



Benefit and Some Practical Aspects of Peer Editing in Teaching Writing

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ABSTRACT

Peer editing is usually defined differently by various theorists, but normally it is based on helping or encouraging learners to share a role as evaluators of each other's errors in written work. Various benefits of peer editing are addressed in this article starting from training in learning strategies for learners, that is, learners are trained to be more self-reliant or more independent when dealing with writing tasks. The advantage of group/pair peer editing is that learners cooperatively work, and support each other, in other words, collaborate in fulfilling the task together. More interactions and personal relationships will be derived through negotiation of forms. Also the fact that poor learners are supported in learning by good learners leads to learning as well as strengthening one's own knowledge about language. This article also discusses steps of peer editing which are mainly focused on providing guidance to learners with linguistic, procedural as well as interactional skills. The significant point is involving the students at all stages and providing chances for writers and editors to discuss to follow up the activity. The last part of this article is some affective factors such as time, course content and learners' interest/motivation which should be considered when incorporating peer editing into classroom teaching of writing.

Keywords: Peer editing, Writing, Peer review



INTRODUCTION

This article generally addresses advantages of using peer editing in classroom teaching of writing. Review of steps and other relevant factors are also discussed.

DEFINITION OF PEER EDITING

Peer editing is similar to the more general terms such as peer review, peer response, and peer feedback. For Liu and Hansen (2002), peer editing refers to the use of learners as sources of information, and interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formally trained teacher, tutor, or editor in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing.

BENEFIT OF PEER EDITING TO TEACHING AND LEARNING WRITING SKILLS

1. *Independent Writing: Strategy Training*

In most university courses which aim at enhancing students' writing skills, the students are trained on either functional or academic writing. For ESP courses, they learn about language points and how to organize ideas to fit the format of writing such as writing business and social letters and reports. For academic writing, they mainly gain practice on language points including grammar, structure related to the type of writing and organizing ideas for paragraph and essay writing. Limited time causes less time for training students to be used to writing as a process. To help learners to learn how to write, it is necessary to train them to be used to writing as a process so as to be more aware of not only 'what' to write but also 'how' to write. In such case, they learn to follow the steps of pre-writing, while writing and post writing. Repeated practice in class will make peer editing a step of writing which is familiar to them. This awareness to improve one's own writing will be like training learning strategies, making them more self-directed in their own writing.

For Wenden (1987, 1991), learning strategies mainly comprise meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies. Meta-cognitive strategies are mental operations or procedures that learners use to regulate their learning. Cognitive strategies refer to mental operations or steps used by learners to learn new information and apply it to specific learning tasks. One major goal of teaching writing should be training them in the way that they will become independent, in other words having strategies to cope with their own writing by which revising and editing or correcting their own errors are done.



Learners should develop both cognitive and meta-cognitive learning strategies, that is, not only learn to manipulate and follow steps of writing as an independent writer but also be equipped with skills to monitor a particular writing task, in other words, to know what they should do when writing.

Training learners to follow the steps of writing tends to develop in them a habit of good writers who learn to plan, organize, prepare drafts, revise and edit. Repeated practice in writing as a process should be provided for learners until finally they become independent writers, that is, they are aware of finding fault both in terms of ideas/ content/ organization as well as mistakes and errors in their own writing.

2. Cooperative and Collaborative Learning

Oxford defines cooperative learning as a particular set of classroom techniques that foster learners' interdependence as a route to cognitive and social development. The main characteristics of cooperative learning are positive interdependence, accountability, group formation and cognitive and social development (Oxford, 1997). This concept should be applied with the teaching of writing in such a way that learners work in a team to fulfill a goal of correcting errors in writing for each other. The goal that learners in a team are responsible for reaching should motivate them to try for the team by helping each other, that is cooperatively working and collaborating to fulfill the task.

Peer editing also brings about more classroom interaction as learners ask, explain and give comment to each other. Such interactions help to enhance their learning because in doing so, both writers and editors focus on meaning as well as form of language.

3. Learning To Write Through Mutual Scaffolding

According to Yygotsky's concept of 'social constructivist', learning is viewed as a construction of knowledge within a social context which, therefore, encourages acculturation of individuals into a learning community (Oxford, 1997). Learners' skills are extended through the guidance and response of each other (Vygostky, 1978). Scaffolding occurs when poor students are helped in the process of fixing their errors by better learners. This is a kind of learning from 'negative evidence'. For Schmidt (1990, as cited in Ellis, 2006), students learn better grammar through peer editing by



which they can associate existing knowledge with the new input. For learning grammar, Ellis et al. (2001, as cited in Ellis, 2006) support using peer editing to help focus learners on both form and meaning. This is due to the fact that when students peer edit, there seems to be a real reader for that piece of writing. So interaction which occurs is like a means in which readers and writers negotiate for agreed form to improve the written work. By doing peer editing, both good and poor students gain benefit in learning. Poor students learn about correct forms through interacting with peers of better language ability while good students learn to apply and associate their existing knowledge with the new input, which helps strengthen their existing knowledge.

The benefit gained from manipulating group/pair work for peer editing is that learners adjust themselves to others in the same group/pair. They practice communicative skills like asking for clarification and explaining problematic points to each other. These also result in knowing more about peers' knowledge and interest. Besides, consulting each other to complete the task of editing peers' written work leads to a sense of being united together, thus creating more relationship. This will create a less threatening classroom atmosphere as their errors will be treated as committed by a team, not an individual. For Dornyei, Zoltan & Murphy (2003), learning enjoyment which is partly a result of knowing more friends is regarded as vital as learning about subject matter for young learners.

4. Steps Of Peer Editing

Peer editing is usually time consuming due to the fact that some learners still lack linguistic skills and equipping them with procedural skills to do peer editing is also necessary. Different theorists (Kroll, 2001; Porto, 2001; Rollinson, 2005 & Yang et al., 2006) proposed different steps of peer editing, but in general they agreed with the three major steps—pre-training, peer editing and post peer editing stages-- as follows.

Step 1. Pre-Training Stage

This step includes clarifying objectives and creating awareness in learners about peer editing before doing it. Most theorists suggest activities involving explaining, giving examples, demonstrating and especially modeling on how to peer edit. In doing these, the students know the roles they should play both as editors and writers from practicing doing them and discussing them with each other.



The students should be guided on steps of peer editing. This comes from clear, simple and step-by-step instructions of teachers on what and how to peer edit, timing, modes of peer editing, skills involved and how to form groups or pairs.

Interaction skills such as asking for clarification, explaining, giving constructive comment and giving specific suggestions could be practiced through group/pair work before they do it on their own. Skills in peer editing such as using symbols and identifying types of errors must also be emphasized by using a peer editing checklist as a guide.

In general, students must be prepared both in terms of linguistic, interactional and procedural guidance. However, the most important thing is to involve them in the pre-training activities as much as possible.

Step 2. While Peer Editing Stage

The teacher and learners' roles are important. For the teacher, he or she should adjust the role at this step as supporter and language resource if necessary while monitoring group/ pair work. Learners' role has to be guided, observed and supported and participation in groups such as asking for help, explaining, exchanging ideas and consulting to fulfill the task have to be observed and promoted. The teacher's moving around, observing and providing support both in terms of language and how to peer edit leads to more helpful feedback (for/from) learners.

Step 3. Post Peer Editing Stage

Some problematic points might not be solved during the peer editing stage. There might be the case that the editors have questions about meanings the writers want to convey or they lack language knowledge about certain errors. These lead to more need for asking for clarification and explaining between readers and writers. Thus, after peer editing, a debriefing or conference among students and teacher should help improve the quality of learners' feedback, which will make peer editing more useful to all students.

5. Affective Factors To Using Peer Editing In Class

5.1 Course content/time limitation

The course content and limited time are the major problems in using peer editing which is usually time consuming. The careful and selective planning on what



stages of peer editing to include in each lesson and the planning on when to incorporate peer editing in the whole course should be done. An appropriate sequence of skills for peer editing should be trained and practiced and the amount of emphasis on each peer editing skill should be carefully considered.

5.2 Learners' interest and motivation

Most undergraduate students are still young and not fully mature. Thus, besides their need for future job, learners' preference and interest leading to more motivation and learning enjoyment should be served.

CONCLUSION

Peer editing is aimed at enhancing learners' learning strategies, more independent writing, self-directed and cooperative learning and mutual scaffolding in class. However, to derive these benefits from peer editing, teachers have to effectively cope with major constraints especially the prescribed content of the course to teach, time limitation as well as learners' needs and want.

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