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I'll re-write yours if you re-write mine: Pure peer revision using sequential collaborative writing

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**I'll re-write yours if you re-write mine:
Pure peer revision using sequential collaborative writing**

*Let another person to review my paper and revise my paper make the revision process
have more fun.*

...to revise the work of another person is much more enjoyable.

*It's very interesting to read something by a normal student of my age, not a famous
writer. I think it is really helpful to exchange our works and revise it. Try to imagine how
boring it will be to read our own work again and again.*

Introduction

Imagine if you could make revision fun...or at least less boring. The quotes above—from students in my Advanced ESL Composition class at OSU—seem to indicate that it's possible. Hard to believe, I know, but true.

Nearly everyone who teaches writing uses peer revision as a means to provide feedback and guidance during the writing process. Ever since Kenneth Bruffee's seminal article, *Collaborative Learning: Some Practical Models* (1973), about the value of collaboration in the classroom, teachers have realized students can make more significant and valuable gains through working together. Although now peer revision may take the form of computer-mediated interaction, typically, *peer revision* means students working in small groups, talking with each other and, ideally, giving each other meaningful feedback to improve their papers (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009).

However, not everyone has agreed on the value of peer review in L2 classrooms [Nelson & Murphy, 1992, as cited in Lundstrom]. There could be many reasons to question non-native writers advising each other: first, would they be able to spot weaknesses in each other's writing?; second, would they be able to articulate the weaknesses to their classmates?; and, finally, would the classmate receiving the feedback trust the classmate giving it enough to actually revise a subsequent draft accordingly?

In order to confront these challenges, I tried a new means of peer revision in my advanced-ESL composition class: requiring partnered students to exchange first drafts, talk through the content of them, and then write the final draft of each other's paper.

Theoretical background

There are a few theoretical reasons why requiring students to actually revise and re-write another student's paper is better than simply asking them to give each other feedback and then rewrite their own papers. According to Trena Paulus (1999), "ESL writers have been found to revise mainly on the surface-level" (p. 266). From my experience with it, students responding to other students often look for mistakes—misspelled words, incorrect article usage, subject/verb disagreement, etc. This seems to be editing and not revising—fixing, not improving. So my assignment forces one student to start with a piece of writing from a classmate, determine what the global issues are, and then figure out how to make the paper better.

Also, ESL writers may ignore feedback from other students, because they think a peer lacks qualifications to help them (Rollinson, 2005). In this case, time spent on peer revision in class is a waste of time. And not only is it a waste of time, it becomes drudgery, and students may begin to resent being there.

In practice

I used this approach to revision in an advanced ESL composition class at Ohio State. There were three assignments in the course: 1) revising a reflection journal into a final paper; 2) writing a short (500-word) research paper; and 3) writing a long (2000-word) research paper. I used my version of peer revision whereby students revise a first draft written by a partner in assignments 1 & 2, though the process worked a little differently in each.

A. Revising a partner's reflection journal

For the first assignment, the students drew upon a set of three reflection journals they had already written about the book *The Endurance: Shackelton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition*. They handed over their three reflections to their partner, who then chose one of them to read and rewrite. Because we were reading this book as a class, both writers were generally familiar with the text but were obviously unfamiliar with how the original writer was trying to personally relate to it.

Students received the journals from their original writer on a Friday and had the weekend to choose one and attempt to revise it. In class on Monday, they shared their revision with the original writer. Up to this point, the revision work was mainly speculative. But during class, talking animatedly about their initial revision [See videos of the revision on the OTESOL Journal website], each student had the chance to get input from the original writer to gauge how well they stuck to their message. So actually, the original author was giving the new writer feedback on what had begun as their own work.

After this 45-minute session, each student went home and made a final revision and came to class on Wednesday with the original reflection piece, the first revision, and the final draft. They sat with their partners, reviewed each other's work, and then submitted the papers. After submitting them, I asked each student to free-write for 10 minutes about this new approach to revision.

B. Short resource paper

After reviewing the questionnaires, and taking into consideration how active and lively the classroom revision sessions were the previous week, I decided to try this again. I assigned each pair of students to write two research papers using the book *The Endurance*, information from our class wiki, and two outside sources.

The first part of this process was for each pair of students to mutually agree on two topics. Since each student had to write part of both papers, it was important they found both topics interesting. Next, the students individually prepared their first draft. They came to class on a Monday with this first draft and needed to explain it fully to their partner, who was soon to receive it.

At this juncture of the process, students again interacted animatedly, trying to figure out exactly what their partner's working thesis was, what support they had for it (I suggested that each student locate one outside source for each paper), and tried to work collaboratively to identify areas that needed improvement.

When class was over, each student left with a first draft written by his/her partner, and had to spend the next few days finding another source, clarifying what was originally said, while strengthening it at the same time.

Conclusion

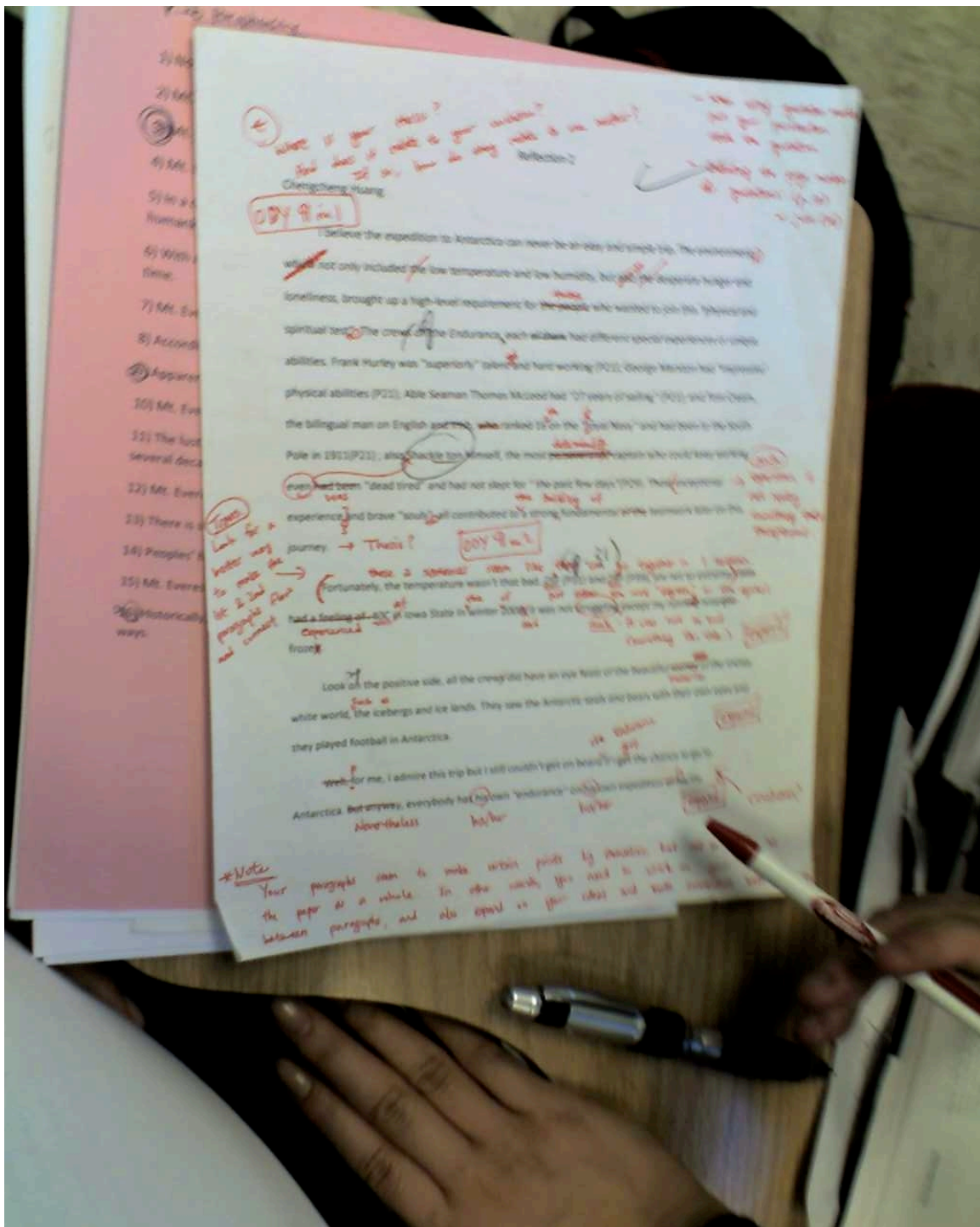
Rewriting another person's work is a novel way to approach the writing process. Of my two classes of students (n=38), only 11 of them claimed to be good at revision before the term started. As a result of asking one student to actually write a revised final draft of a classmate's paper, 35 indicated they understood the importance of revision more. And ultimately, 36 of them reported they were better at revising their own final research paper as a result of revising other people's papers earlier in the quarter.

There are many reasons students don't enjoy revision or appreciate the value of it, and one of them is over-familiarity. Writers—especially ESL writers—spend hours, if not days, struggling over a piece of writing...and then their teacher asks them to rewrite and rewrite and rewrite. It can become tedious. Notwithstanding preliminary findings from my own two classes, which suggest this manner of teaching revision does a resounding job of teaching its importance in the writing process, this exercise, whereby students rewrite each other's papers, is a breath of fresh air...something new and exciting that students may actually enjoy.

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Student revision notes on an original reflection paper
[n.b. the checkmark at the top of the page and other marks in black pen were the sparse comments I made to indicate read it when it was originally submitted as a reading reflection journal]

Some more quotes from answers given to me on questionnaires I circulated:

I like writing with a partner because it helps me figure out what I am not good at and which part I did well. I found out that I need to add more examples and citation for my writing.

After I edited my partner's paper, I learnt his writing's weakness. This leads me to look back on my own paper.

A partner is more objective and can find more mistakes than myself. In the meantime, I also found some mistakes and some weak points in my partner's paper and this really help my writing in the future because these are the mistakes I often make.

I like writing with a partner very much. When I finished my own reflection, I can revise or edit it by myself. I always can't find my mistakes, even they were obvious. I think it's because I wrote it. When I had a partner she revised it for me and we discussed more about the reflection. I can know which part I did was good and which part need to be improved. We tried out best to present the meaning and find the most proper words. It helped a lot. We found which part needed citation or paraphrase to make it clear. I think we improve the reflection a lot.

I enjoy this kind of "revising with a partner." It is helpful for me because I found that we could improve the parts I thought good enough, and correct the mistakes hard to find by myself. I always believe that we can know something more than others as well as less than others. Namely, it is creative to share what we already know with my partner, and at the same time, we all get more. Even though we had different ideas at most of the time, maybe mixing with little argues. Still that is also a part of my reason why I like this type of writing. Sometimes, little arguing makes perfect. We can make agreement finally.