
**Summary**

The main purpose of this article is to summarize the findings and arguments for and against peer feedback in ESL classes and to provide suggestions as to how teachers can more effectively execute peer feedback in classroom contexts. Despite the often strong initial negative perception by many students on peer feedback activities, Rollinson asserts, “once the peer response process is underway, (students’) perception of the value … is likely to change if she begins to receive useful feedback, or finds that commenting on essays is helping her to be more critical of her own writing.” (p. 24). It requires students to engage in collaborative communication, carrying out a number of different sociopragmatic interactions including arguing, explaining, clarifying, and justifying. Often students blindly accept teacher feedback, but peer feedback lends students to engage in higher metacognitive thinking skills as they evaluate peer feedback and decide whether or not to incorporate it into subsequent drafts. Problematic aspects include time constraints (if conducted in class), student factors (lack of confidence in the task competence of peers), and teachers’ role (either over-interfering or lack of support in teaching the activity). Carson and Nelson’s 1996 study was cited in which Chinese students tended to withhold critical comments to maintain harmony or because they felt they lacked authority.

The author suggests the following to create effective peer response groups: (1) properly setting up groups with effective procedures and (2) adequately training students in the best practices of peer response. In the pre-training phase, Rollinson suggests a “propaganda phase” in which students are educated on the benefits of peer feedback vs. teacher feedback, clarifying the role of the responder as collaborator (not director), modeling non-threatening practices and discussing appropriate vs. inappropriate commenting, providing balanced feedback (including strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement), and discussion of obligation to revise vs. freedom to reject reviewer’s comments. Next is the intervention training phase in which a teacher monitors student journal entries regarding how they use their peer’s feedback. This stages allows
instructors to increase effectiveness of peer feedback by either helping reviewers make better comments or helping writers better incorporate feedback. The obvious down-side to this is the weighty time requirements on the part of the teacher. In terms of actually carrying out the feedback session, Rollins recommends giving readers heuristic guidelines by which they can work through and comment on peer’s papers. Readers may either take time after reading to formulate thoughtful responses or give their immediate, gut reaction; both strategies have different benefits and drawbacks. In writing, students can employ different strategies based on partner preferences/needs such as annotation and using different colors to represent different levels of priority of comments. Rollinson concludes by stating again how beneficial and supportive to a teacher’s overall instructive goals peer review can be as it engages students on a deeper level to become more critical readers and self-reliant writers.

Response

The conclusions in this study have greatly influenced my teaching in my current context. As an academic reading and writing instructor in an intensive English program (IEP), the pedagogical implications from this study are very relevant, especially as pertain to the training of students in the manner in which they should give feedback through modeling. The role of individual students’ perceptions of peer feedback may also have a bearing on the way in which they carry out pragmatic acts such as negotiating and questioning feedback. It can also not be taken for granted that students will be able to engage in feedback conversations without structured support and training.Pragmatic language, strong rationales, and teacher monitoring are all important parts of teaching peer feedback. Thus, the outlined steps Rollinson provides have structured my own approach to teaching and training low-level ESL students in peer feedback sessions. This was the topic of my capstone research project for my master’s degree. You can read more about it in my online portfolio under the “Capstone” tab.