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Peer reviewed

Using Student Writing Reflections to Inform Our Understanding of Feedback Receptivity

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This study explores the reflections of 27 native and high-proficiency English-speaking students in two sections of a six-week U.S. college undergraduate content/writing course, to determine what factors influence student receptivity to peer feedback. Reflections stemmed from weekly writing journals designed to enhance process writing skill development, and assessed how amenable students were to peer feedback. Subsequent qualitative analyses resulted in four significant student-generated orientations, each with substantial potential to inform peer review as a component of classroom process writing. The four orientations were: a) overall value orientations; b) interpersonal assessment orientations; c) feedback level orientations; and d) critical assessment orientations. Based upon these findings, several suggestions for improving peer review classroom pedagogy are explored, resulting in implications for enhancing peer review practices more generally and the subsequent reception of student feedback, with relevance for L1 and L2 writing instructional contexts.

Introduction

Since the late 1960s, process writing has become common pedagogical practice within college-level writing courses (Diederich, 1974; Elbow, 1973, 1981; Flower, 1979; Murray, 1968, 1972), where culminating written products are often achieved through multiple revisionary stages. One such stage within the process-based approach is peer review. As Crooks (1988) asserts, peer review can have a substantial impact on student learning outcomes, often facilitating the involvement of students as “active learners” (Lu & Law, 2012, p. 258; see also Cheng & Warren, 1999; Sadler, 1989) through learning envisioned as a collaborative act (see Bruffee, 1984). Thus it is through the building of academic writing communities, where students are initiated into the process via concerted interpersonal engagements, that the benefits of peer review take shape. However, there are few investigations that examine student perceptions of the peer review process. Instead, research has focused on its effectiveness, students’ preference for teacher feedback over peer feedback, and how best to improve peer review practices in general.

Some attempts have been made to determine student perceptions with regard to peer review, mainly through questionnaires. Van Zundert, Sluijsmans, and van

Merriënboer (2010) examined contemporary literature on attitudes articulated by students. Their findings overwhelmingly indicated positive student receptivity to such practices, with only one study yielding negative affective responses (Levine, Kelly, Karakoc, & Haidet, 2007). Yet in our own review of the studies included in van Zundert *et al.* (2010), student perspectives, and thereby overall receptivity, were often constructed through dichotomous yes/no responses (Levine *et al.*, 2007; H. Smith, Cooper, & Lancaster, 2002; Strachan & Wilcox, 1996) and likert scale assessments (Brindley & Scofield, 1998; Cheng & Warren, 1997; Freeman & McKenzie, 2002; Haaga, 1993; Liu & Tsai, 2005; Pain & Mowl, 1996; Sluijsmans, Brand-Gruwel, van Merriënboer, & Martens, 2004; R. A. Smith, 1990; Stanier, 1997; Venables & Summit, 2003; Wen & Tsai, 2006), wherein actual student voices played a peripheral role to quantitative statistical analyses. Notably, one study, Smith *et al.* (2002), did incorporate qualitatively derived student perspectives at great length, resulting in the notion of student preparatory training as a salient characteristic when determining overall receptivity and ultimately effective peer review in which students give and receive substantial and practical feedback. Brammer and Rees (2007) administered a questionnaire in which students were asked to rate questions via a likert-type scale and then allowed to write additional comments. They found that, though most students preferred some type of peer review, they were nonetheless distrustful of the comments they received from peers. They remarked that not all students possessed advanced writing skills and they therefore questioned their peers' ability to provide adequate feedback. Manglesdorf (1992) also found that negative comments pointed to the limitations of their peers as critics, citing "student ignorance, apathy, and/or vagueness as the primary objections" (p. 280).

The quality of peer feedback has been a major concern for those that oppose, or at least are cautious of, peer review in the classroom. Some researchers (F. Hyland, 2000; Leki, 1990; Lockhart & Ng, 1993; Medonca & Johnson, 1994; Nelson & Murphy, 1992) have found that students have difficulty detecting errors and providing adequate feedback. As a consequence, they rely on formulaic comments or give inappropriate feedback. Additionally, McGroarty and Zhu (1997) found that students, who are unable to address global issues, rely on surface-level corrections. Subsequent studies have nevertheless demonstrated that, with proper training, peer review can be a valuable tool in classroom writing pedagogy (Berg, 1999; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; Min, 2005; Paulus, 1999), wherein students become active contributors to the overall process, and ultimately to the resulting product. Min (2005), for example, concluded that training benefited students as both reviewers and writers. As a result of training, writers received more relevant comments due to their attention to clarifying, identifying, and suggesting ways in which writers could improve upon their drafts. As reviewers, students indicated that it helped them focus on organization, and improved their ability to edit their own compositions. Furthermore, less advanced students experienced an affective impact in that it enabled them to view themselves as competent readers.

Though contention persists regarding the efficacy of peer review practices within writing instructional contexts (Myles, 2002; Zhang, 1995), peer review is

generally seen as positive. As Vygotskian perspectives on learning contend (1962, 1978), both social practice, and sociality more generally, are tied to good learning and developmental advancements. Liu, Lin, Chiu, and Yuan (2001) argue that peer review, as one such socially constructed learning practice, emerges as a beneficial classroom tool primarily given its capacity to act as an intersubjective means for sharing knowledge. In this vein, peer review functions as essential in not only helping students take responsibility for their own learning by teaching them to become active learners rather than passive learners but teaching students to think critically through collaborative negotiations (Haaga, 1993; Rushton, Ramsey, & Rada, 1993). Specifically, peer review teaches students to become active learners who are able to independently reflect on their own writing, self edit, and express themselves effectively for a wider range of audiences.

Taken in sum, these studies demonstrate that the larger field remains conflicted with regard to peer review application and ultimately feedback receptivity. As was indicated, a range of variables (i.e., teacher versus peer feedback; L1 versus L2 contextual distinctions) continues to offer mixed conclusions as to its efficacy. Likewise, the qualitative research that has been conducted to date, to our knowledge, predominately envisions student perspectives as a preference or dispreference for the process itself rather than taking into account the complexities that constitute those preferences. The current research therefore attempts to shed light on the issue of peer review feedback receptivity, and ultimately peer review application, through a qualitative examination of student peer review reflections. As Yang (2010) notes, processes of reflection on peer review activities can have a positive effect on students' overall writing skills/abilities. With this understanding in mind, our study focuses exclusively on qualitative student perspectives, generated through ongoing weekly writing journals designed to compliment the process writing approach utilized within our classrooms. Our goal was to develop a better understanding of how peer review practices could be made more effective, while developing a better understanding of the student perspectives that inform such practices. The remainder of this paper therefore offers an in-depth qualitative examination of the significant student perspectives encountered, and concludes with an exploration of the pedagogical implications that may be derived from such a qualitative approach, with relevance to both L1 and L2 contexts.

Methodology

Pedagogical context & participants

The data for this research stemmed from two sections of a six-week summer intensive college-level content/writing course in applied linguistics, of which the authors were the sole instructors, with one instructor per section. Each section met three days per week for a total of nine hours of weekly class time (i.e., three hours per session). Both instructors had previously taught the course, and were well versed in the subject matter. The course covered the academic topic of language and gender, and was designed to develop students' knowledge of the content while

also honing their skills as advanced college writers. As the course satisfied the final undergraduate writing requirement, writing techniques were explicitly taught in order to develop students' metacognitive awareness of process writing and its practical application beyond the classroom. Over the six-week period, students produced two multi-drafted research papers, each of which received both teacher and peer feedback.

The students encompassed a range of backgrounds; however, as the university made no proficiency distinctions in meeting both the content and writing requirements, sociocultural variables such as L1/L2 distinctions were only taken into consideration when vital to the analyses. Further, as a general education/university writing course, students comprised a range of majors. Of the students enrolled, no applied linguistics majors were represented; however, students did represent a vast array of disciplinary specializations in both the humanities and the social and natural sciences. All 29 students across both sections participated; however, because data stemmed from graded writing reflections, with one student not submitting and another not addressing the prompt at hand, the final usable number was 27.

Procedures

The data were produced over the course's duration, and originated from a series of weekly reflective writing journals designed to develop students' metacognitive writing skills in tandem with the course activities students were performing. For example, the initial prompt addressed students' self-perceptions as writers, eliciting information about their personal strengths and weaknesses, as well as their overall experiences with process writing to date. Subsequent prompts addressed such issues as brainstorming, thesis development, writing strategies, organization, topic development, logic, and cohesion. Students received extensive in-class training in preparation for all reflections. For example, prior to the peer reviews, each instructor led whole class collaborative review sessions on student papers submitted in previous terms, wherein students were given pair and group time to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the paper before performing the reflective assignment. On the fifth week, after the peer reviews of both papers had been completed, students were prompted to reflect on a series of subtopics pertaining to the peer review process. Students responded to the following four prompts: a) *What do you think the role of peer review is in developing writing skills?* b) *Do you think it is important to have peer review sessions? Why or why not? Explain;* c) *How important do you believe your own feedback to be in helping your peers to develop their skills as writers? Explain;* and d) *How much confidence do you have in the feedback that you receive from your peers during peer review sessions? Explain.* The present study analyzes students' responses to these prompts with the aim of better understanding student receptivity to peer feedback. This was of particular interest given the scarcity of qualitative research exploring students' beliefs with regard to the feedback they receive from their peers. Students were asked to respond in as much detail as they deemed necessary to address the prompt, and with regard to this journal topic, student responses averaged 490 words.

As Rushton *et al.* (1993) note, students retain a certain level of doubt as to the overall benefit of writing input from peers. Likewise, Carson and Nelson (1996) argue that students' interpersonal relationships have the potential to bias the feedback provided given that negative feedback could be face-threatening. Therefore, students may be hesitant to provide honest critique for fear of damaging their relationships. Knowing the recipient of the feedback can thus impact the overall degree of truthfulness and the level of reliability that students place upon peer review interactions (MacLeod, 1999; Schaffer, 1996; Topping, 1998; Zhao, 1998). To ameliorate these concerns, various strategies have been proposed for circumventing the negative effects of interpersonal dynamics, including the use of multiple reviews and anonymizing participant identities (Kerr, Park, & Domazlicky, 1995). As such, all of the current study's peer reviews and reflective journals were conducted through the online composition submission system Turnitin.com, which allowed students to complete both the peer reviews and the reflections anonymously, where student identifying information was only accessible by the instructors. Our primary reasoning in using Turnitin.com was that the anonymity it provides would circumvent the aforementioned face-threat issues among peers, in turn allowing student reviewers to freely comment and critique without fear of peer identification. Further, it allowed for automatic and random distribution of the compositions, thus insuring that reviewer feedback remained unbiased with regard to the pairing process. Though Turnitin.com has been criticized for its potential to frame classroom writing exercises within an antiplagiarism framework (Howard, 2007), we chose this software partly because it provided an extended, more readily accessible platform that students could access from home, and partly because it has become a common pedagogical tool within composition courses. Nevertheless, the topic of plagiarism was dealt with in class as a specific writing lesson unto itself, as were all other major writing components (e.g., thesis comprised a lesson unto itself, as did supporting evidence). Additionally, as Cho and MacArthur (2010) note, multiple peer reviews per draft result in improved student learning outcomes. Therefore, for each paper, two different randomly selected peer reviews were conducted, resulting in a total of four peer reviews per student. Of note, the peer review assignments were worth 10% of the total course grade, and each review was graded according to the quality of the reviewer's comments. As the course's focus was on both content and writing, some accountability was deemed necessary in order to ensure that students would offer thoughtful, concerted feedback. Likewise, the reflective journals were worth 20% of the total course grade, evenly distributed over six weekly reflective assignments, again, with the explicit goal of creating accountability in developing metacognitive writing skills.

Upon completion of the course, journal entries were anonymized through the use of pseudonyms and qualitatively analyzed for significant trends that could inform peer review pedagogy and feedback receptivity. All comments were categorized based on the saliency of topics and themes oriented to by students; this yielded four significant orientations. For example, one major orientation (explored below) was with regard to interpersonal considerations made by students. Specifically,

when student reflections expressed concerns such as skill sets observed in class, performance during discussions, and co-membership as students of a prestigious institution, they were coded as belonging within this category. Those that did not express such orientations were excluded from this category. In this way, the coding process consisted of either belonging to or not belonging to a specific category; however, all comments conformed to at least one of the four orientations. Orientations were codified independently and then reviewed in collaboration with each researcher. During this collaborative reassessment, individual orientations were further narrowed to larger thematic supracategories that would capture the conveyed meaning of each student's comments. The above-mentioned orientation of interpersonal assessment thus comprised smaller categories that were each interpersonal in nature.

Findings

Through our analyses, we were able to deduce four significant categorical orientations within the students' responses. First, peer review activities were generally seen as valuable, primarily through insight gained from external perspectives. Second, students noted the importance of interpersonal dynamics in gauging their peers' ability to provide quality feedback, thus situating intersubjectivity as a determining factor in overall receptivity. Third, students commonly expressed their preferences for both macro- and micro-level feedback types, marking such considerations as salient in student learning expectations. And finally, students noted that critical assessment was a necessary component in determining subsequent courses of action, and thus in how peer feedback would be implemented within later drafts. The following four subsections respectively explore each of these orientations in detail.

Orientation 1: Overall value

In their responses all students expressed that they saw the peer review process as valuable. They articulated their receptivity through the beneficial give-and-take nature of peer review, as well as through peer responses' ability to metacognitively raise awareness of writing issues and concerns beyond any one individual's skillsets (see also Berg, 1999; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994). The following two excerpts, from Nayeli and Serena, exemplify these points.

"Rarely do I receive useless feedback. I think this is because everyone wants to receive useful reviews so they give useful reviews." — Nayeli

"Usually peer reviews give me some information about my own paper that I didn't already know. For example, if someone tells me that something is confusing, I might reread my own work and realize that it is indeed confusing despite the fact that I didn't notice it before." — Serena

As Nayeli indicates, the give-and-take value of peer review practices is an important component in determining overall feedback receptivity. Her response

implies that the writing process is a collaborative activity that is beyond the individual writer, where overall receptivity is dependent upon one's ability to envision the writing process as a joint effort. Serena's response continues this thought, but expands upon the notion of writing as a collaborative, socially constructed activity through the specific incorporation of audience as a determining consideration in the revision process. Serena's comments thus index the importance of writing as a dialogic sharing of ideas, wherein the capacities of the individual are at least partially constructed through the reader for whom the composition was designed. Both responses, which allude to the overall value of peer review activities, in turn imply that when value is ascribed, peer feedback is more positively received.

In further developing the orientation of value, it is equally important to understand how receptivity to feedback can stem not only from receiving feedback, but also through seeing another's work as a peer reviewer oneself. In this way, students gain the ability to ascribe merit to a peer's skills as both a writer and a reviewer, thereby identifying competencies that can in turn enhance a recipient's overall receptivity. As Peter notes,

"After reading the papers of my peers and seeing what kind of writers they are, I have a lot of confidence in their revisions." — Peter

As is evident in this excerpt, the experience of serving in multiple roles, through one's position as both a reviewer and the one being reviewed, allows students insight into the effectiveness of their peers' ability to adequately assess their work. Here Peter, as reviewer, deconstructs his peers' skillsets, which allows him to make judgments with regard to other students' potential as feedback providers. This helps Peter to develop a positive overall outlook towards the review process itself. In essence, through his experiences as a reviewer, with access to the writing samples of others, he responds positively to both the process of peer review and the eventual feedback that he will receive.

Feedback was not the only factor mentioned in the reflections, however. Three students articulated their desire to see how other students approached the assignment, which in turn allowed them to attribute a sense of value to the overall peer review process.

"I think that peer review is really helpful because you read someone else's paper, of which they were given the same assignment, and you can see how someone else went about writing their paper and how it differs from yours. Then, you can look at the differences and see what you like about their paper and maybe use some of their techniques to improve your own paper. But more importantly, you can look at what you did not like and make sure you do not make the same mistakes." — Risa

"[I]t allows the peer reviewer to see what other peers are writing and the different approaches people took." — Rajan

"I also like to see what other students come up with when responding to the same prompt. This is interesting to me because I get to see how another student interprets the same question, and this can serve to make me think in different ways and allow me to come up with future ideas for other projects." — Adrian

In the case of Risa, Rajan, and Adrian, they see the peer review process as not only a way to give and receive feedback, but as a lens through which to see their own draft. For these students, peer review is not merely about accurate or good feedback, but about access to other points of view that may be beneficial for their own revisions.

Another notion mentioned by three respondents (11%) was graded accountability, which acted as a contributing factor in some students' weighting of value. In this way, voluntary and participatory activities were given less credibility than activities that comprised a proportion of the students' final grades. As students were well informed of the relatively high-stakes nature of the peer review activities, worth a total of 10% of the final course grade, some acknowledged the role of graded accountability in providing constructive feedback, and thus in ascribing value to the peer review process. As Risa and Julio state:

"I find the feedback I receive from my peers very helpful because their review of my work is worth a pretty decent percentage of their grade. Therefore, reviews tend to be more than just vague comments but rather specific points of what I should change in my writing and what they think my strengths and weaknesses are." — Risa

"I have a lot of confidence in my peers, not because they are all that, but because of the stakes of the assignment; ten percent of the grade is quite a chunk! I would be nowhere as confident if the peer reviews were voluntary or a participation assignment. I myself know I would not be as picky or harsh if the assignment were not worth as much as it is." — Julio

As these reflections demonstrate, peer review value stemmed in part from the high-stakes nature of the assignment, marking graded accountability as a potential source for improving peer review receptivity. Yet, though all students were made aware of this component, only a small percentage acknowledged its significance in ascribing overall value. Accountability's role in feedback receptivity thus warrants further investigation, as it may provide new insight into how students respond to peer review practices more generally.

Orientation 2: Interpersonal assessments

Fifteen students (56% of total responses) showed great concern for interpersonal factors such as peer in-class performance/caliber when expressing receptivity to feedback. By this we mean that students indexed the academic competencies of their peers, through shared experiences as co-participants in class lectures and discussions. Given that slightly more than half of responses identified interpersonal variables as an important component of peer review, we felt that this orientation thus constituted a worthy area of exploration in understanding overall receptivity, particularly given that identity assessments among student peers (as members of a classroom community) represent an underexplored variable within existing peer review research.

The following excerpts from Adrian and Rajan illustrate how students metacognitively oriented to the identities of their colleagues as fellow classmates likewise engaged in developing process writing skills. Adrian's reflection below speaks to the caliber of students as members of a university community, in which the status of the university becomes a symbol through which students judge and are judged by one another.

"I am confident in [my peers'] ability to access [sic] my work since they are all smart individuals who attend a great university like [X]. This makes me confident that they know what they are doing and have probably written a lot of essays in their college careers." — Adrian

Rajan's reflection below, on the other hand, highlights not only the notion of shared collegiality, but also the more immediate importance of a shared classroom experience. Rajan displays this orientation by illustrating how students actively assess their peers, and thus their peers' abilities and feedback, through in-class performance displays. He states,

"I have been in classes where the peer reviews serve more as a joke and no one takes it too seriously... In this class, however, I noticed that all the students seemed very motivated to help each other out. Everyone in the class is very intelligent and has the knowledge gained over the course of this class." — Rajan

Miranda's reflection below builds upon the aforementioned interpersonal assessments in that it indexes how confidence in peer feedback can be rooted in the noticeable changes of writing stage development experienced by the classroom community. In other words, she notes that the developmental stages experienced jointly by students allow her a lens through which to gauge the skills of others in assessing her work as an academic content piece. Miranda's receptivity is thus dependent in part upon the idea that everyone knows the same things, or at least has developed the necessary skillsets for providing useful feedback. As co-participants in a process writing course, each student has learned skills common to a specific academic writing genre, and Miranda acknowledges the abilities of her colleagues as knowledgeable members of this community in determining her overall level of receptivity to peer feedback. In her words,

"I have much confidence in the feedback provided to me by my peers. I feel that all of us have had extensive experience with both reading and writing IMRD¹ papers. Also, our weekly journal assignments have underscored the importance of each step of paper writing." — Miranda

Similar to Miranda's reflection, Kay's comments below also make reference to the importance of shared learning and skillset development. Kay's reflection further shows that overall receptivity is partially dependent upon the level of interactions among students within the classroom. Her words illustrate the importance of both personal attributes and personalized contributions, and demonstrate how knowing one's peers, on a more intimate level, has the potential to cultivate overall confidence in peer review processes. She notes,

“I have a fair amount of confidence in the feedback I will receive from my peers during peer review sessions. Because I know we all have similar writing skill sets (the majority of us were just learning about APA formatting, we’ve been doing the same readings, engaging in the same discussions, etc.), I think the feedback will be really helpful in revising my paper. Also, because my paper is not being graded by a random grader but by a classmate that knows my personality and opinions, I feel like I will be better understood.” — Kay²

As each of these excerpts has demonstrated, peer interpersonal orientations play a crucial role in overall feedback receptivity. While some students orient to larger notions of community, through shared membership as university colleagues/co-participants, others orient to notions of community based on general observations of in-class abilities and performances on tasks. Yet, regardless of whether students focus on the larger community or the more immediate environment, they ultimately envision interpersonal assessments as a crucial component in determining receptivity to peer feedback.

Orientation 3: Feedback levels

Feedback level orientations, for the purposes of our research, pertain to comments that specifically implicate micro-level versus macro-level concerns. The term micro-level feedback, in the current research, implies a focus on sentence-level structures and issues, such as grammaticality, spelling, and various mechanical errors (e.g., syntax-centered issues). Conversely, the term macro-level feedback implies a focus on more global, discursive issues such as faulty logic, supporting evidence, and cohesion (e.g., semantic-centered issues). We found that only one student focused solely on macro-level feedback as a significant component of the peer review process, while four focused solely on micro-level feedback. The remaining 17 students that referred to feedback levels emphasized the importance of both micro- and macro-level feedback in tandem. Sanjay’s reflection below represents a common example of blended expectations to feedback. In his excerpt, Sanjay orients to sentence-level issues, expressing concerns about awkward phrasings, grammar, and syntax. Further, he expresses an additional orientation to semantic-centered issues through his concern with discursive variables such as flow.

“Some of the feedback definitely helped me improve my writing by making me aware of overall flow along with sentence structures and easily avoidable grammar and syntax errors. However, I wished that I could’ve got more feedback concerning awkward phrases and flows in the second half of my paper.” — Sanjay

Peter’s reflection below represents a similarly blended orientation, incorporating grammatical aspects, while also orienting to such discursive issues as argument and flow.

“[T]he outside perspective [sic] into your paper is very important to strengthen your whole paper in its argument, its grammar, its language and flow.” — Peter

The excerpts highlighted in this section demonstrate that, for a majority of respondents, feedback level expectations do play a vital role as each student

comes into the writing process with different needs. Student expectations for varying levels of feedback are thus relevant given that such expectations represent a measurement by which usefulness is gauged, implying that a deeper understanding of students' expectations is warranted in determining overall student receptivity. In our understanding of the data, students are here expressing a desire for feedback that addresses all possible weaknesses of their compositions. In basic terms, approaches that shun any one level, to the increased importance of another, could engender negative reactionary stances from students as their expectations become backgrounded to pedagogical theory. That is not to say that we should simply go by what students think they need; rather, it is to say that if students are coming to the process with preestablished expectations, then understanding said expectations could facilitate pedagogical advancements such as improved preparatory activities, explicit classroom explanations on good peer review practices, and the development of student mentalities which envision peer review as an overall positive endeavor.

Orientation 4: Critical assessment

With regard to students' reception to peer review feedback, 15 of 27 respondents (56%) viewed the feedback received as something that should be critically assessed before implementing. Their reflections demonstrated that notions on applicability, general consensus of multiple reviews, and tools such as contrastive analysis, where differing opinions were presented, constituted predominate factors in determining a student's overall receptivity.

Though these orientations comprised a slight majority of overall responses, the fact that more students did not index critical awareness as an important factor in incorporating peer feedback is reason for concern. As college-level writers, students are already engaged in developing academic critical thinking (for the current respondents, basic college-level writing skills had already been completed as a prerequisite). Based on the fact that only a slight majority of students oriented to critical assessment (15 of 27), the lack of attention to this important component thus implies that students may not be envisioning peer review processes in the most productive way (e.g., through discriminatory skills), and consequently may not be fully exploiting their potential as developing writers. The following example from Pilar demonstrates the necessity of carefully scrutinizing peer feedback, as she essentially yields agential authority as a developing writer through her constructions of the reviewer as unquestioned editor.

"When I turn in my essay for peer review, I hope I did well but I also want my peers to tell me what I should fix and what they suggest to do. (...) If my peers just say that my paper was good and don't point out what I should fix, then I feel like there was no point i[n] reviewing it." — Pilar

The above-mentioned perspective, which envisions the reviewer as editor, situates Pilar as passive in the very processes of improvement that are vital to developing successful writing skills. Though her case is extreme among the perspectives, her words serve to highlight the dangers of absent critical awareness

in that, without feedback reflexivity, she essentially relinquishes agency, and thus the scrutinizing lens needed for effective progression as an autonomous writer.

Conversely, the remaining excerpts from Amanda, Minnie, and Alice highlight the importance of developing such a critical awareness. For Amanda, critical reflection and scrutinized selection represent important aspects in ascribing value to peer suggestions, while for Minnie importance is more centrally connected to consensus among multiple reviews. Finally, for Alice, contrastive analysis among multiple reviews is positioned as an important step in determining overall receptivity.

“I try to incorporate as much as I think will help my work. Sometimes I may not agree with what they are saying, but I always think about it and make a note of it.” — Amanda

“Usually when I get peer reviews, I take them with a grain of salt, understanding that I don’t always give the best advice or feedback and that others also have the same faults. I usually take a look at all the reviews together and see what is in common. If multiple people have a problem with that aspect of my work, I believe that it should be fixed.” — Minnie

“I have very different opinions on my readers: one seemed to read through carefully and give comments where they thought they were needed; the other seemed to have read my paper super quickly and just marked it up as much as possible, telling me that every other line, almost, was awkwardly written or didn’t make sense. It is annoying to me when I get feedback like this because if the person who proofed it for me [raises an issue], and one of the [other] reviewers didn’t think it was like that, its hard to take any of that feedback seriously and it gives me a ton more work to do ... So one of them I’m taking into account and the other I’m taking with a grain of salt.” — Alice

What each of these three critical assessments shows is that ultimately a student’s willingness to receive and implement feedback from peers is contingent upon taking it “with a grain of salt.” This implies that, in gauging overall student receptivity, each component of the feedback offered must be reviewed, reflected upon, indiscriminately selected, and strategically incorporated if and only if the author deems it appropriate. Each of these stages, however, can only be accomplished with the proper analytic tools for assessment. It is for this reason that student receptivity to peer review feedback can be characterized as at least partially constituted through the assessment practices that students apply in judging the value of the feedback received, and this application is in part established through the development of critical assessment skills, a necessary step in transitioning student writers from novice to autonomous stages.

Discussion

Based on analytic observations, the findings suggest several pedagogical implications. The first of these concerns the notion of critical assessments. As slightly more than half of students oriented to the concept of critical assessment in determining receptivity to feedback, additional metalinguistic frontloading may be

required in implementing peer review activities. With this assertion we agree with the findings of Smith *et al.* (2002), where it was shown that peer reviews could be improved upon by “front-loading the support for students’ assessment preparation” (p. 79). As teachers we cannot assume that students understand or see the value in peer feedback, unless they are properly socialized into the process through guided instruction. This implies that we as instructors have a responsibility to hone and develop students’ understanding of the value of peer review assignments and of the value of incorporating feedback, while also ensuring that time is devoted to the development of metacognitive processing skills. Furthermore, we need to do explicit instruction on how students should receive and implement feedback. Given that just over half of the students oriented to this aspect in their reflections, we need to ensure that students understand how to critically assess the feedback they are given. This means spending time talking about what constitutes productive feedback, how to decode such feedback, and when that feedback is relevant or irrelevant in relation to the overall amelioration of a paper’s quality.

The second implication is in relation to the specific level of feedback. As a majority of student responses showed expectations for both micro- and macro-level feedback, instructors should be attuned to the fact that students come into the peer review process with certain expectations, and that we as teachers need to be attuned to those expectations to ensure student receptivity. Indeed, a range of studies within both L1 and L2 contexts argue that macro-level feedback can be more effective with regard to student learning outcomes (Ferris, 1997; Hillocks, 1982; K. Hyland, 1990; Kepner, 1991; Ziv, 1984). However, according to Ferris (1997), in addition to her assertion that macro-level feedback positively affects student writing, comments on grammatical form also play a determining factor in the revision process (see also Min, 2005; Myles, 2002). Ferris’ findings are not surprising, however, given that a range of studies within the L2 domain have likewise demonstrated that students often display expectations for micro-level, syntactic-based feedback (Cohen, 1987; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; F. Hyland, 2003; Leki, 1991; Paulus, 1999; Radecki & Swales, 1988; Saito, 1994).

Since the focus of process over product began in the late 1960s, there has been a greater emphasis on process, while grammaticality and syntax have become less emphasized in L1 domains (Bizzell, 1986). By the early 90s, this trend away from a focus on grammar in favor of a more discursively grounded interactional approach had taken hold within L2 contexts (Celce-Murcia, 1991). This is not to say that micro-level issues of lexicon and structure are ignored. Actually, when Truscott (1996) questioned the effectiveness of this type of feedback, he sparked a debate that continues even today (see Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 1999, 2006; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2007). Clearly, there is still an attempt to reconcile process with correctness. In the current research, students’ expectations for both micro- and macro-level feedback not only reinforce this debate, but also illustrate the students’ attempts at its reconciliation. Moreover, this may be a reflection of what students understand to be representative of teacher expectations; after all, most grading rubrics include a language component. Though instructors

may emphasize content and organization, particularly in earlier drafts, students are nevertheless held accountable for language, especially in L2 contexts, but also frequently in L1 contexts. These expectations are ingrained in the students' consciousness, and are thus reflected in these journal entries. This suggests that, while some students might be focusing on macro-level issues, other students may be viewing peer review as a proofreading exercise. In such cases, students may not completely understand the process, or what a process approach implies. This highlights the need to discuss process in more detail, stressing at which stage macro-level and micro-level features should be emphasized.

As writing professionals, we are commonly encouraged to focus on process writing from a holistic perspective as opposed to a micrological perspective, where mechanical issues become subordinate to content/context issues (Murray, 1972). Yet, the reflections within this research indicate that students have varying expectations that do not necessarily conform to our pedagogical training as teachers. Though the case could be made that students should be trained in this holistic fashion, ignoring micrological aspects, or deeming them less important than macrological aspects could be seen as counterproductive for students in that it renders their expectations less important (or at least less important from their perspective). Such practices could therefore result in the hindering of overall receptivity to feedback, as students enter the process with various expectations. Though the idea of process writing is more holistic, student perspectives imply that, in order for peer review to be most effective, some degree of micrological feedback must be accounted for alongside macrological feedback.

Lastly, as students frequently oriented to the importance of interpersonal displays and relationships (56%), the need for nurturing familiarity among peers presents itself as a fruitful avenue for improving overall receptivity. Peer reviews may therefore benefit from a discussion-centered forum as opposed to a lecture-centered forum, given that students are actively assessing the abilities of their peers in relation to peer feedback. Indeed, students oriented to their peers' status as students of a high caliber university as well as to their peers' in-class academic performances in both activities and discussions in determining whether they would accept or reject peer feedback. Social dynamics thus play a vital role in how students will eventually render final judgments on feedback suggestions. As Lu and Bol (2007) note, peer pressures, and thus interactions with peers, do play a role in classroom and activity dynamics (citing from Bagley & Hunter, 1992; Eschenbach, 2001; Kerr *et al.*, 1995; Lin, Liu, Chiu, & Yuan, 1999; Shaw, 2002). The totality of these findings therefore suggests that allowing students to openly display their academic prowess, through a discussion-centered forum, could cultivate an environment that is better suited for peer review practices in general. In short, student investment and displays of competency can be a useful tool in facilitating peer review success.

Of further importance to pedagogy is that the findings of this research have relevancies for both L1 and L2 instructional contexts. Though the research was conducted within a mixed L1/L2 setting, where all students were expected to perform at native language proficiency levels, the findings can be applied to the

concept of peer reviews as a general classroom practice for both domains. Indeed, in this context, where language acquisition was not an active variable, we showed similar concerns to those of students engaged in language learning (e.g., micrological feedback concerns for L1 speakers). Likewise, as Min (2005) notes, within L2 contexts proper training on peer review can improve self-editing skills for language learners in that it enables them to better filter the feedback that they receive from peers, a skill more closely associated with advanced L1-level writing courses. When we examine some of the similarities between L1 and L2 contexts, we thus see that these groups experience similar expectations and needs in determining overall receptivity to peer feedback. Our findings thus suggest that peer review practices can be improved upon across language domains through a deeper understanding of student perspectives that inform such practices, despite L1/L2 distinctions.

Concluding Thoughts

As this research demonstrates, peer review is far more complex than previous studies have indicated, especially when the perspectives of those affected by the review's outcomes are taken into account. Indeed, most existing work on L1 peer reviews has tended to reduce the data to dichotomous yes/no perspectives in relation to receptivity. However, as our findings indicate, a deeper understanding of student perspectives has the potential to yield great insight for pedagogical development. Here, this was achieved through the use of reflective writing journals designed to elicit student experiences as the primary source for insight and understanding. In this way, the complexities within said reflections offered novel insight not only for pinpointing specific elements as potential sources of weakness or strength, but also in how students' overall receptivity can be improved through instructional practices. Though this study made use of a rather small population, the findings offer at least a preliminary understanding of issues and concerns that students might not otherwise offer in face-to-face dialog with instructors. The current research therefore adds greater depth to our understanding of how peer review activities are received and processed by students. This is crucial in that it is the students who either directly benefit or suffer the repercussions of peer review implementation. It is for this reason that student perspectives should be seen as a primary source for future avenues of peer review research.

Though our findings have fruitfully elucidated peer review intricacies, there were limitations. First, a larger population may yield further complexity to the categorical orientations explored herein. As populations grow, the potential for diversity grows as well. It therefore stands to reason that sociocultural variables, such as race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and L1/L2 distinctions, may indeed play a larger role than we envisioned. As our courses predominately excluded such variables in academic considerations, so too did we predominately exclude such complexities in our analyses. Future studies should therefore consider such variables as they pertain to the constitution of peer review practices. Moreover, as the present study analyzed reflective writing journals, future studies could include a

task-based interview in which students discuss their reactions to peers' comments. This may provide additional insights into critical assessments in particular. Lastly, as our peer reviews represented a graded component, studies should also examine the role of students' reflections when such grading constraints are not present. Though there is room for expansion of the ideas and concepts presented herein, the current research offers preliminary insights into how student perspectives can be utilized in improving peer review pedagogical practices.

Notes

¹ IMRD here stands for Introduction, Methodology, Results, and Discussion. This prescriptive paper format is the type used within the course in question.

² As stated in the methodology, peer reviews were anonymous; neither the reviewer nor the author knew the other's identity. Students were asked not to include their names on the documents they turned in; however, it is possible that Kay may have disregarded these directions and revealed her identity to her reviewers. In such a case, however, the reviewer's identity and her/his resulting feedback would remain anonymous.

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