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Challenging Assumptions
Looking In, Looking Out

Using video to coach peer revision in writing

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Peer revision is a communicative writing activity that improves macro features of writing including structure, organization and content. It is a part of peer response, the communication between a reader and writer about a piece of writing. Coaching students in terms of language and skills needed to interact in a peer revision discussion are two areas that need to be considered in implementation. This article will examine if creating videos can develop peer revision skills. A series of videos were created by instructors and trialed with first-year writing classes at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS). In conjunction, students completed listening activities, which contextualized language, and peer revision discussions in class. Following this, students completed a reflection and a survey and though they stated some difficulties expressing their opinions, they reported discussions were a generally positive experience. Students identified the strengths and weaknesses of their discussions and many reported an increase in the use of peer revision language. Results from this study have contributed to the development of a potentially university wide series of videos, which aim to develop students' ability to peer revise.

Peer revisionとは、ライティングのストラクチャー、組み立て、内容を改善するコミュニカティブなライティング アクティビティーである。これは、添削する側とされる側との双方のコミュニケーションのことでありpeer responseの一部である。Peer revisionを導入する際、学生に様々な単語やその使い方を指導する必要性があった。この論文ではビデオを作成することでpeer revisionのスキルを向上されることができるとを検証する。ビデオは神田外語大学の教員によって作られ、同大学の一年次に行われるライティングの授業で試された。それと同時に、学生はリスニング・アクティビティーとpeer revision discussionを行った。学生は意見を述べるのが難しくなっていくにつれ、ディスカッションが概して良い経験だったと報告した。学生はディスカッション時における、自らの長所と短所を知り、大半の学生がpeer revision languageの使用が増えたと報告した。この研究の結果は将来的に大学のビデオシリーズの発展に貢献し、学生のPeer reviseの能力を発達させることに繋がるであろう。

Peer revision's central aim is to get feedback from classmates on macro features present in writing. For most students at Japanese universities, it is often the first time that students will be expected to formally discuss their writing with their peers (Lehtinen, 2008). This may result in students not realizing the educational value of giving feedback, nor trusting feedback received by classmates or even their own opinions. Instructors may reach other conclusions declaring that developing peer revision skills

requires too much class time and teacher feedback is more of an immediate benefit to improve students' writing. By taking such an approach, instructors risk merely handing a student their final draft instead of teaching them the process of creating their final draft. Through an overview of significant studies in peer revision research, which highlight the benefits for students, one can see great potential for the use of peer revision. It was hypothesized that if students could witness a demonstration of a peer revision interaction, they would benefit in many ways. This leads into the research question: can instructors coach students to become more effective in peer revision, in both skills and language, through the use of a video demonstrating the interaction of peer revision?

Advantages and disadvantages of peer revision

Research into the use of peer revision has arguments for both sides. Some criticisms of its use include students' tendency to focus on surface level problems, such as word choice or grammar, when they should concentrate on writing structure, organization, and/or content (Conner and Asenavage, 1994; Ferris, 2003, p. 70). Another criticism views peer response as a creation of western thought. In some cultures there may be potential for abuse of the response system with either overly critical comments or a general reluctance to evaluate classmates' writing (Carson and Nelson, 1996; Leki, 1990; Lockhart and Ng, 1995). Additionally, students may be unconvinced by arguments or comments set forth by peers (Saito and Fujita, 2004). Also, students may prefer teacher feedback as peer feedback is "not enjoyable," "hard," and "time-consuming" (Lockhart and Ng, 1994). As one can see with these criticisms of the use of peer revision in writing,

never adopting its practice in class is certainly tempting as the amount of time invested in training does not necessarily guarantee results.

Alternatively, the use of peer response, of which peer revision is synonymous, in a writing classroom has been praised, especially through the lens of communicative language teaching. In terms of encouraging learner autonomy, peer response develops self-direction and critical reflection in writing while at the same time providing a source of immediate feedback between drafts from a varied audience (Bell, 1991; Flower and Hayes, 1981; Hyland, 2003; Sommers, 1982; Zamel, 1982, 1985, 1995). It cultivates a community of collaborative learners while developing communicative accuracy and fluency (Long and Porter, 1985). Supporting a Vygotskian perspective, peer response interactions promote the idea and practice that learning is socially constructed (Bruffee, 1986; Carson and Nelson, 1994; Mendoca & Johnson 1994; Vygotsky, 1962/1986). Peer response also allows students to experience writing from the point-of-view of the reader, while deepening writers' understanding of audience (Berg, 1999; Hyland, 2003; Stanley, 1992; Tsui and Ng, 2000). Lastly, conversations about writing introduce and develop critical thinking skills as students discuss their writing (Leki, 1990; Stanley, 1992).

Research rationale

As can be seen in a need analysis of KUIS students conducted in 2006 to determine how much writing experience students had in L1 and L2 during their high school years, a total of 272 first year students were asked,

among other questions, “which classroom activities were completely new for you in the basic writing class?” In the initial analysis, it was reported that 80% of students regarded peer response groups as “new” (Lehtinen, 2007). Over half the students said evaluating ideas or having conversations about their own or their classmates’ writing were also new. Four focus groups were conducted which comprised of six first year students both male and female who completed the original questionnaire. These students concluded that they were uncomfortable and unfamiliar with what to say during peer response sessions.

Another questionnaire was administered in 2007 to 144 first year students, which specifically elicited their perceptions about peer response. Data were gathered using a questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Table 1 presents data mean and standard deviation.

Students revealed they were unsure of what to say in peer revision and wanted to learn more language to be used in the peer response interaction (question 10). Another question asked if video would be helpful to understand peer response, with a majority of students responding positively (question 9). Students indicated they enjoy helping their classmates with writing as well as believing they can offer some help to their classmates (questions 2 & 3).

Perceptions of peer revision were also elicited from KUIS writing instructors through focus groups. A majority of the instructors had at some time used peer revision. Though most instructors saw it as a beneficial activity in theory, they thought students were unable to successfully complete it because of language ability and confidence to make

Table 1. Student perceptions of peer response

| | Mean | SD |
|---|------|------|
| 1. I understand what I should do in peer revision | 2.4 | 0.81 |
| 2. I use peer revision to improve my writing. | 2.9 | 0.79 |
| 3. I enjoy talking with my classmates about my writing. | 2.5 | 0.83 |
| 4. I enjoy helping my classmates with their writing | 3.0 | 0.81 |
| 5. I think peer revision helps me improve my writing. | 2.4 | 0.76 |
| 6. I can help other classmates with their writing | 2.9 | 0.77 |
| 7. Peer revising with classmates is difficult for me. | 2.8 | 0.82 |
| 8. I don't know what to say when peer revising with classmates. | 2.8 | 0.76 |
| 9. I want to see a video showing peer revision. | 3.1 | 0.78 |
| 10. I need to know more language to use in peer revision. | 3.4 | 0.65 |

comments on classmates’ writing. When instructors used peer revision in class, it was introduced at the beginning of the semester and sometimes abandoned as the semester progressed because instructors did not think students were benefiting. One of the most frequent methods of using peer revision in class was to hand out a checklist for students to complete, asking them to identify various parts of writing such as thesis statements, transitions, supporting details, etc. Instructors commented that the idea of using a video to coach students along with a worksheet on language for the interaction would be beneficial.

A rationale for the creation of videos was to demonstrate the interaction for students while using specific language functions. The previous year, classroom language (Stanley, 1992) was given to students, but students could not imitate the interaction as they had never experienced it before. Students simply did not understand the process of and the language to be used in the interaction. Therefore, the focus of the videos were to give students a glimpse into the interaction while having them identify language that can be used in their interactions with classmates.

Video rationale

Description

After conducting the need analysis, the first demonstration video was created to focus students' attention on the language in a peer revision discussion. The discussion was filmed from just one over the shoulder camera angle of the essay that was being peer revised. Students heard the two authors' voices and saw them making corrections. The essay's text was large enough that students could read when viewed on a projector screen. The text and language used in the discussion were planned and determined before the discussion was recorded. One essay was written with deliberate mistakes commonly made by KUIS students.

After the first version (V.1) was used, strengths and weaknesses of the video were identified. It was observed that students became more aware of what a peer revision discussion was about through teacher observations. A problem encountered was that students were unsure of which speaker was the writer or reader. Before trialling the video

in the next class, V.1 was slightly edited to make V.2. Some changes included breaks being added to the footage so that students viewing the video had time to look at the worksheet that accompanied the videos. Name subtitles were also included on the bottom of the screen so for the duration the reader or writer spoke, the subtitle *Reader* or *Writer* were at the bottom of the screen. After using V.2 with a different class, the next video (V.3) was produced to demonstrate additional language.

Implementation procedure

Outlined below is the process of setting up peer revision in a writing class that was used in conjunction with the videos (Ferris, 2003). Before implementing peer response in a class, one must reflect on one's personal educational and institution's educational philosophy. In this case, the educational philosophy of KUIS is to create a collaborative learning atmosphere which is conducive towards the development of language learners who are critical in their thinking and self-directed in their access of language. Peer revision helps students focus their communicative interactions with each other through improving their writing and creating a collaborative community. In this writing community, ideas are explained, expanded, and rationalized which are all critical in the development of higher level critical thinking skills.

Step 1: Rationalize—Before the activity is introduced, the students must understand why they are doing this activity. This can be done by explaining some of the benefits of peer revision.

Step 2: Self-reflection—To focus on the collaborative learning aspect of peer revision, students put their writing on their desks, stand up, walk around and scan classmates' writing for a short time. Following this, students return to their desk and write strengths and weaknesses about their writing to be discussed in a revision session.

Step 3: Demonstrate—Demonstrate the interaction of peer revision with a video and listening worksheet where students identify the reader and writer language (based on Stanley, 1992).

Step 4: Explain—Following the video, an instructor gives some guidelines to students on language pragmatics such as saying “*this is fine, no changes*” means “*I don't want to help you improve your writing.*” The instructor should highlight the fact that this interaction is a discussion between reader and writer. Review may be necessary of vocabulary and some specific areas of focus such as identifying concluding sentences.

Step 5: Apply—Students spend 10 -15 minutes with a classmate revising a piece of writing. Note: students are to discuss one piece of writing.

At first, this entire process may take anywhere from 45 - 90 minutes depending upon self-reflection time, demonstration length, areas of lesson focus and amount of revision with classmates. As students understand the interaction of peer revision, fewer steps can be taken to prepare them. Students should be encouraged to work with different partners so they can imitate the language and behaviors of their classmates in the interaction.

Data collection and results

Post-Discussion student reflection

Method

After completing a peer revision discussion using V.3, both classes were given a paper-based student reflection task. This sought to provide student insights and perceptions of the following: strengths and weaknesses of their discussion, future improvements, and use of the language. Additionally, it gave students a chance to reflect on their discussion. Both classes were informed that their answers would be used in our research to improve the peer revision videos and classroom activities. Forty-nine students participated, however, some students neglected to answer all questions.

Results

When asked to give strengths and weaknesses of their discussion, insights were given in a number of ways which can be seen in Table 2, which highlight student responses. Please note that original spelling and grammar has not been altered.

The qualitative data were tagged and analyzed to show what type of strengths and weaknesses students were reflecting on as can be seen in Appendix 1. The analysis of the comments included references to the use of peer revision language, turn-taking procedures, draft improvements due to peer revision, and ability to find and explain strengths or weaknesses. In the same reflection, the question “Did you use the peer revision language?” was asked of students. Out of 47 students, 38 students (80.8%) responded “yes” and 9 students (19.2%) answered “no.” Next, in another question,

Table 2. Strength and weaknesses of student peer revision discussions

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|
| I could use sentences for doing peer revision. I could discuss fluently. | I couldn't find their improvement so much. I couldn't discuss so much. |
| We could discuss very fluently. | It was very hard for me to find better ideas. |
| I could tell how to change and combine sentences and I could give my partner many advices so I did a good revision. | Everything good, but <i>student A's</i> writing hadn't bad points so we didn't discuss so much. (name changed to protect personal information) |
| I could get good advice to improve my draft. | I couldn't give her lots of information with using languages. |
| We pointed mistakes each other with peer revision language. | My peer revision feedback discussion was bad because my sentence wasn't concrete. |
| It was good chance to know other person's opinion. | I don't know what is the best draft clearly, so I have no confidence whether I can make my partner's draft better or not. |

students were asked what they could improve upon in the future. Comments on non-peer revision related content were tagged and analyzed. Of the 69 comments, only 26% were about non-related items (i.e., grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.).

Post-Discussion student questionnaire

Method

Students watched two of the videos over a period of two months. Since that time, students have been completing peer revision discussions on different writing tasks that they were assigned. Towards the end of the second semester of their first year of writing, students completed a follow up questionnaire (see Appendix 2) to gauge the success of coaching students in terms of skills and language. Students were informed that the results would be used for this research and to improve peer revision discussions. Students (n=44) were asked for their opinion on a series of questions on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The last question was a six-point scale with the options 1 (never), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4 (often), 5 (a lot) and 6 (always). There was no middle answer so as to eliminate students choosing the impartial answer.

Results

This questionnaire results can be seen in Appendix 2. In terms of student improvement from peer revision, the first question's mean response was 3.18 (SD = 0.72) and question four's mean response was 3.55 (SD = 0.50). In terms of peer revision language use in discussions, the mean was 2.59 (SD = 0.73). On the same questionnaire, students were asked to give their opinion on a Likert scale on how often they used the peer revision language in the discussions. The mean response was 3.32 (SD = 0.56).

Discussion

Looking at the post-discussion reflection responses, comments giving insight into the research question were examined. Just 8% of the comments were about using peer revision language. Similarly, the post-discussion questionnaire revealed that when asked in question 8, “I use the peer revision language in the discussions,” the student mean was 2.59 (SD = 0.73), just a little more than “sometimes,” which was disappointing for the research as more language use would have been better. However, when tagging comments for analysis, only 26% were references to non-peer revision related content, which indicates student focusing on macro-level peer revision content.

However, according to the results from the post-discussion questionnaire, students felt they did improve due to peer revision training sessions. They stated reading classmates’ essays improved their writing and the discussions were useful. Comments made straight after a peer revision discussion in the reflection substantiate this analysis as can be seen by comments such as, “I understand I should write more detail and more good concluding sentence [*sic*],” and “Good. Because he could find some good and bad points so I could understand my improvement clearly [*sic*].”

When asked to give the strengths and weaknesses of their peer revision discussion, students gave various comments about an inability to find improvements in a partner’s essay including the following: “It was very hard for me to find better ideas yet [*sic*],” “I wasn’t able to find bad points easily,” and “I couldn’t find their improvement so much, I couldn’t discuss so much [*sic*].” Additionally, another student commented, “I can easily find good points but to find

bad points [*sic*] were difficult for me.” Perhaps this indicates more time is needed to coach students in error analysis, which can be improved through peer revision.

There were a number of areas in our research that could have been changed to produce different, perhaps clearer, results. Firstly, the post-discussion student questionnaire did not ask for students’ opinions on the video after viewing had been completed. Also, if the same survey was administered after each viewing of a video, it would have been expected to have more reliable results over the period of time. Being surveyed in this fashion may produce results that can be analyzed for improved writing development over a period of time.

Experiential learning has played an important role in the development of research and may be more salient in the near future. Kolb (1984, p.38) has defined learning as “*the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience*” (italics in original). We, the researchers, were learning from experience through research and classroom observations and, thus, went through the experiential learning cycle when producing each video. Based on the four phases in Kolb’s experiential learning theory (1984), the concrete experience was using the video in class. The reflective observation took place during the video and worksheet activities, and when students completed their next peer revision discussion. Student questionnaires, observations, and reflections aided this comprehension process, which leads into the personal reflection and conceptualization that took place when analyzed. Finally, there was active experimentation through modification of the video and worksheet as well as through making the new video.

In terms of materials development, a new reflective task is also influenced by the experiential learning cycle. The task aims for students to reflect on the experience of their peer revision discussion. The observation is a summary or reflection and draws students' attention towards strengths and weaknesses of an experience. Finally, students discuss or write a plan for improvement in preparation for their next discussion. A student wrote in their post-discussion reflection, "I think good. I tried to find good or bad points and I could ask something that I couldn't understand [*sic*]." This student is reflective in nature, trying to find good and bad points and by asking questions to their partner. Will such a task benefit this student and others? Further research needs to be conducted to determine the effectiveness of such a task for writing students.

Final version

The final version (V.4) is similar to its predecessors, however, V.4 includes reduced and simplified categories for the functions of peer revision language. Instead of the eleven categories of language that Stanley identifies in her 1992 article, there are just seven in total, four reader functions and three writer functions, in the hope that this will make it easier for students to initially comprehend the language and put it into practice. There are seven corresponding videos, four minutes in length, each demonstrating a different language function, such as questioning or commenting. Attention has shifted from a demonstration of an entire peer revision discussion, to a segmented view of each function of peer revision language. The reader functions have been combined into four categories: questioning, narrating,

advising and commenting, which can be seen in Table 3. Writer language was also reduced slightly from four categories to three: questioning, responding, and narrating, as can be seen in Table 4.

Throughout this paper, references have been made to worksheets that accompanied the videos. These worksheets have two main activities, a listening multiple choice and a listening cloze. The listening multiple choice in V.1 and V.2 were far too demanding. Students were asked to listen for the eleven answers from a range of thirty possibilities. The processing load was overwhelming for students in terms of the amount of information and the time given to complete the activity. V.1 did not have a listening cloze, however, after reflecting, two cloze activities with a number of items were added. This guided students to listen for specific answers which included target language. Additionally, Anderson and Lynch commented that listener fatigue may be evident due to long listening texts so the activity was broken into smaller sections (1988). From classroom experience, listeners always became much more attentive during the listening clozes. So V.3 and V.4 also feature these two types of activities.

In addition to the creation of videos and worksheets, a manual has been created for teachers who are interested in using video to coach peer feedback. The manual will guide teachers through the process of setting up their classroom and be accompanied by the V.4 DVD.

Conclusion

Looking at previous research on peer revision, there are arguments for and against its use in a writing class.

Table 3. Reader peer revision language

| New categories | Stanley's 1992 categories | Function of language | Examples of language |
|----------------|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Questioning | Questioning | To inquire or query | "Do you think this ____ is ok?" |
| | Eliciting | To draw out or provoke further discussion | "Why have you included this?" |
| Narrating | Announcing | To read aloud whilst progressing through text | "First you say '...'" |
| Advising | Advising | To recommend changes | "You need to ..." |
| Commenting | Pointing | To verbally highlight an area the reader wants to talk about | "In this paragraph you say ..." |
| | Reacting | Giving praise | "This is great." |

Table 4. Writer peer revision language

| New categories | Stanley's 1992 categories | Function of language | Examples of language |
|----------------|---------------------------|---|---|
| Questioning | Eliciting | To draw out or provoke further discussion | "Is this sentence relevant?" "Should I include another main idea?" |
| | | To read aloud whilst progressing through text | Here you said "..." |
| Responding | Responding | To answer a question from the reader | "I think ..." |

Implementing it in a classroom has potential for making the atmosphere less teacher-centered and more student-directed. The use of this peer revision activity needs to be rationalized with students and the process constantly monitored for any potential misunderstandings. Peer revision can be a powerful tool to not only improve student writing, but to also foster authentic communication between students as they work together to co-construct meaning. By using a video that contains targeted classroom language and listening worksheets, students can witness a discussion while identifying characteristic communicative features of the interaction. Students can then replicate what is seen in their actual peer revision sessions. Though this process of coaching may take time, the long term benefits for students who undergo this training have great potential. Video was the chosen medium to demonstrate the interaction of a peer revision discussion to coach students to be more effective in both skills and language. This is not a “silver-bullet” solution for addressing student reluctance to discuss writing with classmates; it is merely another tool that can be used to modify the classroom environment in a more communicative, collaborative manner.

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Appendix 1

Reflections: Number of comments with specific references

| Reference | No. of comments | % of total comments |
|--|-----------------|---------------------|
| References to peer revision language | 8 | 6% |
| References to their discussion | 13 | 10% |
| References to improvements due to peer revision | 21 | 16% |
| References to an ability to find strengths or weaknesses in partner's writing and explain | 13 | 10% |
| References to a lack of ability to find strengths or weaknesses in partner's writing and therefore not explain | 17 | 13% |

Appendix 2

Post-discussions student questionnaire

| Question | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| 1. Peer revision discussions have improved my writing | 3.18 | 0.72 |
| 2. I enjoy the peer revision discussions | 2.59 | 0.66 |
| 3. I use the peer revision language in the discussions | 2.59 | 0.73 |
| 4. Reading other essays has improved my writing | 3.55 | 0.50 |
| 5. Peer revision discussions were useful. | 3.23 | 0.86 |
| 6. I understood all of the discussion | 2.85 | 0.70 |
| 7. Most of our discussion was about the essay | 3.05 | 0.57 |
| 8. How often did you use the peer revision language in the discussions? (likert 6-point scale) | 3.32 | 0.56 |