Theoretical Analysis, Classroom Practice, Opinion Essays

Moving Beyond Individual Peer Review Tasks:
A Collaborative Written Corrective Feedback Framework

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Abstract

English as an additional language (EAL) teachers include peer feedback activities during the writing process to foster autonomy amongst EAL writers and support target language development. Research has demonstrated the importance of providing peer feedback training to learners in order to improve the efficacy of peer revision (Rahimi, 2013). Peer feedback review activities, however, are often individual tasks despite the evidence that collaborative writing activities are essential for EAL learners (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012). This classroom practice article introduces a threefold pedagogical training designed for English for academic purposes (EAP) learners which combines individual and collaborative peer review activities. The proposed peer collaborative written corrective feedback framework (C-WCF) scaffolds novice academic writers through the peer review process while emphasizing collaborative learning.

Introduction

Within the field of second language writing, there is extant literature on pre-service and in-service teachers' beliefs and practices regarding written corrective feedback (WCF). Traditionally, commenting on students' work was a task assumed by teachers (Ghahari & Sedaghat, 2018; Hansen & Liu, 2005); however, in a number of English as an additional language (EAL) contexts, we note the inclusion of peer WCF practices (Chang, 2016; Yu & Lee, 2016). During peer WCF, EAL learners read and comment on a peer's written production. Research to date has compared the efficacy of teacher and peer WCF (M. K. Lee, 2015; Séror, 2011; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Zhang, 1995) and examined the benefits of peer WCF on target language development (Diab, 2010, 2011; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Engaging learners in peer WCF activities "[empowers] students to play an active role in classroom writing assessment" (I. Lee, 2016, p. 262); however, research shows that EAL learners struggle with this task, a finding that has prompted educators to develop and implement peer WCF training programs (Diab, 2010, 2011; Hu, 2005; Lam, 2010; M. K. Lee, 2015; Min, 2005, 2006, 2008; Rahimi, 2013; Zhao, 2018).

Peer WCF activities have primarily consisted of individual reading and commenting tasks. From a socio-constructivist framework, cognitive development is socially situated and occurs as a result of interaction between an expert and a novice (Lantolf, Thorne, & Poehner, 2015). With EAL students, teachers have traditionally been considered to be the expert; however, there is ample evidence that learners can also provide each other with a scaffold by engaging in

collaborative writing (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012). Despite the growing support for collaborative writing activities (Fernández Dobao, 2012; Neumann & McDonough, 2015; Slavkov, 2015; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012), we observe that peer feedback continues to be operationalized as an individual task where a learner, perhaps following a brief conversation with the author, reads and comments individually. However, research indicates that when learners engage in oral discussions to share written feedback with their peers, they are able to support each other through negotiating and resolving disagreements (Tian & Li, 2018). To foster greater interaction during the initial stages of the peer review process, we are proposing a collaborative written corrective feedback (C-WCF) framework that (1) provides learners with tools and strategies that scaffold the peer WCF process and (2) emphasizes collaborative reviewing and learning. In this paper, following a brief discussion of the merits of peer WCF, we propose a threefold plan to conduct C-WCF with EAL learners in the context of an academic writing class.

Peer Feedback: Effects on EAL Writing

Implementing peer feedback activities with EAL learners has become a regular practice in writing classrooms. Peer feedback can take place during any stage of the writing process (e.g., brainstorming, topic generation, outlining); however, it typically unfolds after the first draft has been written, namely, during the revision stage (Hansen & Liu, 2005).

Recent research indicates that engaging learners in peer feedback practices offers numerous benefits. In a first instance, we find that the authors who receive feedback improve the quality of their written text with fewer treatable errors left uncorrected (Diab, 2010, 2011). It also increases students' motivation (Ghahari & Sedaghat, 2018; Tsui & Ng, 2000) and instills a sense of audience (M. K. Lee, 2015; Rahimi, 2013; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Engaging in peer feedback practices also appears to impact the reviewer's own writing practices. Berggren (2015) and Lundstrom and Baker (2009), who examined whether giving feedback alone had an impact on the reviewer's subsequent production, observed that those who provided feedback, even though they did not receive any in return, showed gains in their written production.

Research has also examined learners' perceptions toward teacher and peer WCF. Early research suggested that learners overwhelmingly preferred teacher feedback to peer feedback (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Zhang, 1995) and did not trust the quality of peer WCF (Tsui & Ng, 2000). Although there is some evidence that learners are open to working with peer WCF, recent evidence continues to indicate that EAL writers find the feedback provided by peers to focus excessively on local errors, find it to be vague (M. K. Lee, 2015; Rahimi, 2013), and feedback providers continue to doubt the usefulness of their feedback (Tian & Li, 2018).

In order to mitigate these negative perceptions and maximize the benefits of WCF, practitioners have emphasized the necessity of implementing peer feedback training and of creating greater opportunities for collaboration at the various stages of the process.

Peer Feedback Training

Training EAL learners to provide feedback has been the subject of a number of empirical studies (Allen & Mills, 2016; Diab, 2010; Lam, 2010; M. K. Lee, 2015; Levine, Oded, Connor, &

Asons, 2002; Min, 2005, 2006, 2008; Rahimi, 2013; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang & Meng, 2013). Peer feedback training can take many forms, ranging from awareness-raising discussions to teacher-led explicit modelling. In fact, teachers can model the peer feedback process through the use of examples of appropriate (or inappropriate) peer comments (Hu, 2005), role-play, and demonstration videos (Allen & Mills, 2016; Levine et al., 2002). Other studies have explored the use of guiding questions to ensure more focused and comprehensible comments (Hu, 2005; Levine et al., 2002; Min, 2005, 2006, 2008) and the use of checklists (M. K. Lee, 2015; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Training can also take place during student-teacher conferences where teachers discuss the feedback the reviewer provided to a peer in order to improve the quality of the comments (Min, 2005, 2006, 2008; Rahimi, 2013). Other peer WCF training focused on how writers can make use of the feedback. For example, Rahimi (2013) provided students with explicit instruction on identifying global errors that hindered comprehension through projecting models. For each identified error, he explained to the learners how modifying the problematic structure could improve the essay and encouraged them to identify such errors in their peers' writing. Lam (2010) focused his explicit instruction on the difference between treatable and non-treatable errors (Ferris, 2002; Guénette & Jean, 2012). The former type is related to linguistic features that are rule-governed (e.g., plural markers) whereas the latter is related to idiosyncratic features (e.g., word choice), and a learner may struggle to correct these without explicit guidance. Reviewers were also asked to keep a log of the errors they noticed in the text as well as their type. Finally, Diab (2010) provided form-focused instruction on identifying selected error types. Reviewers were asked to identify errors, determine their nature and log them into a table along with the line number and the correction. In these cases, keeping the error logs helped learners utilize the explicit instruction they received.

The impact of training on EAL learners' writing practices is positive: training benefits the quality of students' written output since authors tend to incorporate a greater number of comments into their revised drafts (Min, 2006; Rahimi, 2013). In addition, the type of feedback tends to change, moving away from only treating local issues to also treating global issues (i.e., content, organization, and structure) (Min, 2005; Rahimi, 2013). Finally, trained learners tend to engage more with the process of peer feedback and develop a more positive attitude towards this practice (Hu, 2005; Min, 2005, 2008).

Training has focused on preparing learners to provide higher quality local and global feedback; however, it is of equal importance to consider how training impacts the quality of the collaborations, namely, pair dynamics. Min (2008) examined the impact of training with English language learners in Taiwan and reported that learners demonstrated a more collaborative stance after training, frequently engaged in negotiation of ideas with the writers, and produced more empathetic comments. Zhao (2018) conducted a study involving EAL learners in China aiming to describe patterns of interaction that unfold between peers following a training. Drawing on Storch's (2002) taxonomy of dyadic patterns of interaction, Zhao reported a majority of collaborative patterns such that both learners contributed information and provided mutual scaffolding to ensure successful task completion.

The peer WCF process typically begins with an individual component: the reviewer who will provide feedback receives a copy of a text and individually reviews it. Novice EAL reviewers, however, have experienced some discomfort with this practice because they do not

consider themselves to be experts. To overcome struggles associated with peer WCF, collaborative feedback activities have been proposed (M. K. Lee, 2015; Nguyen & Filipi, 2018). Nguyen and Filipi (2018) implemented a multiple-draft/multiple-party feedback process which incorporated a collaborative peer-feedback activity. It consists of four students working in small groups where each student is assigned to comment on a particular aspect of writing, namely, ideas, organization, vocabulary, or grammar. Findings show that students appreciate that the process was learner-centred. It increases motivation and benefits their writing skills. In turn, M. K. Lee (2015) introduced a collaborative reviewing component: intra-peer WCF. Intra-peer WCF consists of two students individually reviewing the same text produced by a third peer. Before sharing their feedback with the author, the two reviewers share their comments and negotiate the feedback to be shared with their peer. A single, compiled feedback form is then returned to the author. With this collaborative technique, reviewers were more motivated to provide feedback and writers were more trusting of the feedback, making learners more favourable to participate in a peer review activity (M. K. Lee, 2015).

While a number of pedagogical papers provide ideas for implementing training (Hansen & Liu, 2005; Ren & Hu, 2012; Rollinson, 2005), to the best of our knowledge, intra-peer WCF has not been integrated into their training suggestions. The present paper presents a threefold training model that aims at scaffolding learners through a variety of reflective tasks and collaborative C-WCF sessions with EAL learners.

Collaborative-Written Corrective Feedback Training Model

Context

This peer C-WCF training was designed for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) learners. EAP classes are a common pathway for learners who wish to integrate English-medium university programs. For example, in British Columbia, EAP programs may consist of up to four levels, at the end of which learners are able to "[function] effectively in formal, extended, unpredictable, and challenging situations typical of the teaching and learning environments at Canadian colleges, vocational institutes, and universities" (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, 2019, p. 17). In programs such as these, EAP students may attend around 15 to 20 hours of English language instruction per week aiming at developing their academic reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Within writing EAP classes, genre-based and process-based approaches to writing are typically the norm (Wette, 2014), and learners are often required to participate in peer WCF activities.

To maximize the benefits associated with peer WCF and collaborative writing, we now turn to the proposed peer C-WCF. The model is divided into three phases: before peer feedback provision, during peer review and after peer revision, presented in Figure 1. A detailed step-by-step guide is provided for teachers in the Appendices.
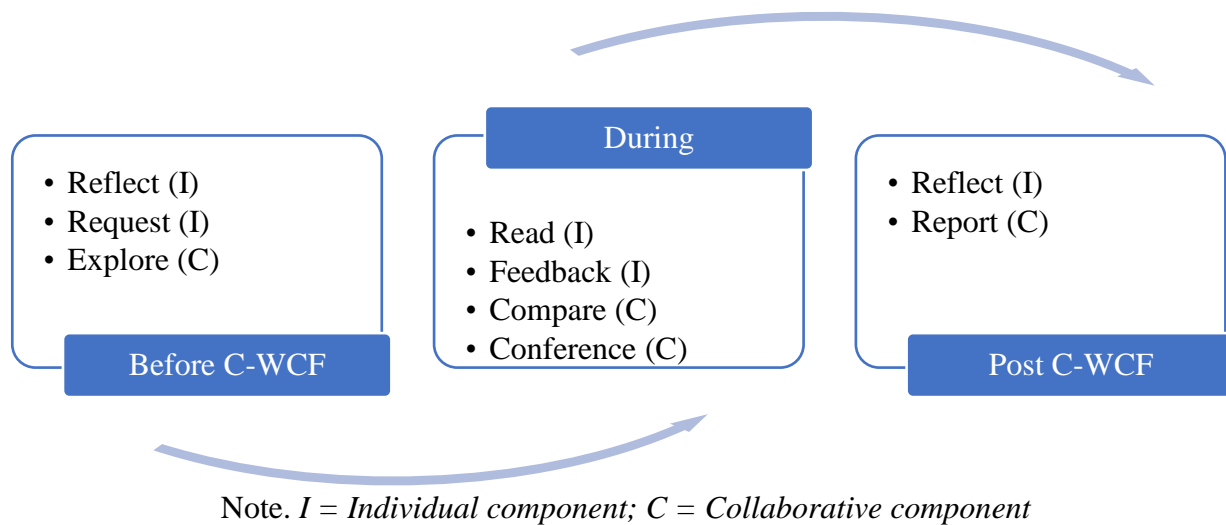
Note. *I = Individual component; C = Collaborative component*

Figure 1. Stages of the peer C-WCF training model

Phase 1: Before Peer C-WCF

Although it may be possible that some learners are familiar with peer WCF activities, it is imperative to explore the rationale and benefits of this practice. The initial stage of the C-WCF training comprises three short activities: (1) to reflect on the objectives of the written production, (2) to request help with the identified aspects of their texts they remain unsure about and (3) to explore discourse strategies to communicate effectively with their peers.

Reflecting on written production. Before sharing their work, learners are guided through an individual reflection task on their written texts. Specifically, during this initial step, learners identify which aspects of their writing they believe they performed well and which caused greater struggle. The latter will become the elements of their texts they would like to receive feedback on. To guide them in this process, they are given a form (Appendix 1) with reflection questions about the writing task and writing process. By completing this initial individual reflection, learners are encouraged to take a critical look at their own production. Immediately following this individual reflection, students share their responses. This can be completed either in dyads or as a whole group activity. These exchanges can raise students' awareness about common struggles, lower negative emotions towards writing-related activities, and help them discover strategies used by their peers to overcome similar challenges. Given that class time is limited, the individual reflection can be completed at home and teachers can elicit their students' responses as a short 10-minute warm-up.

Requesting feedback. Based on this initial individual reflection and group discussion, learners are invited to prepare their peer-request form (see Appendix 2). It is important for learners to identify these areas before engaging in the C-WCF activities to help elicit focused feedback. The guiding questions on the peer-request form can include, for example: What could my peer help me with? What is the main element I want him/her to look at? To avoid very general responses, we encourage teachers to model responses. Once learners have completed their forms, they share them with their reviewer.

Exploring functional language. The final (optional) step prior to engaging in the main peer C-WCF activity focuses on the identification of functional language needed to elicit and to respond to feedback in a way that fosters collaboration and respect. Teachers can model target structures by performing a scripted role-play or by modeling with a learner (see sample structure in Table 1).

Table 1

Functional language (adapted from I. Lee, 2016, p. 265)

Language needed for the writer	Language needed for the reviewer
I would like to have feedback on…	Can you explain what you wanted to say here?
Could you please explain this comment …?	You did well on…
What are your comments on…?	Did you consider writing…
What did you think about…?	This part can be improved by…
This is very helpful.	I liked/enjoyed this part…
	As your reader, I felt that…

Alternatively, teachers can draw on prompts to explore linguistic strategies that will lead to greater and more meaningful negotiation. Example prompts, adapted from Hansen and Liu (2005) include: 1) How can you tell the writer you do not understand the idea? 2) What kind of clarification questions can you ask? 3) Which language is more polite to indicate your confusion? Taking the time to work on functional language reduces the frequency of direct and sometimes offensive requests *(e.g., "This is wrong," "You need to change this," "I don't understand any of this")*.

In sum, preparing learners by drawing on role-plays or whole group discussions serves to demonstrate optimal ways to conduct peer C-WCF review discussions. This preliminary work can be done in class, especially if learners are new to peer feedback; however, as the semester progresses, learners can complete a majority of these tasks before class.

Phase 2: During C-WCF

Having completed Phase 1 of the training, learners are divided into groups of three and proceed to Phase 2. For this phase, each learner will bring two copies of their text to class or, if working in a computer lab, share their texts prior to the C-WCF activity. This C-WCF stage comprises four steps: (1) to individually read a peer's text, (2) to individually provide feedback on the text, (3) to compare feedback and pool feedback using the form, (4) to return and discuss feedback with the author. Step 3 will most likely be new to learners, but this additional step greatly improves the experience.

Reading: Individual reading task. To begin the C-WCF process, first allocate time for the two reviewers to conduct a first individual reading of the same paper, without marking it. This first reading is intended to focus the reviewers' attention on the ideas and macrostructure. As such, students must be reminded that they are to put their pens away and focus on reading their respective copies. Given that papers may vary in length or that some students are fast

readers, they can also be invited to read the paper twice, to give time for all the readers to complete the reading task.

Feedback: Individual commenting task. After the individual reading, the reviewers read the feedback peer-request form (previously completed by the author, Appendix 2) and begin working on an individual WCF task. During this time, the authors whose papers are being commented on, form a group (ideally in another room or at a distance from the reviewers) and work on a free writing task or language-focused task. Alternatively, they can begin to read their peers' work.

Comparing: Collaborative commenting task. The third step is the collaborative component of the C-WCF activity, the new component of the peer review process. To boost the reviewers' confidence and to increase the quality of the feedback, the two reviewers take some time to discuss their initial feedback. During this oral component, the reviewers share their feedback and identify areas of convergence and of divergence. When the reviewers' feedback converges, the reviewers should include these recommendations in the final feedback to the author. Given that both reviewers identified these elements, the reviewers may experience greater confidence in the quality of their feedback. In moments where their feedback diverges from each other, they will be forced to discuss their feedback and arrive at a joint solution. This negotiation stage is critical in developing their understanding of academic writing. Teachers may want to monitor these discussions and offer their input. Sharing notes can also lead to identify gaps in the feedback, namely, errors identified by only one of the reviewers. Again, these negotiations become critical moments in their own writing development and this additional step will ensure that the authors receive constructive and reliable feedback. Once the two reviewers agree on the comments, they fill out the third column of the feedback form. This will be the information to share with the authors.

Conferencing: Sharing final feedback. The reviewers are now ready for the final step: meeting the author to provide their feedback orally. Sharing the written feedback orally has numerous benefits for the reviewers and the authors. During the small group conference, the reviewers present their recommendations to the authors. This creates a space for the author to ask for clarifications regarding the received comments but further enables the author to clarify their ideas if they believe the reviewers misunderstood the text. Overall, this C-WCF format reduces learner anxiety, increases awareness of academic texts, and promotes collaborative learning. See Appendix 3 for a sample instruction to be shared with learners.

Phase 3: After Peer WCF

During the final phase of the review activity, students are guided through a post-review reflective activity. Each student completes an individual checklist (Appendix 4). This checklist promotes reflection from the perspective of both the reviewer and the author. This form also helps the teacher gauge students' perception of adopting a peer C-WCF framework. A group discussion could follow to conclude the activity.

Pedagogical Considerations

This collaborative peer feedback model is comprised of three stages and can easily be adapted. We encourage teachers to execute the complete model at the start of the semester given the importance of peer feedback training that we highlighted at the outset. For subsequent writing tasks, however, teachers may omit certain components, for instance, the functional language component, if learners have demonstrated their ability to communicate effectively with their peers. Other steps of Phase 1, such as form completion, can be completed at home so as not to take valuable class time. Teachers can also choose to alternate between offering teacher feedback only for short writing tasks and combining this peer C-WCF model with teacher feedback for more complex writing tasks that require multiple drafts (Nguyen & Filipi, 2018).

The C-WCF model is intended to scaffold the peer-review process and is designed to include numerous collaborative activities. For this model to be successfully implemented, it is important for learners to arrive with printed copies of the texts. Also, during the individual and collaborative commenting tasks, it is important for teachers to have a plan for the authors whose texts are being reviewed. Without such a plan, we found that these students quickly go off task and disrupt the flow of the activity.

Conclusion

Peer feedback is an essential activity in an EAL class and will support novice writers to develop a positive outlook towards collaborative learning. Learners must be accompanied throughout the process of revising their peers' written productions. This three-stage training model aims at guiding the learners through the various phases of providing comments, beginning with planning for the feedback, providing it, and finally, assessing it. It combines written and oral feedback in a safe environment. In the context of an EAP class, the proposed model can also help introduce learners to collaborative models of learning that they will encounter in their target university courses. Teachers can adapt and optimize this tool in light of their students' previous experiences with peer feedback and their beliefs towards it. Finally, responding to the call of Yu and Lee (2016) of providing more information on training targeting collaboration, it would be interesting to conduct a classroom-based study to empirically examine students' perceptions before and after undergoing this collaborative training model.

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Appendix 1

Before C-WCF: Reflect and Request

Provide a blank copy of *Activity 1: Reflect** to each learner. Following this individual component, engage your learners in a group discussion activity wherein they share their responses. This stage will help increase their awareness of writing difficulties others face.

Activity 1. Individual reflection form with student answers

Guiding question	Sample response
1. What type of text (genre) did I produce?	*A letter of intent to a university program.*
2. Who is the target audience for this text?	*The admissions office at the university*
3. Which section(s) of the text did I write successfully?	*The thesis statement in the introduction*
4. Which section of the text was difficult for me to write?	*Finding the connecting words. Deciding on right punctuation.*
5. How did I overcome those difficulties?	*I went back to my class notes and read the models provided by the teacher*
Think about the language, content, and organization and finish these statements:	
1. I did well on:	*The introduction, the greetings.*
2. I did not do well on:	*Connecting ideas; Using punctuation.*
3. I am not sure about:	*Past tense verbs, academic vocabulary.*

*This handout can easily be adapted. Sample responses can be shared with learners but their form should only include the guiding questions.

Appendix 2

Before C-WCF: Requesting Feedback

After this individual reflection, students will select three or four elements that they would like to receive feedback on and note these in the *Request form*.

Activity 2: Request form for peer feedback with sample answers

Thank you for reading my text.
Today, I would like you to give me feedback on the following:

Sample major category	Sample specific areas	Reviewer comments
Grammar	*Irregular verbs*	
Organization	*One idea per paragraph*	
Academic vocabulary	*Transition words*	

Appendix 3

During C-WCF Phase: Instructions for Step 3*

For this C-WCF activity, you will complete four steps:

1) individual reading,
2) individual feedback,
3) collaborative feedback, and
4) conferencing with the author.

Each group of three will have two reviewers and one author. Each reviewer will have one copy of the written production. As a reviewer, read the text once, without marking the copy. Next, read the feedback request form prepared by the author. Individually comment on the author's text and provide feedback on the requested elements only, directly on the text. Before returning the feedback to the author, both reviewers will share their feedback. For this, compare your feedback, discuss similarities and differences and prepare a single, collaboratively produced feedback form. The procedure of reading individually, of providing feedback individually, of comparing feedback notes, and of returning feedback to authors will be repeated for each group member.

*These instructions can easily be modified.

Appendix 4

After C-WCF: Reflect

After the review process, learners will complete the reflective survey.

Activity 3: Reflection checklist on peer feedback process

When I was reading my peer's text:

    1. I provided the feedback I was asked for at:

Less than 60%   61% – 70%   71% – 80%   81% – 90%   91% – 100%

Explain:

    2. Giving feedback was:

Very Difficult   Difficult   Neutral   Easy   Very Easy

Explain:

When I was reading my peer's comments on my text:

3. *I got the feedback I asked for at:*

Less than 60%   61% – 70%   71% – 80%   81% – 90%   91% – 100%

Explain:

4. *The feedback I received was:*

Useless   Not very Useful   Neutral   Useful   Very Useful

Explain:

What will I do differently next time as a reviewer?