The novice writer as editor: Using peer editing as part of formative feedback in academic writing in an online teaching-learning environment

Elsa Meihuizen and Mariska Nel

Abstract

Employing peer review as part of formative feedback in academic writing instruction is an established practice, as reflected in existing research within applied linguistics. Despite challenges involved, such as the time and effort required to manage this type of process, and the poor quality of feedback provided by fellow students, peer reviewing is generally considered to have a beneficial effect on students' writing development (compare, for instance: Ahmed (2020), Huisman *et al.* (2018), Li & Li (2018)). In our current teaching-learning situation which has become, by necessity, exclusively online, it is increasingly important to reconsider teaching strategies and support systems to overcome the challenges of this new medium of instruction. One such challenge is the fact that opportunities for interaction between the parties involved in the teaching-learning environment commonly available in a normal face to face class situation have been lost. Within the academic literacy course in our specific university context, in keeping with the conception of teaching-learning as a socially constructed process, we normally make use of carefully monitored groupwork (in addition to other forms of interaction) to provide a support network for students' development of academic writing skills. In this paper, we report on a specific conceptualization and implementation of peer reviewing used as part of formative feedback to compensate for students' loss of a physical writing community, normally constituted by, for instance, groupwork. We adopted the term **peer editing** to indicate the process of providing feedback on the writing of peers. This does not entail merely a renaming of the review process, but an essential rethinking of it. One of the major problems with reviews by peers is a lack of critical engagement with different levels of the text. In our approach we actively include, as part of the writing course, instruction on editing principles and different levels of engagement with the text generally accepted as part of the editing practice, such as copyediting, stylistic editing, content editing, and structural editing. In our paper we report on analyses of student feedback on their experience of the editing exercise, as well as examples of students writing to gauge the impact of peer editing on the quality of writing assignments.

Keywords: paper; academic writing; peer editing

References

Ahmed, R. 2020. Peer review in academic writing: different perspectives from instructors and students. TESOL Journal, 12(1) https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.538

Huisman, B., Saab, N., Van den Broeck, P. & Van Driel, J. 2018. The impact of formative peer feedback on higher education students' academic writing: a mata-analysis. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 44(6):863-880.

Li, J. & Li, M. 2018. Turnitin and peer review in ESL academic writing classrooms. *Language Learning and Technology*, 22(1):27-41.