

Tutors on Location: Tutor-mediated Peer Reviews in ESOL Classes

Anastasiia Kryzhanivska
Fernanda Capraro
Kimberly Spallinger
Bowling Green State University

First-year composition (FYC) faculty often incorporate "tutors on location" (term used by Spigelman and Grobman) in their classes either as class-embedded tutors or writing fellows who, similar to teaching assistants, support students with course tasks and assignments both in class and during potential office hours. Such collaboration between instructors and writing center tutors has been shown to increase students' confidence and improve their writing skills (Cronon; Hall and Hughes; Haring-Smith; Regaignon and Bromley; Severino and Trachsel). Research also suggests that writing fellow intervention is especially beneficial for multilingual and L2 writers (Gallagher et al.). Thus, extended use of this practice would benefit many writing classes; however, it is currently not possible in all university settings.

As an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Specialist at our university writing center (Anastasiia Kryzhanivska) and faculty in the ESOL Program (Fernanda Capraro and Kimberly Spallinger), we describe an alternative option for on-location tutoring: a collaboration between the ESOL Program and writing center consultants from the University Writing Center to provide tutor-facilitated peer review sessions for credit-bearing ESOL writing classes. This article discusses implications for tutor-mediated peer reviews and tutor training and shares our experiences facilitating peer reviews in graduate and undergraduate classes.

OVERVIEW AND BENEFITS OF TUTOR-MEDIATED PEER REVIEW

A tutor-mediated peer review is an in-class peer review session that students conduct in small groups (3-4 students) under the supervision of writing center consultants. During these tutor-mediated peer review sessions, the tutors' function is not to be tutors but rather to be facilitators—sparking small group conversations about a student's writing, encouraging constructive feedback by asking questions, and modeling appropriate comments and questions.

Since peer facilitation works especially well for students new to peer review sessions (Min; Lam; Schunk and Zimmerman; Zimmerman and Kitsantas), it is ideal for



international students who may first encounter peer reviews in their U.S. classrooms. Writing consultants can help them become accustomed to this common university practice, and peer facilitation also provides an additional step in forming effective writing habits. Research shows that students who give feedback to their peers benefit more than those who only receive feedback from peers and instructors, and multilingual writers and feedback-givers also have a higher rate of improving their writing and English overall (Cho, Schunn, and Charney; Cho and Cho; Lundstrom and Baker; Nelson and Schunn; Nilson). Language improvement occurs because "learning to review others' writing improves one's own writing [because] students learn from these activities to critically self-evaluate their own writing" (Lundstrom and Baker 38). Moreover, "a positive experience with a tutor/facilitator in the classroom often encourages students to make an appointment with that tutor for a one-to-one conference, initiating a relationship with the writing center that can last far beyond the term" (Decker 30). Therefore, in addition to boosting students' confidence and improving their writing skills, tutors on location also help create a positive image of the writing center so that students are more interested in scheduling an appointment with a tutor outside of class.

TUTOR-MEDIATED PEER REVIEWS IN GRADUATE ESOL CLASSES

As a pilot, we began our partnership in spring 2019 in a field-specific writing course designed for upper-intermediate-level ESOL students. The course develops rhetorical skills and integrates grammar and vocabulary support to assist students in graduate-level academic writing; the first cohort included students from several different disciplines and language backgrounds. Our main goal of initiating the tutor-mediated peer reviews was to build students' confidence in writing. However, we also hoped the sessions would assist students in developing an ability to provide constructive feedback to others, an essential skill for their graduate study and future professional contexts. Finally, it served as a gateway for students to build relationships with the writing center tutors.

During the second half of the semester, students wrote a comprehensive research proposal (8-10 pages) and participated in four peer reviews of different sections: introduction, literature review, proposal (methodology), and a complete draft. To set up the peer reviews, the instructor first met with the ESOL Specialist to discuss goals, share the assignment sheets, and revise the peer review forms to include open-ended questions that could spark discussion. Because the ESOL Specialist could not attend the peer review sessions, the instructor introduced the peer facilitators in class, set up peer groups, and answered questions as they arose. The instructor also observed and evaluated the interactions among peer groups and debriefed with the ESOL Specialist after the session concluded.

Throughout the peer review sessions, there were many benefits for the students. First, the students appeared more engaged than when they did previous peer reviews independently. By the end of the semester, the sessions were lively and contained sustained discussions. Additionally, students expressed interest in utilizing the Writing Center outside of class after obtaining a sense of what it was like to work with a tutor, which translated to an increase in Writing Center sessions. Most importantly, the

feedback that students gave and received was significantly improved due to having a facilitator ask questions and prompt more in-depth feedback. Finally, the process served as excellent professional development in providing constructive feedback to peers.

A few challenges became evident in the pilot based on the instructor's observations and debriefing with the ESOL Specialist. Many of the tutors were undergraduate students who initially felt insecure about providing feedback to graduate writers. Additionally, not all tutors could attend each session, so group continuity was not always possible. For the groups that did have consistency, the sessions were more effective. Another challenge for the tutors was the balance between the facilitator-student talk. Since some had not had much experience working with multilingual language learners, the instructor observed that they initially tried to fill the silence too quickly after asking questions, sometimes limiting student participation. Finally, recognizing the difference between peer review and writing center practices was also challenging for a few tutors. For example, in a regular writing center session, tutors are trained to work on areas of students' choice; however, for the peer reviews, the tutors were asked to focus specifically on areas that the instructor had chosen. After piloting our partnership, we concluded that it would have been helpful if the tutors had received more preparation before peer review facilitation. Additionally, more involvement with the ESOL Specialist in the classroom would have been beneficial.

TUTOR-MEDIATED PEER REVIEWS IN UNDERGRADUATE ESOL CLASSES

After piloting our partnership with the Writing Center, we continued this collaboration in an undergraduate writing course for international undergraduate students who need additional support before taking the FYC courses the following semester. Our main goal was to introduce the Writing Center and tutors to the undergraduate students whom we observed were reluctant to utilize Writing Center services.

Our planning began early in fall 2019 when the instructor met with the ESOL Specialist and Writing Consultants to plan the tutor-mediated peer review sessions. Following this meeting, the ESOL Specialist visited the classroom to introduce the Writing Center. She discussed the benefits of peer reviews with the students and distributed enticing writing center gifts. After that, the ESOL Specialist conducted several training sessions for tutors, which focused on facilitating a conversation between students and tutors about the students' writing in a course assignment.

Building off the previous experience in the graduate course, we held a tutor-mediated peer review session in the classroom. The peer reviews were conducted in small groups of 2-3 students with one tutor each. The group members read the draft and completed a worksheet adapted from the assigned course textbook (Adams). To achieve our goal of facilitating a conversation between the students and tutors, the ESOL Specialist trained the tutors to ask the students questions instead of filling the silence with their suggestions, and the instructor prepared a worksheet that structured their conversation on the students' draft of the report and questionnaire assignment. Specifically, the peer review worksheet instructed the tutors and students to read the report and check the items the writer had included, such as the topic, number of people surveyed, summary of results, and analysis of patterns. Next, the peer reviewers checked the target

vocabulary from the course textbook that the writer had used in the report. Finally, any general comments about the writer's report were also welcomed in the worksheet. The peer review emphasized rhetorical concerns; however, there were a few lower-order questions related to grammar and vocabulary.

During the peer review session, the instructor gave instructions and observed the students and tutors in action. Their engaging and animated conversations about the writer's drafts made it a rewarding classroom experience for everyone. This successful partnership was achieved because the tutors asked questions encouraging dialogue with the students about their observations of the writers' drafts. When the class ended, the students expressed enjoyment in having the tutors do peer reviews with them.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TUTOR TRAINING

Our experience showed that tutors who have training in working with multilingual and international students in a writing center context are better equipped for peer review facilitation in ESOL classes. Before our pilot experience, a small group of tutors already participated in weekly training sessions with the ESOL Specialist to develop strategies for working with multilingual writers. However, these tutors were not the only ones invited to participate in peer facilitation roles in ESOL classes. Thus, after our pilot experience, the ESOL Specialist conducted group tutor training sessions during weekly Writing Center meetings in short bursts. In addition, individual hour-long training sessions were offered to tutors who had schedule conflicts during weekly meetings. From our experience, we concluded that peer reviews in our undergraduate classes were more effective due to the training tutors received before coming to the classroom.

To prepare for effective peer review facilitation, writing consultants must first understand that their role as a facilitator in class is different from the tutoring session and that they are not expected to provide feedback on students' writing. Instead, their task is to ensure students give feedback to one another in small groups. Because "the shift in tutors' roles from individual authority in one-to-one sessions to shared authority in the classroom-based program directly affects their sense of professional identity" (Martins and Wolf 173) and can affect their performance, it is vital that tutors discuss their concerns about the facilitative role with the trainer. In this new role, tutors are not doing what they would be doing in a one-to-one conference in the writing center—they are showing students how to provide meaningful feedback by asking questions that encourage active participation among peers.

When tutors understand the underlying principles and differences between a tutoring session and a peer review facilitation, they should also be equipped with strategies they can employ during an in-class visit. The first strategy is extended wait time after asking a question. This recommendation is corroborated by previous studies recommending that tutors "allow learners to 'struggle' some of the time" (Walsh 207), a strategy that allows learners to gather their thoughts.

The second strategy is related to shaping learner contributions, which involves taking a student's response and doing something with it rather than simply accepting it. Tutors must understand that it is essential to choose their words carefully when interacting

with student writers during peer reviews; their discourse strategies can significantly impact how interactions with learners unfold. For example, peer review facilitators can recast, paraphrase, summarize, scaffold, or extend students' statements (Walsh 168). This practice allows tutors to repackage students' ideas and encourages metacognition.

Along with shaping learners' contributions, the processes of negotiating meaning, seeking clarification, and checking comprehension and confirmation are important for tutoring sessions and tutor-mediated peer reviews: "Engaging students in dialogue about their writing can allow them more opportunity, not only to clarify and defend their meanings, but also to build a greater sense of ownership over their texts" (Tardy 74). To assist in creating this dialogue, writing consultants are encouraged to ask open-ended questions. In a training manual developed by the ESOL Specialist for the peer review facilitators, the following sample questions were shared:

- It seems that what you are saying here is _____. Is that correct? Is that what you want to say? What does the rest of the group think?
- Perhaps, there's a better way to express that. What does everyone else think? Do you have suggestions?
- What is the relationship between ___ and ___? What does the group think?
- What's your reason for putting ___ before ____? What does the rest of the group think?

When peer review facilitation is set up in-person, writing consultants should also be instructed on nonverbal communication. Specifically, cultural differences in proximity and expectations for eye contact could vary in different cultures. Although employing these strategies during the peer review sessions is effective, it is important to acknowledge that one-to-one appointments at the writing center are often more productive in terms of actual completed work (i.e., the number of pages reviewed and edits made). Therefore, writing consultants should encourage students to see them at the Writing Center to continue the revision process.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The pilot in-class facilitation of peer reviews received positive feedback from faculty, tutors, and students, and with improved training, it can be even more effective. If you decide to implement a similar program in your university, we want to emphasize the importance of tutor training because we observed a striking difference in peer reviews facilitated by tutors with and without training in peer review facilitation. Tutors also need to understand that the primary goal of the tutor-mediated peer review is not to provide feedback to students as they do during the one-to-one sessions at the writing center but rather to facilitate a discussion among students about their writing. The proficiency of students also needs to be considered. For example, undergraduate tutors are generally more hesitant to work with graduate students, even in the context of a writing center, and this is consistent for peer reviews, too. Therefore, we suggest that graduate tutors facilitate peer reviews in graduate courses. Preparing students for the tutors' class visit is also essential. Finally, improving the communication between the ESOL Specialist and faculty, the ESOL Specialist and tutors, and faculty and students is crucial.

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Announcements

Southeastern Writing Center Association, February 22-24, 2024

Emory University, Atlanta, GA

“Writing Center Movements”

For questions: swca.conference@gmail.com; **conference website:**

<https://southeasternwritingcenter.wildapricot.org/conference>

Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, March 22-23, 2024

George Mason University, Fairfax, VA

“People Power: Community and Care in the Contemporary Writing Center”

Deadline for Call for Proposals: December 22, 2023; **conference website:**

https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vRYt7Kp1opy_iRWSeB1_-HVvvo9M2ttQCZtzB5t_w-2yJbPCzraHs7usgtTSUAPh_l0I3LOYNuljW5/pub

European Writing Centers Association, June 11-14, 2024

University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland

“The Future of Writing Centers”

Deadline for Call for Papers: January 29, 2024; **conference website:**

<https://europeanwritingcenters.eu/conference>

East Central Writing Centers Association, February 29-March 2, 2024

Wright State University and Sinclair Community College, Dayton, Ohio

Conference website: <https://ecwca.wildapricot.org/conference>