AJAL

EFL learners' written reflections on their experience of attending process genre-based, student-centred essay writing course

Alireza Memari Hanjani
Department of English, College of Humanities, Eslamshahr Branch, Islamic Azad University, Eslamshahr, Iran

Li Li
Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter, UK

Peer collaboration and process-based writing pedagogy are relatively unattended concepts in Iranian EFL composition classes where single-draft, single-reviewer essay writing practice maintains its dominance despite its failure to improve L2 learners' writing skills. The current global popularity of process writing and peer collaboration tasks on the one hand, and its absence in an Iranian EFL writing curriculum on the other, formed the primary motivation to incorporate this approach into an L2 essay writing course and explore students' reflections on their new experience. The results of feedback provided by 111 students at the end of a new process genre-based academic writing course revealed that participants showed a favourable attitude towards multiple drafting and collaborative tasks, even though they reported some concerns.

Key words: process-genre writing; peer collaboration; EFL; reflection; reflective writing; tertiary education; Iran

Introduction
A move towards applying a process-oriented approach and incorporating alternative forms of feedback has been common in many L2 composition classrooms around the world. However, the majority of English language teaching institutions in Iran still practice product, form-focused models of writing (Ghorbani, 2009). Most Iranian EFL writing teachers still provide traditional teacher-written feedback, consider single-draft student products as language practice rather than written expression and address surface level errors rather than meaning-related problems in students' texts (Allami, 2006; Birjandi & Malmir, 2009). Hence, writing courses focusing on paragraph and essay writing, which are theoretically intended to provide students with essential skills for producing different types of papers through the medium of English, fail to achieve those goals and students complete the courses without developing appropriate writing skills (Baroudy, 2008; Birjandi & Malmir, 2009). As an alternative, a process-genre based, student-centred pedagogy was introduced in English academic essay writing courses run at an Iranian university. This paper reports students' reflections of their experience of those courses.

Literature Review

Approaches to second language writing pedagogy
The product approach to writing, also referred to as form-dominated, has been an influential mode of instruction in L2 writing since the 1960s (Raimes, 1991). This view that writing primarily means "linguistic knowledge" ((Pincas, 1982, cited in Badger & White, 2000, p. 153) and that form precedes meaning, reinforces a narrow and limited perception of writing function (Zamel, 1987) which considers writing "as grammar instruction, with the emphasis on controlled composition, correction of the product, and correct form over expression of ideas" (Susser, 1994, p. 36). Writing courses inspired by this approach are preoccupied with usage, structure, or accurate form (Zamel, 1976, 1982, 1983). Curricula are based on a mechanistic philosophy of teaching and learning (Zamel, 1987), and follow a traditional model involving "familiarization; controlled writing; guided writing; and free writing" (Badger & White, 2000, p. 153). Teachers play the role of examiner rather than instructor perceiving the texts as demonstrations of linguistic skill rather than opportunities for the discovery and expression of ideas (Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992) and emphasize accuracy over fluency (Raimes, 1985, 1991; Susser, 1994; Zamel, 1985). Consequently, revision is limited and mostly focuses on linguistic flaws rather than content problems (Reid, 1984). The main purpose of writing assessment is evaluation for summative purposes (Ferris, 2003).

The process approach to writing instruction, known as the writer-dominant approach seeks to construct cognitive models of what writers actually do as they write (Hyland, 2003), viewing writing as a "non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning" (Zamel, 1983, p. 165). Process writing classrooms emphasize meaningful writing for a real purpose and audience, introduce students to invention techniques and engage them in pair/group activities such as collaborative writing, peer reviewing, and collaborative revision. Advocates believe that producing multiple drafts and receiving feedback at intermediate stages of writing from teachers or peers makes students aware of the extent their texts meet their audiences' needs, and allows the feedback to be used in revisions (Reid, 1994; Susser, 1994). This emphasis on audience, feedback, and revision supports an increased use of peer collaboration (collaborative writing, peer evaluation, collaborative revision) which is believed to complement the traditional teacher's written feedback (Ferris, 2003, p. 69).

The genre approach emerged following criticisms that process theories fail to consider the social nature of writing by assuming it is an abstract, neutral, value-free activity associated with mastery of universal processes which do not address "the forces outside the individual which help guide purposes, establish relationships, and ultimately shape writing" (Hyland, 2003, p. 18). Genre-based pedagogies, however, recognize the writing process as a purposeful, socially situated response to particular contexts and communities (Hyland, 2002). Students use various linguistic and rhetorical options to accomplish different purposes in different contexts. Focusing on understanding the complex variables in text composition better prepares students to perform writing tasks (Johns, 1995). Thus, teachers actively support students within a contextual framework to accomplish their writing tasks through explicit instruction of the appropriate generic structure and convention of target text types, and by meaning construction and demonstration of how various types of texts are organized in distinct ways in terms of their purpose, audience and message (Hyland, 2003, p. 19). Genre classrooms, then, involve the gradual introduction, modelling and analysis of the linguistic and structural

features of target genres and the development of multiple drafts of papers through collaboration (Johns et al., 2006).

Badger and White (2000) argue that product, process and genre approaches can be adapted eclectically in a "process genre approach" (p. 157). Such an approach recognizes L2 students' needs for linguistic knowledge about the texts, understands the importance of the skills involved in writing, and acknowledges writing as a social practice with special attention to purpose and audience. Students are provided with linguistic skills, such as planning, drafting, and re-drafting skills; linguistic knowledge, such as knowledge of grammar and vocabulary; and guidance to produce a text meeting the requirements of a particular genre.

Peer collaboration

Peer collaboration during which peers collaboratively develop a text, evaluate each other's drafts, or revise them jointly, is grounded in several theoretical stances including Vygotskian learning theory and the process-based approach to writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Shehadeh, 2011; Yong, 2010). Studies show that peer evaluation provides students with a real audience (Caulk, 1994; Hyland & Hyland, 2006), makes them aware of their readers' expectations (Liu & Sadler, 2003; Paulus, 1999; Tsui & Ng, 2000), generates more positive opinions towards writing (Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Min, 2005), reduces learners' writing anxiety and increases their confidence (Lockhart & Ng, 1995); contributes to their autonomy (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Tsui & Ng, 2000); enhances students' critical, analytical, and evaluative skills (Berg, 1999; Storch, 2005; Zhang, 1995); exposes them to alternatives ideas and writing styles (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Paulus, 1999); and provides learning opportunities by means of negotiation of meaning, collaborative learning, and co-construction of knowledge (van Gennip, Segers, & Tillema, 2010; Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996; Yong, 2010). Some studies indicate that learners perceive peer collaboration as a beneficial task (Morra & Romano, 2008; Saito & Fujita, 2004; Sengupta, 2000) although others report learners' reservations about collaborative work (Amores, 1997; Leki, 1991; Nelson & Carson, 1998). It is also suggested that detailed class preparation and training can promote collaboration (Kaufman & Schunn, 2011; Morra & Romano, 2008; Roskams, 1999; Storch, 2005).

Rationale for this study

The inefficacy of traditional, product-oriented pedagogies for written performance (Baroudy, 2008; Birjandi & Malmir, 2009) and observations of our students' negative views of writing as a boring and demanding activity prompted the experiment with a student-fronted, process-genre approach reported here. The goal is to make the L2 writing course more pleasant, more productive and specifically to:

a) Place equal emphasis on both local and global aspects of writing and focus on content and organization of the texts as well as surface level issues such as language and mechanics.

b) Treat writing as a recursive process and stress that composing is not just drafting but covers other essential stages such as generating ideas, planning and organization, drafting, revising, and editing.

c) Require students to participate actively in their writing process including evaluation and revision.

This paper focuses on students' reflections at the end of the course which identify their preferences and expectations; and on the strengths and weaknesses of the course with a view to enhancing the quality and efficacy of the pedagogy.

The Study

The larger study of which this paper reports one aspect, adopted an exploratory case study approach, aiming to explore in depth the EFL students' "doing and feeling" of peer feedback and collaborative revision in an Iranian context. The interaction dynamics and revision behaviours of the participants during peer review and collaborative revision activities are reported elsewhere (Memari Hanjani & Li, 2014). The current paper employs written reflection as its main data source because it is a well-established method in eliciting participants' experience (see, for example, Brady, Corbie-Smith, & Branch, 2002; Scanlan, Care, & Udod, 2002; Usher, Francis, Owens, & Tollefson, 1998; Watson & Wilcox, 2000). Reflective writing provided rich and in-depth reflections from a large number of participants in a short period of time while also allowing participants the space and time to express their own opinions freely.

The context

The study was conducted in an Iranian private university in 2012. The participants consisted of 111 English Translation Majors enrolled on an English essay writing course divided into four separate classes. Participants were native speakers of Persian from a middle class community. Although they had been studying English for between 8 to 12 years, most of them were novice English writers based on the sample essays they produced at the beginning of the course. The preliminary survey (Appendix 1) also revealed that they were not familiar with peer collaboration tasks or multiple draft pedagogy although they had had other opportunities to write English than in the current course. One of the researchers was also the course instructor, a non-native speaker of English with a specialism in L2 writing who had been working at the university for 8 years.

The genre process-oriented course

The course at the centre of the research was composed of a preparation stage and a writing stage. Prior to the start of the course, participants were informed they would be introduced to the use of collaborative tasks and process-genre based writing pedagogy which was different from what they were used to. Issues such as course policies, objectives, time-frame and the content of each session were also discussed in detail. This made the course unique compared to others run within the university.

The preparation stage lasted for six weeks, focusing on writing generics and the composing process including pre-writing, drafting, and revision, as well as the structure and components of an English academic essay. Lectures, discussions, and tasks emphasized the important role the writing process played in producing an English academic essay. At the pre-writing step, invention techniques such as brainstorming, free writing, outlining and organization methods were practised. The drafting step provided detailed instructions on the format of English academic essays. Components were analysed and detailed models provided. The revision step concentrated on polishing ideas and addressed issues of coherence, cohesion, organization, and accuracy. It should be noted that in order to establish a stress-free, comfortable

classroom atmosphere and to help students prepare for the second stage of the course, all in-class activities were performed by self-selected groups of three or four students.

The writing stage contained two cycles focusing on process and argumentative texts respectively. Each writing cycle lasted 4 weeks (Figure 1) and consisted of four distinct phases:

Phase One focused on genre analysis and preparing for composing an essay. The notion of genre was introduced, its characteristics discussed, and the steps involved in developing it were explained through models. Students were assigned a 250-word essay to be submitted after two weeks (see Appendix 2 for the essay prompts).

Phase Two involved peer review training. Both peer review and collaborative revision tasks were novel activities for this cohort of students so they received a sample student paper, a peer review sheet and training in evaluating a paper in terms of content and organization as well as language and mechanics based on the guidelines provided (see Appendix 3 for a sample peer review sheet). After modelling the text evaluation procedure, students were provided with the sample revised draft which incorporated the instructor's advice. The peer review sheets reflected the characteristics of each particular genre as well as the instructions provided during Phase One.

Phase Three consisted of peer review activities where students exchanged, reviewed, and evaluated each other's essays and provided their peers with written and oral feedback using peer feedback forms and employing the guidelines provided and discussed in Phase Two. Students worked in self-selected pairs and were given sufficient time to produce detailed and specific feedback, including 30 minutes for reviewing and reading a peer's paper and an hour-long discussion of papers and feedback with each student taking turns as reviewer and writer. The instructor did not participate in the discussions nor interfere, but monitored and provided assistance if needed. Following the peer review session, students worked at home revising their first drafts based on the feedback they had received, and submitted their first and second drafts, along with peer review forms within three days. The instructor then applied the scheme provided in the peer review sheet to comment and address global and local flaws in the papers and returned the second drafts the following week.

Phase Four concentrated on collaborative revision during which students were allocated a whole class session to read through their essays jointly, act on feedback and comments provided by the instructor, and produce the final drafts of their essays.
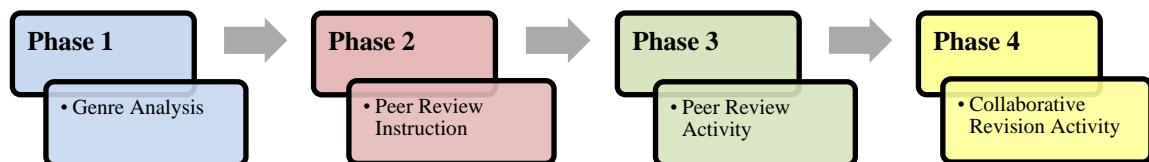

Figure 1. Writing cycles overview

Instruments

The data collection instruments consisted of a questionnaire administered at the beginning of the course and participants' anonymous written reflections collected at the end of the course. The preliminary survey collected demographic data and participants' self-reports about their level of English language proficiency, and familiarity with peer collaboration tasks and multiple drafting. Participants' written reflections were used to elicit their perceptions of working with their peers and engaging in process-based writing pedagogy. Anonymity was important to ensure freedom of expression in a non-threatening environment and to guarantee that reflections would not impact on end-of-course grades. To facilitate clarity of expression, participants were free to reflect in Persian (their native language).

Data Analysis

The written reflections varied from a few lines to two pages in length and covered a wide range of issues. Data was first organised by visiting, re-visiting, and reducing it into meaningful segments while still in the original Persian. Special care was taken to retain key terms, phrases or expressions from the participants' own language to avoid the loss of significant information. Meaningful portions of the data were translated into English. This was then classified and distinctive codes generated to represent the content. The translations were examined recursively and codes/sub-codes were developed manually and inductively. This was done paper by paper. New codes emerged as the process continued. Then all codes/sub-codes were clustered into three broad categories: pedagogical, the instructor's personal behaviour, and miscellaneous (Appendix 4). Finally, representative extracts from the participants were used to support, illustrate, and clarify the codes/sub-codes.

Findings

Three major themes emerged from the students' reflective writing: pedagogical, instructor's personal behaviours, and miscellaneous.

Pedagogical

Pedagogical remarks included attitudes to the course and the pedagogy used. The former focused on the quality of the course, the materials used, the class atmosphere, and the comprehensiveness of the instruction. Remarks about the latter focused on changes in pedagogy, peer collaboration and use of indirect feedback.

Attitudes to the course

Students' attitudes towards the course were generally positive. They considered it novel, dynamic, enjoyable, exciting, integrated, and an unforgettable experience. One participant wrote:

> It was one of the most useful courses I have ever attended. Even though it was demanding, its distinctive features were attractive and motivated the students to work hard.

Participants also reflected on the change of their attitudes as the course went along, for example:

> At the beginning of the course I was sceptical about the success of the new approach. However, I gradually realized that it was very helpful in improving my writing skill.

The friendly and stress-free class atmosphere was also highlighted as it fostered participants' self-confidence and eliminated their apprehension. For example:

> I was always scared of writing and I didn't believe I could learn to write one day. But, now I feel my writing skill has improved a lot and I enjoy writing.

> and

> Establishing a relaxed and collaborative atmosphere in class facilitated my learning.

Participants also believed that the instruction was informative, and even though they needed more time and practice to become skilled writers, they felt progress in their writing and revision skills, knowledge of essay structure, grammar, and vocabulary. For example:

> Complex concepts were expressed in simple way and we internalized them in class. Hence, there was no need to spend extra time learning them at home.

The pedagogical approach
Some participants commented on the change in approach. For example:

> The methodology was novel. The theoretical concepts were explained thoroughly and right after that we had to apply them into practice. So, all of us got ready for writing and learned how and what to write.

Most respondents found the model essays and supporting materials very helpful. For example:

> The model essays which were analysed and discussed were great help in improving our writing skills.

> and

> One advantage of supplementary materials was that they facilitated our understanding of theoretical concepts.

A number of the participants acknowledged their weak writing skill foundation as well as lack of grammar and content knowledge, and suggested providing mini grammar tasks on generic grammatical mistakes, and further explanation of essay structure. For example, one of the participants wrote:

> Allocating some of the class time to discussing and elaborating common grammatical problems of the learners could be very beneficial.

Some participants complained about the intensity of the course, heavy workload, crowded classes, and inappropriate classroom settings. For example:

> The classroom was small for such big group of students and its setting was not suitable for peer collaboration. I think busy class and inappropriate space negatively influenced the outcome.

Some participants favoured the application of process writing, describing it as a modern, novel approach which encouraged collaboration. They also found multiple drafting useful as it helped them identify the weaknesses and strengths of their drafts, highlighted the areas which needed further practice, and consequently enhanced their writing skill. For example, participants reflected:

> In our previous writing course [paragraph writing], we didn't pay enough attention to the feedback provided by our instructors as we were not required to re-submit them.

and

> Composing several drafts helped me understand my mistakes so I tried to fix them in my subsequent attempt.

However, a number of participants found multiple drafting boring and unnecessary as it reduced the quantity of the new essays they could develop during the course. Instead, they suggested that more genres should have been discussed and developed during the course. For instance, it was noted:

> There was no need to spend eight weeks drafting and redrafting just two essay types. I think one session for each was enough.

and

> I found three times drafting boring. Unfortunately, we practiced only two types of essays during the term and didn't have a chance to get familiar with more varied genres.

As pointed out earlier, product and process approaches to writing differ in their focus on either form or content. Interestingly, this distinction was not mentioned by any of the participants in the current study.

Peer collaboration
The participants found peer collaboration advantageous for several reasons. Specifically, it improved their self-revision, self-monitoring, and critical reading skills; helped them practice critiquing and being criticized; and inspired and motivated them to be more active and compose better quality papers. Three examples of how learners expressed these views are:

> Peer collaboration made us accountable for our writing and we were more careful to write better quality essays.

> [the activities] improved our sense of collaboration and we learned to be more tolerant of the criticisms.

> Reviewing my peer's paper raised my self-awareness and I assessed my own essay not to make similar errors.

However, many of the participants had reservations about the choice of their partners and suggested that the instructor should arrange the pairs as in some cases partners were unhelpful, inattentive, defensive, and unable to detect errors or fix them. For instance, one participant complained about the capability of his/her[1] partner and reflected:

> Unfortunately, my partner was not at my level. I was a helpful partner for him/her, but s/he couldn't help me and wasn't able to give any suggestions to improve my writing. If we had a similar level of proficiency, s/he might be able to help me.

Another participant confessed:

> I didn't pay enough attention to my peer's feedback and believed that s/he was not qualified enough to comment on my essay as s/he herself had many mistakes in his/her own papers. I think only the teacher's comments are valid.

Consequently, a few participants expected more intervention and support during the evaluation process. While not making any judgements about the superiority of one collaborative task over the other, some participants felt vulnerable and needed more help from their instructor. For example:

> Sometimes we were unable to correct our mistakes. Hence, we approached you for help but you avoided providing any support and forced us to fix the problems ourselves. It was so frustrating and took a lot of our time.

In addition, some participants believed that collaborative learning was incompatible with the Iranian context in which students work individually. For example:

> I think this technique is more practical in Western countries as it is more compatible with their cultural norms and educational systems. In exam-dominated educational systems like ours, students do not take it seriously and are more concerned about passing their final exams.

and

> Incorporating such techniques in contexts like ours is not that much easy and it requires prior cultural and educational transformations.

Indirect feedback

Using indirect coded feedback to address linguistic mistakes was welcomed as it increased the level of engagement in revision and required students to think about the correct forms. Participants typically commented:

> Using codes was useful as it made us think about our mistakes.

or

> Showing errors by using codes was an interesting idea. It increased our concentration and engaged us with the activities.

However, some expressed negative views about using indirect feedback and believed that the codes did not cover all types of errors, were sometimes confusing, and needed more explanation. For example:

> The codes were not user friendly and in some cases I didn't know which one of them could be used to indicate a specific type of error.

and

> Some of the codes covered several mistakes and I couldn't get what they referred to. I think it would have been more useful, had we received more training about their usage.

The instructor

Another focus of participants' reflections was on the instructor's personal characteristics and performance in class. The majority of participants expressed positive views. He was commonly referred to as an energetic, dedicated, committed, experienced, and knowledgeable instructor who was organized, disciplined, and punctual. Participants also said he was creative, inspiring, patient, and understanding; believed in his students' capabilities and encouraged them to use their potential; and was able to establish and maintain friendly relationships with his students. A few even stressed that the instructor was not only an excellent teaching model, but also a social model. On the other hand, some participants suggested that he was manipulative, inflexible, and intolerant on some occasions, and became demotivated towards the end of the course. Further, a few believed the instructor was incapable of managing overcrowded classes and needed to be stricter in such conditions.

Unrelated matters

Some reflections were labelled as miscellaneous and were not directly relevant to the course or the instructor. For example, a great majority of participants wished the instructor the best of luck in his personal and academic life, and stressed that they would miss him, apologized for not being "good" students, and felt lucky to have attended the course, stressing that they learned a lot and would implement the experience they had gained in their future teaching career. Some complained about the inefficiency of other courses run at the department, especially "paragraph writing", and wished those courses had also been as interactive and dynamic as this module and encouraged the instructor to continue offering high quality teaching, as well as collaborative learning pedagogy in the future. Finally, a few participants expressed the view that they did not like the emphasis put on attendance, punctuality, and the marks allocated to class activities.

Discussion and Conclusion

Participants were overwhelmingly positive in their evaluation of multiple-draft and peer collaboration pedagogy, even though they expressed some reservations. They favoured peer review and collaborative revision tasks as novel, motivating, and inspiring techniques with several advantages. However, a few participants alleged that these activities were incompatible with the context, felt unready for the tasks, and preferred individual to joint work. In addition, some believed that pair structure, learners' linguistic abilities, and class size negatively affected the efficacy of the techniques. Producing multiple drafts was considered appealing as this helped students diagnose their strengths and weaknesses, which eventually improved their writing. However, it was commented that developing several drafts reduced the number of essays and thus the range of genres experienced. Likewise, while using codes to address linguistic mistakes was favoured, some participants reported some practical problems.

Participants' accounts of the experience suggest that perhaps the changes made in this course were so radical that some of them could not cope. Being exposed to collaborative tasks, process writing, and an indirect feedback strategy all at the same

time has probably been beyond students' cognitive capacity and they were overwhelmed even though they had very positive opinions about the course in general. It should be noted that these students came from a background of teacher-centred, product-based writing pedagogy and were used to writing single draft texts individually which received direct feedback with no requirement for revisions. Hence, students were overly dependent on their teachers and were not ready to develop several drafts using their peers'/teacher's indirect feedback on the one hand, and to actively engage in collaborative tasks on the other, despite their good intentions. Several researchers (Berg, 1999; Hu, 2005; Kamimura, 2006; Keh, 1990; McGroarty & Zhu, 1997; Min, 2005, 2006; Rothschild & Klingenberg, 1990; Stanley, 1992) have stressed that careful planning and proper training as well as establishing a supportive atmosphere in L2 composition classes can not only change L2 learners' perceptions and attitudes towards peer collaboration, but also make the experience more pleasant and effective. However, as collaboration and evaluation are not skills with which these students have had extensive experience, a considerable investment of time and effort is required. If students are expected to skilfully participate in collaborative tasks and successfully perform evaluation and revision of their texts, they need adequate time and practice to internalize this demanding task. A well-designed teaching plan occurs at two levels; theoretical and procedural. Theoretical preparation is characterized by explaining the purpose of incorporating the activities in class as well as illustrating their significance in academic and occupational communities. Teachers should also highlight the advantages of peer collaboration which include developing student writers' audience awareness, encouraging their autonomy and self-confidence, and reinforcing their critical reading and thinking skills. Procedural preparation involves informing students about the procedures they will experience and how they should engage in them. Teachers should engage students in some preparatory activities which form a collaborative and supportive atmosphere among them. These activities include modelling the tasks using sample student papers and peer response sheets, and organizing the group/pair structure considering some criteria such as learners' characteristics, writing proficiencies, and needs. Teachers should also monitor the process and observe if the pairs/groups are on-task, collaborating, and following the procedures. In the context of this study the instructor tried to prepare the participants to actively participate in peer collaboration activities. However, the fact that some of the students doubted the efficacy of the tasks implies that the theoretical and procedural preparations were insufficient and possibly not well implemented and this may have been because of the time constraint and class size. In theory the instructor was able to think globally (i.e., viewing writing as a process rather than product and adopting learner-centred pedagogy) but failed to take adequate local action (i.e., adequate student preparation for paradigm shift).

Finally, the fact that the participants not only commented on the adopted pedagogy but also paid attention to every detail of the course including their teachers' characteristics and behaviours, indicates that students' emotions and feelings should not be overlooked. If their attitudes are valued, they may work harder and focus more on the activities they perform (Leki, 1991). Student comments and suggestions are useful and informative although there are occasions when they are unrealistic and impractical. In such cases, teachers should be prepared to arrange teacher-student conferences, discuss the issues, justify their pedagogy and decisions, and convince their students in a supportive atmosphere. The advantage of explaining and justifying their teaching and feedback philosophy is that students understand the rationale behind the adopted strategies and are mentally prepared to actively engage in the activities (Ferris, 2003; Goldstein, 2004; Lee, 2008). When needed, teachers should also modify their students'

expectations by clearly explaining the course objectives and what is achievable. Listening to the student voice implies that teachers respect their students' views and attempt to meet their needs, abilities, and expectations. This can certainly help to improve teacher-student relationships and to avoid frustration and disappointment. The characteristics and behaviours of the teachers make a difference. Their ability to establish friendly relationship with students, to provide a stress-free, supportive, and cooperative atmosphere, and to show respect and belief in their students' capabilities inspires and motivates them to work harder.

The goal of the research was to make the writing course more pleasant and productive by using a new approach. It is clear that students were positive about the peer collaboration pedagogy in spite of some reservations they expressed. They valued peer review and collaborative revision especially in addressing the affective aspect of learning (i.e. motivation) and linguistic improvement (e.g. improving writing). This said, the sociocultural context needs to be taken into consideration, especially the culture of learning. This study suggests that given sufficient learner training, collaborative writing could become a useful pedagogy in tertiary L2 writing classrooms in Iran.

About the authors

Alireza Memari Hanjani is a lecturer in the Department of English at Eslamshahr Islamic Azad University, Iran. His research interests include second language learning, cooperative learning, writing pedagogy, feedback and error correction in writing, collaborative writing and revision, and peer evaluation.

Li Li is a senior lecturer and Director of the MEd in TESOL in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Exeter. She has been involved in language teaching and research for nearly 20 years and has mainly worked in China and the UK. Her research interests include teacher cognition, classroom discourse, thinking skills and the use of new technologies.

Notes

1. In Persian (the language participants used for their reflective writing) there is a single subject pronoun to refer to the third person singular. When it is used in the data it is impossible to know whether it refers to a male or female. Therefore, to retain the original meaning, this pronoun is translated throughout the data as s/he, his/her or him/her.

References

Allami, H. (2006). A cognitive approach to teaching in EFL writing classes. *Iranian Journal of Language Studies (IJLS), 1*(1), 48.

Amores, M. J. (1997). A new perspective on peer-editing. *Foreign Language Annals, 30*(4), 513-522.

Badger, R., & White, G. (2000). A process genre approach to teaching writing. *ELT Journal, 54*(2), 153-160.

Baroudy, I. (2008). The implementation of process writing: Writing-teacher roles. *Iranian Journal of Language Studies, 2*(1), 1-18.

Berg, E. C. (1999). The effects of trained peer response on ESL students' revision types and writing quality. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 8*(3), 215-241.

Birjandi, P., & Malmir, A. (2009). The effect of task-based approach on the Iranian advanced EFL learners' narrative vs. expository writing. *Iranian Journal of Applied Language Studies, 1*(2), 1-26.

Brady, D. W., Corbie-Smith, G., & Branch, W. T. (2002). "What's important to you?": The use of narratives to promote self-reflection and to understand the experiences of medical residents. *Annals of internal medicine, 137*(3), 220-223.

Caulk, N. (1994). Comparing teacher and student responses to written work. *TESOL Quarterly, 28*(1), 181-188.

Ferris, D. R. (2003). *Response to student writing: Implications for second language students*. Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Ghorbani, M. (2009). ELT in Iranian high schools in Iran, Malaysia and Japan: Reflections on how tests influence use of prescribed textbooks. *Reflections on English Language Teaching, 8*(2), 131-139.

Goldstein, L. M. (2004). Questions and answers about teacher written commentary and student revision: Teachers and students working together. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 13*(1), 63-80.

Hu, G. (2005). Using peer review with Chinese ESL student writers. *Language Teaching Research, 9*(3), 321-342.

Hyland, K. (2002). Genre: language, context, and literacy. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 22*, 113-135.

Hyland, K. (2003). Genre-based pedagogies: A social response to process. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 12*(1), 17-29.

Hyland, K., & Hyland, F. (2006). Feedback on second language students' writing. *Language Teaching, 39*(02), 83-101.

Johns, A. M. (1995). Genre and pedagogical purposes. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 4*(2), 181-190.

Johns, A. M., Bawarshi, A., Coe, R. M., Hyland, K., Paltridge, B., Reiff, M. J., & Tardy, C. (2006). Crossing the boundaries of genre studies: Commentaries by experts. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 15*(3), 234-249.

Kamimura, T. (2006). Effects of peer feedback on EFL student writers at different levels of English proficiency: A Japanese context. *TESL Canada Journal, 23*(2), 12-39.

Kaufman, J. H., & Schunn, C. D. (2011). Students' perceptions about peer assessment for writing: their origin and impact on revision work. *Instructional Science, 39*(3), 387-406.

Keh, C. L. (1990). Feedback in the writing process: A model and methods for implementation. *ELT Journal, 44*(4), 294-304.

Lee, I. (2008). Understanding teachers' written feedback practices in Hong Kong secondary classrooms. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 17*(2), 69-85.

Leki, I. (1991). The preferences of ESL students for error correction in college-level writing classes. *Foreign Language Annals, 24*(3), 203-218.

Liu, J., & Sadler, R. W. (2003). The effect and affect of peer review in electronic versus traditional modes on L2 writing. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 2*(3), 193-227.

Lockhart, C., & Ng, P. (1995). Analyzing talk in ESL peer response groups: Stances, functions, and content. *Language Learning, 45*(4), 605-651.

Lundstrom, K., & Baker, W. (2009). To give is better than to receive: The benefits of peer review to the reviewer's own writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 18*(1), 30-43.

Mangelsdorf, K., & Schlumberger, A. (1992). ESL student response stances in a peer-review task. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 1*(3), 235-254.

McGroarty, M. E., & Zhu, W. (1997). Triangulation in classroom research: A study of peer revision. *Language Learning, 47*(1), 1-43.

Memari Hanjani, A., & Li, L. (2014). Exploring L2 writers' collaborative revision interactions and their writing performance. *System, 44*, 101-114.

Mendonca, C. O., & Johnson, K. E. (1994). Peer review negotiations: Revision activities in ESL writing instruction. *TESOL Quarterly, 28*(4), 745-769.

Min, H.-T. (2005). Training students to become successful peer reviewers. *System, 33*(2), 293-308.

Min, H.-T. (2006). The effects of trained peer review on EFL students' revision types and writing quality. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 15*(2), 118-141.

Morra, A. M., & Romano, M. E. (2008). University students' reactions to guided peer feedback of EAP compositions. *Journal of College Literacy and Learning, 35*, 19-30.

Nelson, G. L., & Carson, J. G. (1998). ESL students' perceptions of effectiveness in peer response groups. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 7*(2), 113-131.

Paulus, T. M. (1999). The effect of peer and teacher feedback on student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 8*(3), 265-289.

Raimes, A. (1985). What unskilled ESL students do as they write: A classroom study of composing. *TESOL Quarterly, 19*(2), 229-258.

Raimes, A. (1991). Out of the woods: Emerging traditions in the teaching of writing. *TESOL Quarterly, 25*(3), 407-430.

Reid, J. (1984). The radical outliner and the radical brainstormer: A perspective on composing processes. *TESOL Quarterly, 18*(3), 529-534.

Reid, J. (1994). Responding to ESL students' texts: The myths of appropriation. *TESOL Quarterly, 28*(2), 273-292.

Roskams, T. (1999). Chinese EFL students' attitudes to peer feedback and peer assessment in an extended pairwork setting. *RELC Journal, 30*(1), 79-123.

Rothschild, D., & Klingenberg, F. (1990). Self and peer evaluation of writing in the interactive ESL classroom: An exploratory study. *TESL Canada Journal, 8*(1), 52-65.

Saito, H., & Fujita, T. (2004). Characteristics and user acceptance of peer rating in EFL writing classrooms. *Language Teaching Research, 8*(1), 31-54.

Scanlan, J. M., Care, W. D., & Udod, S. (2002). Unravelling the unknowns of reflection in classroom teaching. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 38*(2), 136-143.

Sengupta, S. (2000). An investigation into the effects of revision strategy instruction on L2 secondary school learners. *System, 28*(1), 97-113.

Shehadeh, A. (2011). Effects and student perceptions of collaborative writing in L2. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 20*(4), 286-305.

Stanley, J. (1992). Coaching student writers to be effective peer evaluators. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 1*(3), 217-233.

Storch, N. (2005). Collaborative writing: Product, process, and students' reflections. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 14*(3), 153-173.

Susser, B. (1994). Process approaches in ESL/EFL writing instruction. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 3*(1), 31-47.

Tsui, A., & Ng, M. (2000). Do secondary L2 writers benefit from peer comments? *Journal of Second Language Writing, 9*(2), 147-170.

Usher, K., Francis, D., Owens, J., & Tollefson, J. (1998). Reflective writing: A strategy to foster critical inquiry in undergraduate nursing students. *The Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing, 17*(1), 7-12.

van Gennip, N. A., Segers, M. S., & Tillema, H. H. (2010). Peer assessment as a collaborative learning activity: The role of interpersonal variables and conceptions. *Learning and Instruction, 20*(4), 280-290.

Villamil, O. S., & De Guerrero, M. (1996). Peer revision in the L2 classroom: Social-cognitive activities, mediating strategies, and aspects of social behavior. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 5*(1), 51-75.

Watson, J. S., & Wilcox, S. (2000). Reading for understanding: Methods of reflecting on practice. *Reflective Practice, 1*(1), 57-67.

Yong, M. F. (2010). Collaborative writing features. *RELC Journal, 41*(1), 18-30.

Zamel, V. (1976). Teaching composition in the ESL classroom: What we can learn from research in the teaching of English. *TESOL Quarterly, 10*(1), 67-76.

Zamel, V. (1982). Writing: The process of discovering meaning. *TESOL Quarterly, 16*(2), 195-209.

Zamel, V. (1983). The composing processes of advanced ESL students: Six case studies. *TESOL Quarterly, 17*(2), 165-188.

Zamel, V. (1985). Responding to student writing. *TESOL Quarterly, 19*(1), 79-101.

Zamel, V. (1987). Recent research on writing pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly, 21*(4), 697-715.

Zhang, S. (1995). Reexamining the affective advantage of peer feedback in the ESL writing class. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 4*(3), 209-222.

Appendix 1: Demographic Questionnaire

These questions are for classification purposes only. All your answers will be treated confidentially.

1. Name/Surname:

2. What is your gender?

        Male ☐   Female ☐

3. How old are you?

4. How long have you been studying English (high school, university, language institutes)?

5. How do you describe your skills in English language writing?

Excellent ☐   Good ☐   Fair ☐   Poor ☐

6. Have you ever had any opportunities to attend any English writing courses (paragraph or essay writing) than the current course?

        Yes ☐   No ☐

If your answer to question 6 is YES, then answer questions 7and 8.

7. Have you ever had previous experience of multiple-drafts writing activities; i.e., rewriting your paper again using the feedback/comments you received from your teacher?

        Yes ☐   No ☐

your peer?

        Yes ☐   No ☐

8. Have you ever had previous experiences of peer review activities?

        Yes ☐   No ☐

collaborative revision activities?

        Yes ☐   No ☐

9. What are your goals for attending this essay writing course?

10. What are your future career goals?

Appendix 2: Essay Prompts

Process Essay (writing cycle 1):

How to get a good mark in Essay Writing Module final exam?

Argumentative Essay (writing cycle 2):

By taking a position either for or against give your opinion whether married women should work or not. Be sure to back up your opinions with specific examples.

Appendix 3: Process Essay Peer Response Sheet

Writing cycle: ❶②

Draft written by: Response provided by:

Date: Title of essay:

The purpose of peer reviewing is to provide your partner with honest but helpful reactions and responses as the reader of the essay. Read your peer's essay carefully and think about the questions. After you have answered these questions, discuss them with him/her.

A. Content and Organization:

1. Read the whole essay:
   a) Is the essay well organized through introduction, body, and conclusion?
   b) Has the writer devoted one paragraph per main step and its sub-steps?
   c) Has the paper used a clear method of organization (chronology/ emphatic)?
   d) Can you think of any comments/suggestions which can help your partner improve the structure, paragraphing, and organization of his/her essay? Write it/them down and discuss it/them with him/her.

2. Read the introduction:
   a) Does the introduction contain a thesis statement?
   b) Does it clearly tell what the writer is going to describe?
   c) Does the writer try to state the importance of process or he/she intends to express his/her opinion of it?
   d) Can you think of any comments/suggestions which can help your partner improve the introduction and thesis statement of his/her essay? Write it/them down and discuss it/them with him/her.

3. Read the body paragraphs:
   a) Is all the essential and necessary information included so that any one reading the paper can follow the same process?
   b) Has the author provided a clear, step-by-step, and logical description of the process?
   c) Are the steps presented in a logical and correct order?
   d) Are transition words (signals) used properly and do they help the paper move smoothly from one step to another? Can you follow the writer's train of thought with ease?
   e) Can you think of any comments/suggestions which can help your partner improve the body of his/her essay? Write it/them down and discuss it/them with him/her.

4. Now read the conclusion:
   a) Does the conclusion provide a summary of the major steps?
   b) Does it make clear the results or the benefits of the process?
   c) Is the writer ultimately successful in accomplishing his/her task?
   d) Can you think of any comments/suggestions which can help your partner improve the conclusion of his/her essay? Write it/them down and discuss it/them with him/her.

5. What did you learn from reading this essay, either in language use or content? Is there anything nice you want to say about this essay? Discuss it with your partner.

B. Grammar, Vocabulary, and Mechanics:

Use the following correction codes to point out the errors. Mark the codes in your peer's draft and discuss them later.

V   Error in verb tense/verb form (active/passive voice, present/past participle)

         Example: Suzan got a cold. She couldn't went to London last week.   (V) (go)

Art   Article/other determiner missing or unnecessary or incorrectly used

Example: I read book about New York. The author, however, was from California. (Art) (a book)

PP   Preposition missing or incorrectly used

Example: Please come to my office at Thursday.   (PP)   (on Thursday)

PR   Pronoun

Example: Bill was so drunk last night. She couldn't even recognize his father.   (PR)   (He)

NE   Noun ending (plural or possessive) missing or unnecessary

Example: Two piece of chalk   (NE)   (pieces)

WW   Wrong word/ wrong word form

Example: He is a linguistics.   (WW)   (linguist)

Example: The show is alive.   (WW)   (live)

SV   Subject and verb do not agree

Example: I took three tests yesterday. The tests was so difficult.   (SV)   (were)

SS   Sentence structure: incorrect structures, wrong word order, sentence fragments, run-ons

Example: Because I could not sleep. I turned on my light and read.   (SS)(sentence fragment)

Example: It is nearly half past five we cannot reach town before dark.   (SS)   (run-on)

IT   Unnecessary, incorrect, or missing transition

Example: I wanted to cook a pizza; therefore, I had forgotten to by the ingredients.(IT) However)

PU   Punctuation, capitalization, or spelling errors

Example: sarah and karla are from south Africa   (PU)   (Sarah, Karla, South Africa)

Example: Thise books belong to Barbara.   (PU)   (These)

^   Missing word

Example: Printed on the back of the carton are directions that(^) how the appliance is to be assembled.   (^) (explain)

!   Unnecessary word

Example: Ingestion, which occurs in the mouth, helps to increase the surface are of the food particles and prepares them for digestion.   (!)   (are)

Appendix 4: Learners' Written Reflections Classification

Pedagogical

About The Course

Compliment
1. Unique course/experience
2. Stress-free atmosphere
3. Useful course material
4. Informative writing generics instruction
5. Enhanced writing/revision skill

Complaint
1. Intensive course
2. Crowded class

Confession
1. Weak writing skill foundation
2. Scared of writing

Comment
1. Mini lessons on grammatical points
2. More instruction on essay structure
3. Reading aloud the essays

About The Approach

Compliment
1. Process writing favoured as it helped:
   a) diagnosing mistakes
   b) practicing weak areas
   c) improving writing and revision
   d) skills
2. Peer collaboration welcomed as it encouraged:
   a) critical reading
   b) self-revision
   c) motivation
   d) constructive criticism
3. Indirect feedback supported:
   a) engaged the students
   b) provoked thinking

Complaint
1. peer collaboration:
   a) defensive partners
   b) unhelpful peers
2. Multiple drafting:
   a) unnecessary
   b) boring
3. Indirect feedback
   a) confusing
   b) not inclusive of all categories of error

Confession
1. Incompatibility of peer collaboration in the context
2. Inability of learners' to cope

Comment
1. Collaborative revision more efficient than peer review
2. More teacher intervention required

Instructor's Personal Behaviour

Pleasant
1. Hardworking
2. Committed
3. Experienced
4. Organised
5. Punctual
6. Creative
7. Inspiring
8. Patient

Unpleasant
1. Unapproachable
2. Strict
3. Manipulative
4. Intolerant

Miscellaneous Comments

1. Wish the instructor luck
2. Apologies for misconduct
3. Privileged attending the course
4. Apply the experience in their future teaching career
5. Unproductivity of other courses especially the writing modules
6. Recommend maintaining the same pedagogy/ quality
7. Displeased with emphasis on class attendance, punctuality