

'You're Not Alone': Peer Feedback Practices for Cross-Cultural Writing Classrooms and Centers

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Abstract : As writing instructors and writing center administrators at a large research university with a significant population of English language learners (ELLs), we are interested in how peer feedback pedagogy can be effectively translated for writing center purposes, as well as how various modes of peer feedback can enrich the learning experiences of L1 and L2 writers in these spaces. Although peer feedback is widely used in classrooms and centers, instructor, student, and researcher opinions vary in respect to its effectiveness. We argue that peer feedback - traditional and digital, synchronous and asynchronous - is an indispensable element for both classrooms and centers and emphasize that it should occur with both L1 and L2 students to further develop an array of reading and writing skills. We also believe that further understanding of the best practices of peer feedback in such cross-cultural spaces, like the classroom and center, can optimize the benefits of peer feedback. After a critical review of the literature, we implemented an embedded tutoring program in our university's writing center in collaboration with its First-Year Composition (FYC) program and Language Institute. The embedded tutoring program matches a graduate writing consultant with L1 and L2 writers enrolled in controlled-matriculation composition courses where ELLs make up at least 50% of each class. Furthermore, this program is informed by what we argue to be some best practices of peer feedback for both classroom and center purposes, including expectation-based training through rubrics, modeling effective feedback, hybridizing traditional and digital modes of feedback, recognizing the significance the body in composition (what we call writer embodiment), and maximizing digital technologies to exploit extended cognition. After conducting surveys and follow-up interviews with students, instructors, and writing consultants in the embedded tutoring program, we found that not only did students see an increased value in peer feedback, but also instructors saw an improvement in both writing style and critical thinking skills. Our L2 participants noted improvements in language acquisition while our L1 students recognized a broadening of their worldviews. We believe that both L1 and L2 students developed self-efficacy and agency in their identities as writers because they gained confidence in their abilities to offer feedback, as well as in the legitimacy of feedback they received from peers. We also argue that these best practices situate novice writers as experts, as writers become a valued and integral part of the revision process with their own and their peers' papers. Finally, the use of iPads in embedded tutoring recovered the importance of the body and its senses in writing; the highly sensory feedback from these multi-modal sessions that offer audio and visual input underscores the significant role both the body and mind play in compositional practices. After beginning with a brief review of the literature that sparked this research, this paper will discuss the embedded tutoring program in detail, report on the results of the pilot program, and will conclude with a discussion of the pedagogical implications that arise from this research for both classroom and center.

Keywords : English language learners, peer feedback, writing center, writing classroom

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