

Teacher and Student Perceptions of Peer Assessment for English Writing

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

1. Peer assessment is perceived to be a useful medium for writing revisions and improvements.
2. Students' perception towards the usefulness of peer comments may be influenced by their epistemological stances.
3. Understanding the paradoxical tensions of conducting peer assessment practice can inform instructional design of student-centric formative pedagogies.

BACKGROUND

Being in line with the notion of formative assessment, peer assessment has established itself as an educational arrangement that supports social, cognitive and affective aspects of learning. Despite peer assessment being widely studied and implemented, they have been mainly examined in higher education settings, with its importance at the K12 levels overlooked. The majority of existing studies have also investigated the learning processes and outcomes of peer assessment using quantitative methodologies. Such methodologies are useful in ascertaining better grades as a result of peer assessment experiences, but do not crucially shed light on the learning processes that lead to such improvements. Resistance towards peer assessment in classrooms stems from the uncertainty regarding the reliability of same status peer reviews and comments. Additionally,

the lack of teacher training in formative assessments may result in inefficient and time consuming implementation of peer assessment in the classrooms.

FOCUS OF STUDY

Stemming from our review of available literature, our study proposed a web-based peer assessment intervention aimed at addressing some of the existing concerns with this educational arrangement. Through the web-based peer assessment intervention in our study, students are provided with opportunities to make revisions to their writing, arguments and ideas development taking into considerations the feedback from their readers/peers.

KEY FINDINGS

Both students and teachers generally perceived peer assessment positively. Teacher participants recognized peer assessment as a good instructional strategy, particularly in that it allowed their students to better understand the requirements and demands of writing an argumentative essay. Students found the reviews by multiple peers useful as they provide more details and are more easily understood as compared to feedback given by teachers. They have also reported that peers' review focused more on ideas and arguments development, while teachers' comments generally focused on grammatical competencies. Analysis of students'

pre- and post-writing suggests improvements in functional text and construction of arguments. Our findings also suggest that students of different epistemological stances view the usefulness of peer comments differently. For example, students who adopt the multiplist stance (i.e., believed that there could be more than one single truth) generally felt more positive about their peers' comments, whereas students with the evaluativist stance (i.e., believed in truths that are backed with evidence) tended to perceive peer comments as being more useful than teacher comments.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Through this study, we hope to portray the affordances of formative and student-centred assessments. We hope the teachers' and students' perceptions toward peer assessment practices gathered in our study would provide value to learning and instruction. Drawing upon our findings, four main paradoxes of peer assessment can be implied: (1) increased student ownership but reduction in teachers' sense of control over student learning; (2) anonymity of peer comments lowered students' anxiety but reduced accountability; (3) reviewing multiple peers' essays increased student feedback but gave rise to more contradictory and non-constructive comments; and (4) the online peer assessment tool provided a good platform for peer review but overemphasized on the outcomes rather than processes. Tensions between the understanding and perceived usefulness of peer assessment between students and teachers as analysed and found in our study may inform and advance formative pedagogies.

POPULATION

Seven hundred and ninety-five Secondary 3 students across 3 schools in Singapore participated in our study. 19 teachers across 3 schools were involved and facilitated the intervention.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A web-based peer assessment system, SWoRD (Scaffolded Writing and Rewriting in the Discipline) was used to facilitate peer review in the classrooms. An online platform was selected for its systematic and automatized procedures. SWoRD allows for anonymity, incorporation of e-rubrics and random assignment of multiple peer reviewers. Data collected through SWoRD included student peer comments and ratings and original and revised drafts. Students' perceptions toward peer assessment were gathered through pre and post surveys and interviews. Teachers' perceptions toward peer assessment practices were examined through focus group discussions. Mixed methods were employed to analyse the data gathered.

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