Collaboration and Writing: More than Exchanging Words

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Second language writing courses need to remain open to the value of peer review and consider the writing gains beyond what students can obtain from a teacher and from their own review process. The mixed method design of this study divides students in peer review and self review groups to avoid putting students in paradigm of comparing feedback from a teacher versus from a peer. The overarching finding is that the value of peer review came from the collaborative process, with students achieving through discussion what was not achieved in solitary. Students who were actively engaged in peer review often did not take the exact advice of their peers, but the process of exchanging feedback prompted them to transform their ideas that they then incorporated into their revisions whereas self reviewing students maintained their original trajectory of thought. Additionally, results indicate that students gained from the reviewing process differently depending on their proficiencies. A final key finding is that students were more likely to make effective local changes when peer reviewing than self reviewing, regardless of the “correctness” of the comments. The analysis brings insights to ownership of ideas and development of concepts in the peer review process within a Vygotskian framework of concept formation.

Introduction

Writing composition in tertiary settings has undergone an evolution since the 1950s and 60s, from being seen as a product that students complete and submit for a grade to being seen as a process through which students learn techniques and strategies for writing successfully (e.g., Parker, 1972; Petrosky & Brozick, 1979; Hopkins, 1990). In such a process view, writing is occurring as an “ongoing network of communication,” which necessarily occurs in some socio-cultural context (Hopkins, 1990, p.