

Peer Response Groups in the Intermediate ESL Writing Classroom: Should They Be Used?

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要 約

〈中級レベルの ESL（第二言語としての英語）作文の授業でピア・レスポンス・グループ学習（級友間相互学習）を行うべきか？〉

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この研究は英語を第一言語(L1)とする人達の授業及び上級 ESL 生の作文の授業において有効であった「級友間相互学習」が同じ様に有効に中級 ESL の授業でも使われることができるかを決定するために行われた。例えば、これまでの研究のよると、他の級友の書いた作文を批判的に読む技術を上手に発揮した L1 生と上級 ESL 生には、作文の技術においても進歩が見られた。彼らは自分の作文を批判的に読むようになり、読み手の存在を的確に意識し、自らの文章を支配できるといった進歩である。

この研究で対象となったのはシカゴのイリノイ大学の中級 ESL 作文の授業に於いて一年生によって書かれた三種類の異なる作文に対する、級友による18枚のレスポンス・シート（読後感シート）である。データが集められた箇所は、レスポンス・シートの中でそれぞれ級友たちが次稿で作文の筆者に優先的に答えてもらいたい事柄について三つの質問をすることを要求されている部分である。尋ねられた質問が妥当であったかそうでなかったか、そして学生達が尋ねられた質問に答えたかが、中級 ESL 作文の授業で級友間相互学習が効果的に使われるかどうかを決める基準に用いられた。

これらの中級 ESL 作文の学生が、級友の作文に正しく批判的な質問ができるという結果が出ている。しかし、彼らは時に第二稿において級友の良案をとりいれていないこともある。全体的に見て、中級 ESL 作文の授業における「級友による批判」は生産的であり、作文の技術の向上の助けとなるので、実施されるべきである。

In the early 1970's, teachers and researchers of native (L 1) English composition courses found that the common practice of teaching writing using a prescriptive approach did not help students improve their writing (Applebee, 1981 in Strong, 1993; Hafernik, 1984, Keh, 1990). In turn, teachers began using what is now widely known as the process approach to writing. In contrast to a prescriptive approach, which primarily focuses on writing patterns and sentence-level mechanics, the process approach is based on the steps that "good writers" have been found to follow. These steps include brainstorming for ideas, considering one's purpose and audience, and writing multiple drafts with critical feedback given between each one until the writer is finally satisfied with the product. As summed up by Strong: "If unskilled or novice writers concentrate on developing their ideas first and then attend to mechanical and linguistic problems afterward, then their writing may improve as well" (1993: p. 130).

In L 2 composition classes, writing had often been viewed as primarily a means to improve language skills. However, the success of the process approach in L 1 classes influenced a change in the purpose for which, as well as the way in which, writing was taught (Davies and Omberg, 1986, Strong, 1993). According to Davies and Omberg (1986), two L 2 composition teachers: "The main tasks of the foreign language composition class, then, should be to focus on the process of writing and to help the students to see their work as an act of communication with a value in itself, not merely as a sort of grammar exercise" (p. 7). A further reason for using the process approach with ESL writers is that they use strategies similar to those used by L 1 English writers when involved in the composing process (Zamel, 1982). In addition, it has been found that writing problems in a writer's L 1 are carried over to her L 2. (Arndt, 1987). Therefore, the troubles that the writer has with such things as discourse type have nothing to do with language proficiency (Arndt, 1987). For these reasons, it was expected that L 2 writers could also benefit from the process approach.

With this new approach to the teaching of writing came a renewed interest in the ways in which students were given feedback on their papers. In Keh's (1990) words, "Feedback is a fundamental element of a process approach to writing....Through feedback, the writer learns where he or she has misled or confused the reader by not supplying enough information, illogical organization, lack of development of ideas, or something like inappropriate word-choice or tense" (p. 294-5). With this in mind, teachers and researchers alike began questioning if feedback provided only by the teacher had an effect on students' subsequent drafts or later papers. For example, as Hafernik (1984) writes, one problem with solely teacher-generated feedback is that students write only for the teacher and can therefore not really understand the concept of audience. In addition, the main purpose of writing becomes receiving a good evaluation, as opposed to communicating for a specific purpose (Hafernik, 1984).

In order to address these and other concerns, L 1, and eventually L 2, composition teachers began using peer response groups (student-student editing groups) as a supple-

ment to teacher feedback. The typical peer response group is composed of pairs, or groups of three or four students, who read and then comment critically on the first drafts of each other's papers. Each student is then asked to revise her own paper, taking into account her peer's or group's comments, before turning it in to receive feedback from the teacher.

Most L 1 and L 2 researchers agree on several aspects of how to conduct peer review in the classroom. According to Hafernik (1984) and others (Davies and Omberg, 1986; Herrington and Cadman, 1991, Keh, 1990) the key to the success of peer response groups is that teachers explain the importance of the activity and also walk their students through a "trial run" in which they point out how to read for higher order concerns (i.e., problems related to ideas and organization as opposed to mechanics) in their peer's papers. In addition to doing this, Hafernik (1984) also suggests designating specific days for peer response groups, giving students editing sheets with specific questions to answer when they are reviewing their peer's paper, having students both write and discuss comments and suggestions, and having students rewrite their papers using suggestions from their peer(s). Other researchers who have addressed the how-to of peer review have similar suggestions. Keh (1990), for example, writes that instead of giving students editing sheets throughout the course, teachers should initially give very structured guidelines, then less structured guidelines, and finally no guidelines.

Studies of peer response groups in both L 1 and L 2 classrooms have found a number of advantages in their use. For example, both groups have been found capable of giving good advice concerning higher order concerns. George (1984), an L 1 composition teacher, has found that her suggestions are similar to, though more specific than, those given by peer groups. In a study of peer response groups in an L 1 Writing in Anthropology course, it was also found that even students who had writing problems were able to give what the researchers termed "sound advice" (Herrington and Cadman, 1991, p. 185). Hafernik (1984) has found that L 2 students also give specific and helpful advice, particularly after they become more comfortable with the peer response process. In addition to letting students help other writers by serving as editors, another advantage is that, "Students who become good editors generally become good writers" (Hafernik, 1984: p. 55). Keh (1990) agrees: "The reader learns more about writing through critically reading others' papers" (p. 296).

These, however, are just two of the many advantages of peer response. Hafernik (1984) and Herrington and Cadman (1991) cite almost identical reasons for using peer response groups. These include that participating in peer response sessions:

- helps students see their own writing in a new way
- gives students more self confidence as writers and individuals
- improves the classroom atmosphere by bringing students together in their desire to achieve the same goal
- makes students understand the concepts of audience and purpose
- gives students the chance to see if their readers understand and/or agree with their thinking and logic
- exposes students to different kinds of writing so that they can compare and decide

what works and what they like

gives students the opportunity to decide whether or not they should take their peer's advice, as opposed to feeling that they must take the teacher's advice

Some researchers have found that there are also disadvantages to using peer groups. One such disadvantage is that some students simply do not listen to their peers' advice (Berkenkotter, 1984; George, 1984). Another disadvantage is that students are sometimes afraid that their peers' advice may be incorrect (Davies and Omberg, 1986). In addition, students who are not taught how to read for higher order concerns tend to mark only grammar errors, which are termed lower order concerns (Keh, 1990).

The largely positive results of early research, combined with the consistent use of peer response groups in both L 1 and L 2 writing classes, has led to a different kind of research, namely research which focuses on what exactly goes on between pairs or groups during peer response sessions. The first research into this area was conducted by L 1 researchers and teachers in the mid-80's, followed shortly after by L 2 researchers and teachers in the early and mid-90's. For example, George (1984) taped more than 100 L 1 group review sessions and then listened and recorded comments onto them. She then gave the tape back to her students who listened and then wrote their thoughts on the session in a journal. By watching and recording her students, she was able to categorize three distinct kinds of peer response groups: "...Task Oriented, Leaderless and Dysfunctional" (George, 1984, p. 321). Whereas Task-Oriented groups work well together and are eager to help each other, Leaderless groups are reluctant to discuss their papers and rely on the instructor to help guide them. Finally, Dysfunctional groups consist of individuals who sit in a line and agree with any comment made in order to finish the exercise as quickly as possible.

L 2 teachers and researchers Mendonca and Johnson (1994) also recorded students during peer response sessions but focused their attention on somewhat different elements than did George (1984). In their case, they focused on the interactions of peer groups in a writing class consisting of 12 international graduate students with TOEFL scores of or above 550, looking for the answers to the following questions:

1. What types of negotiations do L 2 students engage in during peer reviews?
2. How do L 2 students use their peers' comments in their revision activities?
3. What are L 2 students' perceptions of the usefulness of peer reviews? (p. 748)

Students in their study were given four general peer response guidelines and were told to pay particular attention to ideas that seemed unclear as they were reading their partner's paper. Mendonca and Johnson (1994) collected and then analyzed the data in a number of ways. For example, after recording and then transcribing the peer sessions, they were able to divide the kinds of negotiations that occurred into five major groups as well as determine which partner brought up each topic. From this they found not only what kinds of things students discussed, but also that students were able to help their peers see where clarity was needed (i.e., could identify higher order concerns). Upon looking at students' second drafts, they found that writers did not always use their peer's ad-

vice but instead used their own judgement about whether or not to follow the advice. In total, 53% of the revisions were a result of peer questions. These findings, in conjunction with the facts that communication skills were improved due to participating in peer response and that everyone in the class found the activity to be useful, led Mendonca and Johnson (1994) to strongly recommend that peer response should be a part of the L2 writing classroom. However, because of the small sample size and the fact that the students were all advanced ESL students, they caution that their results may not necessarily apply to all ESL writers, especially those who are not advanced.

Purpose

The present study is similar to Mendonca and Johnson's (1994) but uses intermediate ESL writers in order to find if their conclusions also apply to students of lower English proficiency. Thus, in trying to determine whether or not peer review should be used in an intermediate ESL writing classroom, I first set out to determine if students were able to identify legitimate higher order concerns in their peers' papers. If the answer was positive, the next step would be to see if the writer responded to the legitimate advice given. The ability to do this would indicate that students are sensitive to and aware of an audience that is comprised of more than just the teacher. Additionally, the advice they chose to respond to would show if intermediate-level students are able to tell the difference between feedback that is useful and feedback that is not useful. As has been stated in the literature review above, Hafernik (1984) and Herrington and Cadman (1991) suggest that the ability to do these things helps some composition students improve their writing and communication skills. If intermediate ESL writers were also able to point out shortcomings of other writers as well as successfully respond to the reviews of their peers, then it would follow that peer review can have an effect on the acquisition and improvement of written and communication skills in intermediate-level L2 writers as well.

Subjects

The subjects used in this study were the nine ESL undergraduate students enrolled in one section of English 060 during the spring of 1997 at the University of Illinois at Chicago. English 060 is a one-semester, non-credit, introductory academic composition course for non-native students. Students are placed in this course because they do not score well enough on the college's placement exam to be admitted into English 160, the mandatory freshman composition class. The exams are graded in terms of clarity of ideas, severity of grammar mistakes, lexical deficiencies and overall cohesiveness. English 060 meets twice a week for one hour and fifty minutes over the course of a 15-week semester. Students in this class must successfully complete another one-semester, non-credit course, English 150, before being admitted to English 160. Although some students in this section were slightly better writers than others, all students had higher order concern problems such as organizing their ideas, using adequate examples to prove their points, and using effective transitions to introduce another topic or example. In addition, all students had problems with lower order concerns such as verb tenses.

Procedure

Students in this class were required to write four out-of-class, multi-draft essays. Es-

say topics were specific (e.g., "Describe your favorite place and tell why it is your favorite place") but allowed students to determine the exact subject of their papers (their bedroom, the park in their hometown, etc.). On the due date of each first draft, students were required to bring three copies of their papers: one for their peer, one for the instructor, and one for their own use. I then handed out a 2-page peer response sheet. After I read the questions aloud, explained what was being asked of the peer responders, and fielded any questions, students then exchanged papers with someone they had not exchanged papers with in previous peer review sessions. They were asked to complete the response sheet as homework, including any advice and suggestions they thought would be helpful. During the following class period, the pairs got together and spent about thirty minutes reading the advice their partner had given and then discussing each other's paper.

Each paper's peer response sheet (see appendix for an example) had assignment-specific questions which asked students to identify certain features (thesis statement, topic sentences), predict what points the paper would cover on the basis of these questions, and give suggestions for improving the paper. According to Hafernik (1984), most ESL students need these kinds of guidelines in order to help them analyze an essay. However, because other research (DiPardo and Freedman, 1988) has shown that too much guidance takes control of the activity away from student advisors and writers, peer response sheets for each essay in this study also required the reviewer to ask the writer three original content-based questions which they felt should be answered in the second draft. Because these questions were student-generated and the decision to answer them was also made by the students, I used the written information from this section of the peer response sheets for my data. Thus, in the first part of this study, the quality of the questions asked and whether or not the writers actually addressed these questions, will be the subject of the data analysis and results section of this paper.

Data Analysis

The data are taken from a total of 19 peer response sheets covering the latter three of the four essay assignments. In order to analyze the data, I first listed the three (some readers included only two) questions from the peer response sheet and read the reviewed student's first draft. I then determined whether or not each question asked was legitimate or not legitimate on the basis of the information as presented in the writer's first draft. In this case, the term "legitimate" simply meant that I thought the questions asked were worthy of the writer's attention. In other words, the question was asked as a result of a problem in the writer's first draft which I agreed should be addressed in order to make the second draft stronger. Types of questions that I found legitimate had to do with such things as providing more background information, giving more examples, and expanding on some aspect of the paper.

After determining whether the questions were legitimate or not, I read the writer's second draft in order to determine whether the information remarked upon was applied to the writer's second draft. If the writer revised the paper to include the exact information requested, or improvements were made because the idea was somehow changed, ex-

panded upon, or even eliminated, I marked that the question had been addressed. If no change had been made, I marked that the question was not addressed. I did this for both legitimate and not legitimate questions.

Results

Table 1
Questions Asked and Addressed

Kind of Essay:	Descriptive		Cause /Effect		Compare/Contrast	
Total Peer Sheets Studied	6		5		7	
Total Questions Asked	17		15		20	
NUMBER OF:	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Legitimate Questions Asked	13	76	12	80	14	70
Legit. Questions Addressed	7	54	5	42	8	57
Legit. Questions Not Addressed	6	46	7	58	6	43
NUMBER OF:						
Not--legitimate Questions Asked	4	24	3	20	6	30
Not--legit. Questions Addressed	0	0	2	66	0	0
Not--legit. Questions Not Addressed	4	100	1	33	6	100

Table 1 is a compilation of the data:

Discussion

The results indicate that intermediate ESL peer responders are indeed capable of reading their peer's first draft and asking legitimate, critical questions of the writing. In total, students asked three times as many legitimate questions as not-legitimate questions (see Table 1). In addition, a review of the questions which I considered to be not-legitimate found that four were unclear questions, three were questions which did not serve to strengthen the paper, and six were questions to which the answer was already in the paper. Problems with these six questions seemed to be related to grammar issues that may have confused the reader, or vocabulary the reader did not understand. For example, one student must not have understood the word "persist" as her question was, "Does the ideas [sic] of discrimination between males and females still apply today in Japan?" Given the fact that half the questions were legitimate but deemed not legitimate only because the answers were already in the writer's first draft seems to strengthen the notion that, despite language problems, these intermediate ESL writers are capable of giving good critical feedback.

Equally promising is that students did not tend to respond to the not-legitimate questions asked. As can be seen in Table 1, only two of the thirteen questions which I deemed not legitimate were answered. This shows that not only are some intermediate ESL writers able to read the works of others critically, they are also able to distinguish good from bad feedback when reading their peer's critiques.

Although students seemed to know when to discount unhelpful feedback, it appears that these student writers did not always take the good advice that had been offered them. According to the results, students incorporated only half of their partner's helpful

comments into their successive draft. In order to try to determine why students were able to give critical comments but were less likely to respond to these comments, I first looked at the response rates of individual students to see if some students simply did not respond to their peer's questions. Upon finding three response sheets in which none of the 3 questions were addressed, I decided to determine if any advice found on the peer response sheet had been used by these students in their second drafts.

I found that one student who had been given three legitimate questions to address had not changed a word between his first and second draft. Another student had changed his paper considerably, responding to two points made elsewhere by the student reviewer but leaving the two legitimate and one not legitimate questions unaddressed. The other student had made slight changes in his paper but did not address the three legitimate questions or any of the other points his peer had made. This student is similar to what Berkenkotter (1984) calls "The Resisting Revisor" (p. 313), a person who is reluctant to change the content of his paper and who does not accept the advice of his peers. These three papers alone accounted for 8 of the 19 legitimate questions which were not addressed, a fact which suggests a correlation with Berkenkotter's (1984) finding that student type may play a role in the success of peer review.

Other factors which I thought may have affected whether or not students addressed legitimate questions were the subject of each paper, and the order in which the peer response session had occurred. For example, if students had not addressed legitimate questions pertaining only to a particular paper topic (e.g., the descriptive essay) then it could be hypothesized that the results were dependent on the topic of each paper. Likewise, if fewer legitimate questions had been addressed in the second paper than in the third or fourth papers, it could have been suggested that perhaps students were initially unsure of how to react to peer advice, but had become more accepting as they became experienced with the concept. It was for these reasons that I listed and reviewed the data for each essay separately. However, as a quick review of Table 1 will show, the percentage of legitimate questions that were left unaddressed was between 43% and 58% for each essay. Thus it appears that neither of these factors seemed to make a difference.

My final probe into this issue involved labeling each of the 39 legitimate questions according to question-type in order to determine if students were more likely to respond to certain categories of questions. For example, if I were to find that students tended to respond more frequently to questions which concerned giving more examples as opposed to questions which concerned giving more background information, this could have indicated that students felt more confident addressing this kind of issue in their writing. It may also have shown that students understood the importance of certain aspects of writing better than others. Upon reviewing the questions, I found that they fell into four categories: the need to provide more examples to support a point, the need to elaborate or give more information regarding an idea or point, the need to give background information on the topic, and the need to meet an expectation that the writer failed to address. The first three question types are self-explanatory. The following is an example of the type of question involved in the last category, expectations unmet: The topic sentence

of the writer's paragraph indicated that he would discuss the differences in the education of boys and girls in his native country. However, the student only included information about the education of girls. The question asked by his peer was, "You didn't mention about the boys education, so do they have one or what?" Table 2 shows the results of this

Table 2
Types of Questions Asked and Addressed

Legit. Questions Concerning: (Read fraction: Answered/Asked)	Descriptive		Cause/Effect		Compare/Contrast	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Background Information	3/6	50	2/3	66	0/1	0
Elaborate/More Information	3/6	50	3/8	37	6/9	66
More Examples	1/1	100	0/1	0	1/1	100
Unmet Expectations	0/0	0	0/0	0	1/3	33

analysis:

Although it is clear from the data that students asked more questions which concerned elaborating/giving more information, the total data does not serve to indicate exactly why students did not address the questions they left unanswered. However, as has been suggested in earlier research, it is possible that students did not trust the advice of their peers, did not agree with the advice of their peers, or simply did not listen to or read the advice of their peers.

Conclusion

It is clear from the data that, like L1 writers and advanced ESL writers, intermediate ESL writers are capable of giving their peers quality feedback in relation to higher order concerns. Previous research suggests that the ability to do this can result in improved writing skills because students learn to read their own works critically. In addition, being able to anticipate potential questions from readers helps the writer gain a better sense of audience, another important aspect of writing.

Given the fact that these students did not address the majority of not-legitimate questions asked, it can also be concluded that students are aware of what constitutes bad feedback. However, what is not clear is why students chose not to address about half of the legitimate questions asked. Although this could be viewed negatively, it is interesting to note that the advanced students in Mendonca and Johnson's (1994) study also chose not to address some of the legitimate comments offered. Perhaps, as Herrington and Cadman (1991) suggest, what is more important than the percentage of questions that were addressed is the fact that the students were able to decide for themselves what they, as writers, wanted to include in their essays: "Indeed, the value of peer-review exchanges can be realized as much in instances where a writer decides not to follow a peer's advice as where she does" (p. 185). Unfortunately, students in this study were not asked to give their reasons for not addressing certain questions, one of the limitations of this study.

The overall results of this study suggest that students would benefit from the introduction of peer review into intermediate ESL writing classrooms as it gives them the opportunity to hone these skills. As was true in Mendonca and Johnson's (1994) study, the

number of students involved in this study is too low to make any sweeping generalizations. In order to truly determine if intermediate writers are able to become better writers through peer review, a larger sample should be taken. Such a study should also include recordings of student peer response conferences as well as postinterviews to determine the reasons that students do or do not use their peer's suggestions. Furthermore, studies which compare the progress of intermediate students in writing classes which use peer review and those in classes which do not could also be useful in determining the true effect over time of the use of peer review.

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Appendix

Peer Response Sheet for Paper #3 (Cause/Effect Essay)

Directions: Before doing anything, read through the entire response sheet. When you are completing it, remember to include the things that you like about the paper as well as the things you have questions about. Don't be afraid to offer suggestions for improvement-your partner will be grateful!!

Due Date: Bring this completed form to class on Wednesday, March 26. We will spend class time that day discussing each other's papers.

Note: You will turn these sheets in with your second drafts. Do not throw them away!!

Writer:

Responder:

Read the first paragraph and then STOP and answer the following questions:

1. What decision has the writer chosen to describe?
2. Is the paper about the Causes of the decision or the Effects of it? (check one)
Causes _____ Effects _____
3. How many Causes or Effects will the writer explain? _____
4. How many Body Paragraphs (not including the Conclusion) do you expect the paper to have? ____
5. What do you think the topic of each of the body paragraphs will be?
A. Topic of First Body Paragraph:
B. Topic of Second Body Paragraph:
C. Topic of Third Body Paragraph (if applicable):

NOW: Read the rest of the paper and compare your answers to what the writer has actually written.
Answer Yes or No to the following questions:

6. Did the number of body paragraphs match your estimate? _____
7. Was the topic of the first body paragraph as you guessed? _____
8. Was the topic of the second body paragraph as you guessed? _____
9. Was the topic of the third body paragraph as you guessed? _____
10. If you answered NO to any of these questions, use the space below to tell WHY and give suggestions about how this can be changed.
11. Read the first body paragraph again and underline the topic sentence. Does all of the information in this paragraph pertain to the topic? Do the sentences flow smoothly?
Give comments and suggestions.
12. Do the same for the second body paragraph. If there is a third body paragraph use the back of this page to make comments.
13. Write THREE questions that you would like to see the writer address in the second draft:

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