CHAPTER 9.

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD FOR ELL STUDENTS: THE CASE FOR MOVING PEER REVIEW TO AN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

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As a pedagogical practice, peer review has garnered an abundance of attention for scholars of composition as well as second language acquisition. Over the years, both the positives and negatives of this teaching practice have been much explored, although the consensus to date is that it can be a beneficial practice for the composition classroom—under the right circumstances (DiGiovanni and Nagaswami 264-265; Hyland 176). This topic has been especially debated in relation to English Language Learner (ELL) writers; research confirms that this population learns to write differently, especially when learning through the filter of cultural background, reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition (Ortmeier-Hooper, *Writing Across* 6-12; Show 238). In addition, due to language-specific challenges, ELL students often contend with a host of insecurities regarding communication in oral and written forms, which can become an issue in and out of the classroom and can impede their progress in a composition course if left unchecked. However, with the right instruction and learning environment, peer review can be an important writing tool for ELL students. The challenge for instructors is to find ways to make this activity a positive learning experience for these students. Both research and experience suggest that asynchronous online peer review can be an effective method of overcoming potential obstacles and encouraging success for ELLs. While no class activity is without its challenges, the overall benefits of moving peer review to an online environment for non-native speakers make it worth considering. If properly employed, writing instructors can use technology to make peer review activities an egalitarian and successful experience for the ELL student.

THE CHALLENGES OF PEER REVIEW FOR ELLS

As with any student-driven activity, there is always the risk that the expected outcomes and benefits of the peer review process will not be achieved. When you

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add in the additional challenges created by learning and using another language, the potential for pedagogical failure becomes even more pronounced. There are many factors that can impede success of the peer review process for ELL students (e.g., Andrade and Evans 115; Ferris 149; Kim 600; Ortmeier-Hooper, *Writing Across* 109; Show 240-242). Some of the most significant are a general lack of experience in both the peer review process and language acquisition, the influence of culture, increased anxiety, low risk tolerance, and the need for additional time to process ideas and complete tasks. However, while these factors can present barriers to learning, the potential benefits ultimately make overcoming them a worthwhile goal.

Lack of experience. Peer review is one aspect of the writing process that can feel very unfamiliar to international students in particular. The process approach to writing, with its emphasis on the practices of collaboration, authorial voice, and revision, is often a new experience for students who received their writing instruction abroad (Hyland 20). Added to this, ELL students understandably have varying levels of facility with the English language, presenting a number of challenges to completing writing assignments. As Soo Hyon Kim observes,

> Having English learners (ELs) from diverse backgrounds who are in the process of developing their language skills can make it even more challenging for teachers to facilitate peer review . . . [they] may have little prior experience with peer review and a lack of confidence in their English proficiency, which are factors that can hinder them from fully enjoying the benefits of peer review. (599)

This can lead to false expectations and "a lack of confidence in the credibility of feedback they give and receive" (Kim 600). Matsuda and Silva similarly point to a mistrust of the peer review process on the part of ELL writers (17). Low self-confidence can also extend to the ELL students' own abilities; feelings of inexperience in the language or the peer review process can lead to self-doubt and insecurity in their ability to offer meaningful feedback (Show 238, 242; Costino and Hyon 75; Carson and Nelson 11, 14). In addition, many ELL students claim to have "difficulty in articulating problems and suggestions" to their peers (Kim 600). In some cases, inexperience with peer review and concern for improving English speaking skills can cause ELL students to place an unnecessarily strong emphasis on language and "local" or sentence-level issues (Leki and Carson 90), thus missing the purpose of many peer review activities.

Cultural differences. For many ELL students, cultural backgrounds also heavily influence their receptiveness to and success with the peer review process. Many are more comfortable with the authority of the teacher voice in response to their work and may not see any value in the feedback of their peers (Andrade and Evans 115; Fordham 20; Kim 600; Zhang 211). In some cases, ELLs can have a tendency to be uncomfortable with the collaborative or critiquing process

due to cultural factors such as a desire to "save face" by not giving negative or incorrect feedback, or avoidance of asserting ideas that might be perceived as negative in order to maintain group harmony (Carson and Nelson 9; Costino and Hyon 75). Some ELLs, especially those that are not considered "international" students, often desire to blend in with the dominant language and culture and may fear the potential stigma that comes with identification as an ELL student. Avoiding the risk of exposure can impede their participation in peer review activities (Costino and Hyon 76; Miller-Cochran 21; Ortmeier-Hooper, "English May Be" 393).

In addition, students coming from less "mainstream" cultural backgrounds may not have received explicit instruction in the genres used in the typical composition classroom. As Ken Hyland observes, this makes successful peer response to these genres a challenge, as ELL students "commonly do not have access to this cultural resource and so lack knowledge of the typical patterns and possibilities of variation within the texts that possess cultural capital" (19). In this way, "Students outside the mainstream [. . .] find themselves in an invisible curriculum, denied access to the sources of understanding they need to succeed" (Hyland 20).

Increased anxiety. All of the above factors can contribute to poor ELL engagement with peer review activities and lead to a great deal of anxiety on the part of the student. This anxiety can also be developed in response to the perceived or real sense of impatience that the ELL student may feel from their peer review partners. In George Braine's comparative study of ELL and "mainstream" composition courses, many of his subjects noted that "NS [native speaking] students were impatient with them, and one student said that he overheard a NS student complain to the teacher about her inability to correct the numerous grammatical errors in his paper" during the peer review process (Braine 98). The participants in this study often shared their fears and embarrassment at speaking up in class, noting that they did not perceive teacher support when they did so (Braine 100). Matsuda and Silva also point to the anxiety that ELLs are likely to experience in the writing classroom, explaining that "Some ESL students tend not to do well in mainstream courses partly because many of them feel intimidated by their NES peers who are obviously more proficient in English and comfortable with the U.S. classroom culture" (17). In a survey conducted by Show, she ranked the top concerns and challenges of ELL students in the college writing classroom; anxiety appeared as the fourth most common difficulty on her list (Show 241).

Anxiety can lead to a number of difficulties for students trying to learn or improve academic writing skills and can derail the peer review process. Braine points to the association between anxiety and "feelings of uneasiness, self-doubt, and worry" (101) which can hinder a writer's ability to think and communicate

effectively. Additionally, research done by Mike Rose demonstrates how anxiety can lead to a limitation in "the development of mechanical, grammatical, and rhetorical competence" along with "confusion, frustration, and anger, resulting in writer's block" (Rose, qtd. in Braine 101).

Low risk tolerance. These challenges can promote a negative attitude towards the peer review process and academic writing in general and undermine any potential benefits of the collaborative learning experience that an instructor is trying to foster. Writing is difficult under the best of circumstances and involves a certain level of vulnerability in order to engage in the process. Language learning also comes with its own share of discomfort; when both learning challenges are combined, fear of the risks may outweigh the desire for any of the benefits on the part of the ELL student. As Evans and Andrade observe,

> Language learning . . . involves risk-taking, making mistakes, trial and error, and a willingness to show a lack of knowledge or ability. NNESs [non-native English speakers] in higher education may mask their linguistic incompetence or lack of confidence by not participating, avoiding challenging courses or majors, not asking questions, or not seeking help. (8)

Smith echoes this concern, noting that it is particularly prevalent among first-year students, who are often the ones sitting in the composition classroom. As she explains, "a common response to such feelings of uncertainty is for students to eschew risk and error and take what they see as the safest route to meet the demands, both real and perceived, of their new environment, even though risk and error are often the best routes to learning" (Smith 36). And Braine takes it a step further, suggesting that the fear of mistakes can lead to "apathy, silence, or flight—a quick withdrawal from the class" (Braine 101). Lack of participation—and in some cases the complete absence from the peer review activity—is concerning; in composition courses focused on writing as a process, students need to be able to engage in each stage of this process in order to obtain the maximum benefit.

Need for time. In reflecting on the various challenges and emotions that an ELL writer can experience in the college writing classroom, one factor which seems to offer the most potential for either a strongly negative impact or a positive influence on student success is *time*. The impatience experienced by the ELL students in the discussion above, for example, can often be the result of the common desire for many students to rush through their work; any impediment to rapid and successful outcomes on an assignment can be viewed negatively. ELLs often need more processing time in order to formulate ideas in a manner that they deem acceptable for sharing (Leki and Carson 90; Raimes 247; Show

240). Show's study illustrates the significance of the time factor: "Writing fluency . . . was the third ranked writing difficulty. Students stated that they stop many times to think about what to write when they write English essays. They often think for extended periods of time but find only a few words to express a quite complicated idea; therefore, they have serious problems with fluency" (240). While this points specifically to writing essays, it is easy to see that this concern would apply equally to written or oral feedback on peer essays. Leki and Carson also analyze the desire many ELL students express for more time when it comes to language acquisition and writing efficiency, noting that their focus on sentence-level concerns such as grammar and vocabulary might not be misplaced, but rather demonstrate "an interest in efficiency and [. . .] a desire to cut down on their workload and their work time" (92).

When one is communicating in their native language, it is easy to forget—or fail to comprehend—the incredible amount of time required for the various cognitive shifts that need to happen in order to communicate in a second or third language (Evans and Andrade 7; Ferris 149). And of course, time is a beneficial ingredient in writing instruction for *all* students—native and non-native speakers alike. Ann Raimes sums up this need for time effectively:

> To take advantage of this extraordinary generative power of language, we need to give our students what is always in short supply in the writing classroom—time. The time they need to write has to take precedence over the time we need to complete a syllabus or cover the course material. That time is needed, too, for attention to vocabulary. To generate, develop, and present ideas, our students need an adequate vocabulary. This is also true of native speakers. (248)

If students (both native and non-native speakers) are to receive the most benefit from peer review and make strides in improving their academic writing, adequate time for reflection, processing language, and formulating effective critiques is not a luxury; it is one of the most essential ingredients in the process.

A PEDAGOGICAL SHIFT: USING ONLINE TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

If peer review proves to be such a struggle for ELL students, perhaps the logical choice would be to omit it from the writing process altogether. Yet while this might be an understandable temptation for some educators, research shows that peer review has the potential to provide a positive impact on student writing, even when English is not the students' first language. Through peer review, students

obtain a variety of perspectives in response to their ideas, creating a more authentic sense of audience (Caulk 184; Kim 600; Sommers 148; Tsui and Ng 166). It also increases autonomy in the student writer (Sommers 149-150; Tsui and Ng 164) and heightens the ELL students' understanding of the assignment goals. It can provide them with model essays, as well as examples of what they should avoid in their own writing. As they see the errors of others and discover that they too find writing a challenging process, they can gain confidence in their own abilities and suggestions (Ferris, 2003b; Fordham 48; Mittan, 1989; Tsui and Ng 166), which in turn leads to more self-corrections (Miao et al. 191).

Further, Miao et al. note that while teacher feedback may be more heavily used by ELL writers, the impact peer comments have on student writing is significant. They found that the latter form of feedback often led to more revisions focused on clarity and variety of ideas, rather than the sentence-level changes that often resulted from teacher feedback (Miao et al. 193). When participating in peer review, students are engaged in active learning and critical thinking, as well as the exercise of communication and negotiation of ideas (Mendonca and Johnson 765-66; Miao et al. 193). Lundstrom and Baker found that in some cases, the benefits of peer review are even *greater* for the ELL writer than for the native speaker. They note that ELL students not only benefit more from giving peer feedback than receiving it (31), but that the increased learning curve they often have with writing and communicating in English allows for more recognizable growth in ELL writing over the duration of a course (38-39).

This is not to suggest that peer review is a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching writing; as acknowledged earlier, there are potential difficulties to using peer review in the classroom. Instruction in best practices for peer review is certainly a necessary precursor, as many scholars have shown (e.g., Hoogeveen and van Gelderen 497; Lundstrom and Baker 31; Miao et al. 183; Rollinson 24; Tsui and Ng 168). Yet given all of the evidence that this can be a beneficial activity for ELL students in particular, it is imperative that we find an effective way to help these students overcome their challenges with the process and provide them with every opportunity for success. Shifting peer review to an online platform is one method that has the potential to accomplish this goal.

While the idea of moving peer review online might at first seem unconventional, in reality, most teachers of composition already embrace technology in many aspects of our teaching practice. Much of what we do in and out of the classroom is multimodal, a point which Kathleen Blake Yancey insightfully observes:

> . . . when reviewed, our own practices [as teachers of composition] suggest that we have already committed to a theory of

> communication that is both/and: print and digital. Given the way we *produce* print—sooner or later inside a word processor—we are digital already, at least in process. Given the course management systems like Blackboard and WebCT, we have committed to the screen for administrative purposes at least. Given the oral communication context of peer review, our teaching requires that students participate in mixed communicative modes. ("Made Not Only" 307)

In light of this fact, it seems contradictory to expect our students to stick solely with the more "traditional" learning experiences. Yet all too often, when we create writing assignments and activities for our students, we are not able to see beyond the walls of the physical classroom. However, as Cheryl Smith puts it, "[e]volutions in writing demand evolutions in pedagogy" (57)—and it's time that our approach to peer review in the writing classroom evolved right along with the rest it.

Some might voice the concern that not all students are "digital natives," and that implementing more technology tools simply creates another stumbling block for the already challenged ELL student in the writing classroom (see Nakamaru 382). It may be true that many students in higher education are not as well versed in some of the online technology tools that we employ in our courses as we would hope. However, the fact is that we live in a world where we are all continually engaged in the act of composing—often doing so in an online, collaborative way, as Yancey notes:

> [S]een historically this 21st century writing marks the beginning of a new era in literacy, a period we might call the Age of Composition, a period where composers become composers not through direct and formal instruction alone (if at all), but rather through what we might call an extracurricular social co-apprenticeship . . . In the case of the web, though, writers compose authentic texts in informal digitally networked contexts, but there isn't a hierarchy of expert-apprentice, but rather a peer co-apprenticeship in which communicative knowledge is freely exchanged. ("Writing in the 21st Century" 5)

As teachers of composition, our task is to instruct students in how to apply these skills to the more academic and professional uses they will encounter during their time in higher education and beyond (Pennington 287).

Clark also urges educators to use tools that "[engage] students in the interactivity, collaboration, ownership, authority, and malleability of texts" (28). She

invokes Richard Lanham's claim that "the computer is a rhetorical tool" (28), sharing that her goal is to use this tool "to re-create the contemporary worlds of writing that our students encounter everyday" (29). Further, Fiona Hyland asserts that "[c]omputer-mediated feedback and computer tools offer opportunities for new modes of feedback and open up new avenues for communication between teachers and students and between students themselves" (177), and encourages ELL educators to "recognize that many of the new generation of second language writers may be totally at ease with computer-mediated communication and may in fact prefer this form of feedback to the face-to-face mode, as it is a relaxed, flexible and routine means of communication between themselves and their peers" (178). Sousa reminds us that "[m]any ELLs get their first exposure to the English language through media rather than through formal schooling" (218) and asserts that the appropriate use of technology can have a positive impact on the ELL student, often increasing the speed and accuracy of language acquisition, as well as leading to improvements in critical thinking, writing and analysis (219). And in Warschauer's view, ELL students "[tend] to see English and computers as a natural combination" and view electronic literacy as an important life skill that they need to develop (45-46).

In many ways, then, computer-mediated communication (CMC) is ideally suited as a rhetorical tool for ELL students. Kessler highlights this potential: "CMC practices can benefit language learners in numerous ways, particularly due to the collaborative and constructive manner in which netspeak is created" (210). He goes on to cite scholars who confirm many additional benefits of CMC, including "increased motivation and opportunities for out-of-class practice . . . increased authenticity and self-regulation . . . and student autonomy" (Kessler 217). Pennington also encourages the use of computer-related tools for ELL students, noting that "[m]any studies have shown that beyond their facilitating effects, word processors have an impact on student writers' attitudes, the characteristics of their texts, their revising behavior and the attention they pay to form and mechanics, and the order and the type of writing activities in which they engage" (288). Additionally, she notes that CMC can relieve the anxiety of writing for the ELL student (288-89) and increase the quantity and quality of revisions (290).

Inevitably, there will be a learning curve for some ELL students; however, the potential benefits and relevance for our students outweigh any resistance we might encounter in the process. Incorporating various technology tools more intentionally into the writing process affords opportunities for increased facility with language, self-confidence, more useful/usable feedback, better collaboration and participation, and perhaps most significantly, it levels the playing field of communication for both native and non-native speakers alike.

The time factor. Of all the ways in which we might best empower ELL students, by far one of the most impactful is the luxury of time. Earlier I noted the potentially negative impact a lack of time can have on ELL students during in-class peer review activities. It perhaps goes without saying, then, that affording more time to complete activities, to process ideas, to think through the language and word choice, to simply *read* the writing of their peers more thoroughly and with greater comprehension, can only be beneficial for the ELL writer. Shannon Sauro, in her discussion of computer-mediated corrective feedback, explains that "one factor affecting what elements of input learners notice is time pressure" and notes that the delays caused between responses in online peer-to-peer communications can create more processing and planning time for the ELL student, which contrasts with the on-demand responses in a face-to-face peer response activity (101). Belcher also suggests that the additional time afforded by CMC can act as an antidote to anxiety:

> CMC, with its hybrid written conversation, not only affords additional and possibly less anxiety-provoking (than face-to-face interaction) means of learner-to-learner communication within language classrooms but extends the interaction possibilities beyond the classroom walls, hence beyond its time constraints and the usual limited circle of interlocutors of classroom pair and group work. (255)

While online written communication of ideas can perhaps be viewed as more formal or perhaps even artificial in some cases, it *is* authentic communication, conducted in a way that favors the ELL writer: "current research indicates that 'computer conversations' are a form of hybrid communication,' which allows students to respond spontaneously, yet offers them the opportunity to reflect on their ideas, rehearse their responses, and work at their own pace" (Janet Swaffar, qtd. in DiGiovanni and Nagaswami 269). However, there is one important caveat to this mode of communication. If online peer review is implemented, it is important that it be conducted asynchronously. As Liu and Sadler demonstrated in their comparison of electronic and traditional modes of communication between students, creating a synchronous peer exchange not only reproduces the anxiety-inducing time constraints of the face-to-face peer review activity; it may in fact worsen the impact, due to the lack of non-verbal cues and risk of misunderstanding spontaneous and informal language (219). Kessler supports this view, suggesting that "[asynchronous computer-mediated communication] provides participants with time to reflect before responding, perhaps contributing to more thoughtful and in-depth engagement" (211). Creating a gap of time between sharing and responding to the writing will produce the best results,

allowing for the exchange of ideas to be more meaningful and positive for all students involved.

Increased participation. One thing I often used to struggle with when implementing peer review in my writing courses was the balance between overseeing the activity to keep students accountable, and not wanting to hover over students during the session or ask them to turn in their feedback (which would seem to defeat the purpose, since I wanted them to have the notes for their own reference). Usually, I would resort to walking around the room, quickly scanning notes or checking off that they were completing work and trusting that somehow the feedback would be useful for each of the students participating in the exercise. If I'm being honest, I know that was not always the case, and students would often allude to this fact as well. So one of the most surprising benefits of moving peer review online was that there was a clear opportunity for my presence to be felt, without having to directly interject my comments or have students formally turn in an assignment. I typically use online LMS discussion boards to complete the activity, and provide a set of parameters including suggested topics for feedback, number of essays to review, and a timeline in which to complete the assignment. Because students know that I can easily view their comments, I have seen a higher number of participants overall, and better quality in the responses (far fewer of the "it looks ok" type responses, for example).

My experience confirms ideas put forth by DiGiovanni and Nagaswami, who described several advantages of online peer review (OLPR) related to teacher presence. They observed that in OLPR, students "remained on-task and focused," that "teachers can monitor students' interaction much more closely than in face-to-face situations," which will enable them to offer more training in peer review to specific groups as needed, and that teachers can "assess the impact of peer review on [students'] revised drafts" (268). While Rollinson is not specifically talking about OLPR, he also notes the potential benefit of instructor oversight provided by written feedback: "Written feedback also gives the teacher a better chance of closely following the progress of individuals and groups, both in terms of feedback offered and revisions made" (27).

In addition to (or perhaps influenced by) the accountability provided by teacher presence, I have observed that as a rule, *more* students participate in the peer review process overall when it takes place in an online environment. Less vocal students who would normally stay silent during a face-to-face peer review session (and this certainly includes ELL students in many cases) are often more comfortable responding online, where the fears and anxieties of verbal communication have been removed. Liu posits that "lack of face-to-face interaction seem[s] to be beneficial for some students whose cultural backgrounds do not encourage such interactions in a classroom environment" (qtd. in Liu and Sadler

218). Kessler considers a different explanation, sharing research from Bloch suggesting that "the act of writing for a public audience can increase motivation and, therefore, the quantity and quality of writing" (210). Whether or not it is due to cultural differences, audience awareness, accountability, or some other reason, the fact that some students seem more comfortable and vocal online is confirmed by research from Warschauer, who found that there were "much more equitable conversations in the CMC mode than in face-to-face interactions as the less vocal students seemed to participate more" (qtd. in Liu and Sadler 196). Liu and Sadler also point to Sullivan and Pratt's study, which "showed full student participation in electronic discourse as compared with 50% participation in face-to-face interaction" (196). Although working with a (perhaps) more highly motivated graduate student population, Belcher observes a similar trend: "The most significant outcome . . . was that voices—not anonymous, but clearly, and, to all appearances, confidently self-identified voices—which were never or seldom heard in class, were heard online" (264). From this evidence, it is clear that one way we can ensure that our ELL students show up for and fully engage in peer review is to shift the activity—at least to a degree—to an online environment.

Quality of feedback. When you combine more time with increased accountability, an interesting thing happens to the peer review comments: simply stated, *they get better.* This is certainly true for both native and non-native students, but it seems clear that OLPR is one way in which ELL students are able to truly show what they are capable of in the writing process. First, they are given more time to read their peers' essays critically, and reread if necessary in order to ascertain meaning and identify potential areas for comment. Thus, they are able to provide more thoughtful and thorough comments on their peers' writing, a point that Rollinson makes in connection with written comments as well: "[written feedback] gives both readers and writers more time for collaboration, consideration, and reflection than is normally possible in the cut and thrust of oral negotiation and debate" (Rollinson 27). Liu and Sadler also noted this phenomenon in their research: "One of the major findings of the study reveals that the overall number of comments made by the technology-enhanced peer review group was larger, and the percentage of revision-oriented comments was larger for this group as well, thus resulting in a larger number of revisions overall" (218). They further observed that using an online medium afforded the peer reviewers more space for sharing their ideas, as they were no longer constrained by a question-and-answer format on a piece of paper. Thus, although the students understandably said that the OLPR process was more time-consuming, their comments were more in-depth, and appeared to be more beneficial for their peers' writing overall (Liu and Sadler 219).

Given the additional time typically allotted in OLPR, ELL students also have the opportunity to "polish up" any language difficulties they struggle with, which is quite the opposite of what they might experience if they had to create comments on the fly during an in-class activity. Warschauer noted this potential for improvements in the language and syntax of online comments: "the electronic exchanges were longer and more lexically and syntactically sophisticated, suggesting . . . that the online environment encourages use of complex language" (qtd. in Belcher 256). And Liu and Sadler, citing the work of others, noted that OLPR has the potential to "enhance opportunities and motivation for authentic interaction and meaningful negotiation; reduce anxiety and produce more talk; and improve linguistic proficiency and increase self-confidence" (195). The ability to present a more clear and thorough set of comments sets up the ELL student for success, and undoubtedly increases their self-confidence as writers.

A further improvement in the quality of feedback pertains to the unfortunate but true experience that some students have during a face-to-face peer review session: negative feedback. To be clear, not all feedback needs to be glowing; I am referring to the tendency of some students (whether due to perceived superiority, impatience, or for some other reason), to be unduly harsh in their critique of another's work. Liu and Sadler summarize many of the concerns shared by other scholars over this type of peer review experience:

> . . . students sometimes can be hostile, sarcastic, overly critical, or unkind in their criticisms of their classmates' writing. Interactions of the group are at times unpleasant, with students being overly critical of each other's writings. In fact, the nature of responding to peers' drafts sometimes generates a sense of discomfort and uneasiness among the participants. Generally speaking, the students can become rather defensive when their work is criticized, especially by their peers. (194)

However, as noted earlier, the fact that peer comments are in a more "public" space creates a measure of accountability, which means that those who review the essays of ELL writers will usually be more judicious in their comments, avoiding any temptation they might have to respond negatively to what a native speaker might view as "clumsy" English construction. Rollinson confirms this, asserting that written feedback "reduces possible friction, defensiveness, or negative interactions" (27).

Ultimately, better quality and quantity in the feedback provided by and given to ELL writers will lead to an increase in revisions on student writing, a point that Frank Tuzi demonstrates in his study of the impact of e-comments on the revision process: "e-feedback resulted in more revisions than feedback from the

writing center or oral feedback. E-feedback may be a viable avenue for receiving comments for L2 writers. Another interesting observation is that although the L2 writers stated that they preferred oral feedback, they made more e-feedback-based changes than oral-based changes" (Tuzi 229). As educators, we not only want our students engaged in the process; our goal is to provide opportunities for the most positive and effective learning possible to take place.

Written records. One final benefit of OLPR worth noting is the record-keeping quality of this format. In an oral peer review exchange, even with the encouragement to write notes during the exercise, the feedback students offer each other is for the most part ephemeral. Any notes written during the process tend to be brief, either due to space constraints as Liu and Sadler noted (219) or due to the brevity of the exercise. And, as mentioned earlier, there will simply be fewer comments overall due to the limited processing and response time of an in-class peer review. We all know that memory is not entirely trustworthy, and even if a student is recording notes during or at the end of the peer review activity, some ideas will be lost forever. Or perhaps the basic notes will be written, and then later the student will not be able to recall what the suggestion meant. Added to this fact is that ELL students often need time to translate phrasing or vocabulary and may simply not be able to fully comprehend a suggestion before it is lost forever. Williams discusses the gaps that occur for ELL students in face-to-face conversations, arguing that "noticing the gap may be a challenging process for language learners because they must compare interlanguage forms with memory traces that may have already degraded" (qtd. in Sauro 101). Thus, having a way to slow this process down and have a clear and thorough record of the peer feedback is ideal.

Several scholars have commented on the record-keeping factor of OLPR. Rollinson observes that "written feedback . . . provides the reader with a written record for later consideration" (27), and Digiovanni and Nagaswami also found the fact that "students do not have to rely on memory to recall feedback" a key advantage of the process (268). Sauro, citing the work of others in a discussion of text-chat feedback, notes that it creates an "enduring visual record . . . that may mirror the benefits of repetition and redundancy by allowing chatters to continually refresh memory traces" (101). In addition, Tuzi discusses the positive impact written records of peer feedback can have on subsequent revisions (229-230).

Another way in which the written form of feedback can be beneficial to students is by providing a diversity of models for the writing assignment. In a traditional peer review activity, students are typically placed in groups of two or perhaps three at most. This is quite practical, as time constraints and student interest would prohibit groups of any larger size. In fact, even in an OLPR

situation, I would not ask students to review more than two other essays, unless perhaps I was offering extra credit for doing more. However, the mere fact that students can "browse" through the openly shared materials of all of the participating writers provides them with a wealth of examples from which to consider and contrast their own approaches to the writing assignment. I continually see evidence of this occurring in my course OLPR activities through comments made by students. Tuzi concurs, commenting that "An added benefit of the expanded audience is the ability to read other writers' drafts thereby providing opportunities for L2 writers to learn from the writing styles of others and incorporate them into their own writing" (232). As composition instructors, we may already provide models for our students, and perhaps even work through a critique of them in our class sessions. However, the additional repository of both good (and sometimes less effective) examples of student writing can be quite beneficial for the ELL student in particular, as it gives them more opportunity to see a diversity of styles, vocabulary, and interpretations of the writing assignment.

CONCLUSION

Given the positive impact that peer review can have on writing for both non-native and native students alike, it would be unfortunate to avoid using it in the composition or ELL classroom due to the struggles that some students face. While teacher feedback still serves a crucial role, student feedback equips emerging writers with the skills they need to succeed in their coursework and even beyond the classroom. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that some methods of implementing peer review are not as well-suited for the ELL student, and can actually lead to an unsuccessful experience, or even encourage absence or disengagement from the process. Shifting to an online format for peer review provides a promising alternative and sets the ELL student up for a successful and rewarding experience. It also opens up opportunities for helping students gain more facility with the increasingly online and collaborative nature of communication that they will encounter in years to come.

For writing instructors who might be uncomfortable with the thought of completely abandoning face-to-face peer review activities, consider a two-step approach to the peer review process recommended by some scholars: begin in the classroom with some initial activities, training and discussion, and then move the reading and commenting stage to an asynchronous online format (DiGiovanni and Nagaswami 268; Liu and Sadler 221). If you do opt for a completely online approach, it is important to remember that the process will be more successful if conducted asynchronously.

We encourage our students regularly to take risks, knowing full well that doing so promotes more and deeper learning. As educators, it is imperative that we adopt the same philosophy for our own teaching practice. At times it may feel as though incorporating technology is simply buying in to the latest fad in education. However, evidence has shown that in some cases, it not only opens up new opportunities for learning, but it also serves as an equalizing factor—especially for the ELL student.

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