of peer review. Specifically this study examined if students preferred one style of peer review over the other.

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Background

The field of second language (L2) writing, like its first language (L1) counterpart, promotes the use of peer review to aid students in the writing process. Based on the idea that writing is a process, peer review seeks to provide students a means for obtaining student-provided feedback while benefiting from reading other student work (Chang, 2012). Since the rise of L1 and L2 peer review studies in the 1980s, much has been written regarding the benefits of peer review, claiming that it leads to students' increased audience awareness, critical thinking abilities, and ownership of their work (Hu, 2005; Hu & Lam, 2010; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 2011; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Weigle, 2014). However, peer review is often time-consuming, and its ideals can be quickly lost on students. Also, while L1 and L2 instruction views writing as an ongoing matter that values "big picture" ideas like content and organization, instructors who implement peer review observe a lack of student comments concerning these global issues, instead noticing a preference for comments about sentence-level errors (Rahimi, 2013). Though widely sought after, strategies in creating effective peer review sessions are not clearly agreed upon.

Research Questions

Due to the lack of consensus regarding the preferred types of peer review, as well as the perceptions of its overall effectiveness, research is needed to justify using so much class time to teach it. This study explores the usefulness of two specific styles of peer review, as perceived by students--an in class, checklist style and an experimental, out of class, prose style. While the alternate, experimental style shares some characteristics with other styles that have appeared in the literature, it does not exactly match any of the styles previously researched. More

specifically, this study aims to answer the question: What is the effect of different styles of peer review on student perception of the usefulness of the process?

Methods

The 14 participants were enrolled in one of two Level 4 Content-Based Instruction (CBI) classes at the Program in Intensive English (PIE). Recruitment was based on a convenience sample, as the sections each used a distinct style of peer review.

The independent variable in this study can be defined theoretically as the style of peer review that students participate in, which operationalized by the peer review style used within each section. The dependent variable, the students' perceptions of peer review, was operationalized by their responses to a survey about opinions of various aspects of peer review.

A survey asking three types of questions was used. The first set of questions, which were concerned with background information, gather nominal data, so their values are only for descriptive purposes. The last two sets of questions were measured ordinally and used to ask students' opinions about peer review. Missing data was coded as "0" and was left out. Variables based on a composite score (Overall Reaction to Peer Review) and three subconstructs (i.e., Helpfulness with Content, Helpfulness with Writing Style, and Helpfulness and Liking of Peer Review) were also created *post hoc* using the Likert-scale data from the second set of questions. Higher scores reflect positive attitudes, which correspond with "Strongly agree" answers.

Independent *t* tests were used to find an answer to this question. The *t* tests were computed using interval level data. The *t* test using the Overall Reaction variable was used for the main analysis, but the *t* tests for the subconstruct variables were the *post hoc* analyses. Means were compared across Sections I and II to identify significant differences.

The researchers administered the survey to all students during class time the same week that they finished their final peer review. This was a one-time administration in each class. Only

data from students who consented to taking part in this type of research were included.

Results

The main analysis consisted of an independent t test using the composite variable “Overall Reaction to Peer Review.” t tests using the subconstructs were looked at *post hoc*.

Before running the independent t tests, the alpha level was set at .05 using two tails and $df=12$. $t_{CRIT} = 2.18$. For the overall composite score of the students’ reactions to peer review (Items 4-12 totaled), $Sig.=.123$, so equal variances were assumed. $t_{OBS} = -.96$. Because t_{OBS} is less than t_{CRIT} , and because the confidence intervals include 0, we failed to reject the null hypothesis (H_0). There is no difference in perception of peer review between the two sections.

The *post hoc* analyses yielded similar conclusions. For the subconstruct relating to content, $Sig.=.07$, meaning equal variances were assumed and $t_{OBS} = -1.45$. $Sig. = .30$ for the writing style subconstruct. Equal variances were assumed, so $t_{OBS} = .08$. Equal variances were also assumed for the subconstruct relating to liking peer review and finding it helpful, as $Sig.=.11$. $t_{OBS} = -1.40$. Because all t_{OBS} values were less than t_{CRIT} and because all confidence levels included 0, we failed to reject the null hypothesis (H_0) for all three subconstructs. There is no difference in perception of peer review between the two sections with regard to any of the subconstructs.

Practical significance was not calculated due to a lack of statistically significant results.

Relevance to PIE and Second Language Learning

Although the study had no statistically significant results, the lack of results suggests two specific implications: that further research is needed in order to identify specific methods that make peer review effective for L2 learners and that student perception may not be the most useful tool to measure the effectiveness of peer review. We hypothesize that students view any style of peer review as work, which affects their perception of the usefulness of peer review.

Future studies (within the PIE and in other settings) should rather focus on the relationship between peer review and the quality of student papers.

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