

Feedback Provision in L2 Writing Classes: The Use of Poster Presentations to Fill a Gap

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Abstract

In writing classes it is standard practice to provide feedback on preliminary drafts of essays, yet for various reasons teachers may feel compelled to primarily address issues of language and structure, rather than those of content. Furthermore, peer reviewers whose predominant experience of English is grammar focused lessons may tend to provide feedback mainly on this aspect of their classmates' compositions. However, to develop into competent L2 writers, learners also require formative feedback on the content of their written work. This study addresses this issue through the introduction of an additional method of feedback provision during an academic writing course. As well as receiving teacher and peer written feedback, students made poster presentations of their essays in order to generate peer feedback on the content of their work. It was found that this method generated substantially more content-focused feedback than the more traditional style of peer review; however, despite this, student responses to surveys indicated that they found teacher feedback more useful than either peer-directed method.

ライティングの授業では、作文の草案にフィードバックを行うのは標準的な演習である。しかし、さまざまな理由により、教師は作文の内容よりも、まず言語や構造の問題についてアドバイスを与える傾向がある。さらに、英語学習の経験がほとんど文法中心であった学習仲間も、主に文法事項のフィードバックを行うであろう。しかし、優れた第2言語の書き手となるには、学習者は自分の作文の内容に対する形成的フィードバックも必要となる。本研究では、アカデミックライティングコースの中で、もう一つのフィードバックの方法を導入することによって、この問題を論じる。教師と学習仲間からの書き込みフィードバックを受け取るだけでなく、学習仲間から作文の内容に関するフィードバックを得るために、学習者は自分の作文のポスター発表も行った。この方法は、ピアレビューのこれまでのスタイルより、非常に内容重視のフィードバックをもたらした。しかし、仲間指向のいずれの方法よりも、教師からのフィードバックの方が役に立ったと、学習者達はアンケートに回答している。

Keywords : academic writing, feedback on content, peer review, poster presentations, teacher roles

Introduction

In the field of second language writing instruction the growth in popularity of the process approach, with its focus on multiple drafting and revision strategies, has resulted in greater awareness of both the value of feedback and the difficulties inherent in providing it. Rather than providing only feedback on a completed final draft, teachers following a process approach give formative feedback on early drafts of assignments with the immediate goal of helping their students produce a better final piece of writing (Zamel, 1982). Moreover, in addition to providing feedback themselves, many teachers incorporate peer review into their writing classes with a view to both increasing the amount and varying the type of feedback students receive.

Within the framework of sociocultural theory, teacher feedback on written work can be viewed as a form of scaffolding, in which a more proficient individual assists a learner in doing something they are unable to do alone, thus helping them to move towards self-regulation. While peer feedback differs in as much as neither participant can necessarily be defined as more proficient, it is nonetheless an explicitly social activity requiring negotiation of meaning: as such, peer to peer collaboration constitutes a form of mutual scaffolding (Hansen & Liu, 2005; Villamil & Guerrero, 2006). Although the scaffolding function may be common to both forms of feedback, other advantages appear more specific. Reid (1994) persuasively outlines a view of the teacher as cultural informant, whereby his or her role is not only that of a language expert, but also of a conduit between the academic discourse community of English-speaking culture and that of the students. While peer reviewers, especially in an EFL context, are far less likely to be fully conversant with the expectations and conventions of English academic writing than is the teacher, peer feedback can offer the alternative advantages of promoting a sense of audience, developing learners' critical awareness, and fostering ownership of their work (Berg, 1999; Keh, 1990; Manglesdorf, 1992; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Given the limited amount of time that a teacher has to assist any individual student, the incorporation of peer review into writing classes also provides the further benefit of generating more feedback than would otherwise be possible.

Learners, it appears, realize the benefits of both forms of feedback. Studies have shown that not only are students more likely to adopt teacher feedback (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Miao, Badger & Zhen, 2006), but also that they claim to prefer it to receiving feedback from their peers (Saito, 1994; Stevens, 2006; Zhang, 1995). Connor and Asenavage (1994), and Paulus (1999) found that teacher feedback resulted in significantly more revisions than peer feedback, although interestingly, in both studies the majority of revisions were found to be self directed. However, support for the use of peer review also comes from research investigating student feelings towards the process. Jacobs et al. (1998) found that 93% of the participants in their study wanted to have peer review included in future courses; similarly, 100% of the learners surveyed by Wakabayashi (2008) reported peer review to be effective. As Jacobs et al. (1998) rightly point out, the decision whether to use teacher or peer feedback is not an either/or choice.

In spite of the widely-recognised benefits of each type of feedback, neither is without its problems. The remainder of this paper examines the issues raised by the use of teacher and peer feedback, before describing the results of an experiment in feedback provision designed to overcome some of the shortcomings of these two methods.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Issues in teacher feedback

1.1.1 The grammar correction debate

Fourteen years after Truscott's 1996 article putting forward the case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes, the debate regarding his position continues. While Truscott accepts the value of teacher feedback on content and organization, he argues that feedback on grammar is not only ineffective but also counterproductive, as it diverts teacher and student time and attention from more profitable activities. Truscott has consistently defended this position (Truscott 1999, 2007, 2009; Truscott & Hsu, 2008); others, notably Ferris (1999, 2004, 2006) and Chandler (2003, 2009) have taken the opposite view. Ferris (2006) found that students receiving error correction both successfully edited their errors in the short term and significantly reduced the number of errors in the long term. She also noted, however, that the extent to which individual students benefited from correction varied hugely. Although not a theoretical justification, it is important to note that while students and institutions expect grammar correction in writing classes, abandoning it is not a viable option for the majority of teachers, a more practical approach being to make correction as effective as possible for as many students as possible.

1.1.2 Feedback on form versus feedback on content

Even those who support the effectiveness of grammar correction would accept that it is only one aspect of giving feedback on writing. Particularly when following a process approach, at least as important is how to respond to global issues raised by students' drafts. Zamel (1985) found that although teachers also commented on organization and content, their responses were dominated by a focus on surface level features of the text. Moreover, it may be the case that teachers themselves are unaware of how much they do, in practice, focus on issues of form (Hyland, 2003; Montgomery & Baker, 2007). Conversely, Ferris (1997) noted that "the vast majority of the teacher's comments and the students' revisions dealt with ideas rather than grammar" (p. 332). Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) investigated how much feedback was given on local issues (grammar, vocabulary and mechanics) and global issues (content and organization) in three teaching situations and found that the focus of the feedback varied with both the educational context and the proficiency level of the student. Of course, at the level of the individual text it may be entirely appropriate to focus largely on one type of feedback; in general terms, however, teachers have a responsibility to ensure students are receiving adequate input in all these areas.

1.1.3 Multiple roles of the teacher

Various authors point out that a writing teacher must play more than one role when adopting a process approach. Keh (1990) notes that she adopts the roles of reader, writing teacher and grammarian when responding to student writing; Leki (1990) subsumes the latter two roles and adds one more, resulting in the three-fold division of teacher as reader, teacher as coach, and teacher as evaluator, a classification which seems to neatly encompass all the tasks a writing teacher must perform. Whereas a product-orientated single draft assignment may clearly push the teacher towards the evaluator role, the requirements of process based writing instruction necessitate a more finely nuanced balancing act.

The tensions that arise when attempting to balance these different and potentially conflicting roles create serious dilemmas for the writing teacher: how can you simultaneously respond as an interested reader and award a grade which may affect the writer's academic future?; how much direct correction is it appropriate to offer in the role of coach when at a later stage you will be responsible for grading this piece of work?; how often would a real reader offer constructive criticism and negative feedback on something they had read? Cohen and Cavalcanti's (1990) research indicates the difficulty of balancing these roles and suggests that it may be the role of reader which tends to get squeezed out: in all three groups of students they studied a majority perceived the teacher as always fulfilling the role of judge; in only one group did a majority feel the same about the reader role (the role of coach was not investigated in this research). Even when a teacher does respond as a reader, is it reasonable to expect students to relate to this as coming from a real audience, when of course they are still fully aware that the same person is ultimately responsible for grading the paper? Tardy (2006) notes that it is the teacher who decides "what the learner will write about, the length of time allowed for composing, the criteria by which the text will be evaluated, and the grade to be given" (p. 61). Whether a teacher attempts to respond as reader, coach or judge, students will remain aware of this fundamental truth, which will, in turn, influence how they perceive and respond to the feedback.

1.2 Issues in peer feedback

1.2.1 English level

Despite evidence of student support for peer review, other studies indicate that students may lack confidence in the ability of their peers and themselves to provide meaningful advice on written work. Students may perceive only the teacher to have sufficient English proficiency to give feedback, a problem likely to be more pronounced in teacher-centred cultures (Nelson and Carson, 1998; Sengupta, 1998). Moreover, even when students accept the value of peer review in theory, the relative English levels within pairs or groups can affect attitudes towards the activity (Amores, 1997). Students may also doubt their own ability to critique the work of their peers (Coomber & Silver, 2010; Hirose, 2008); such lack of self-belief, whether justified or not, will clearly have some impact on the quantity and type of feedback given. While teachers and researchers may consider peer review to be

an effective form of mutual scaffolding, it seems clear that not all students are equally convinced.

1.2.2 Focus on surface issues

Evidence is conflicting regarding the degree to which peer feedback focuses on either surface or meaning level comments: some studies indicate that peer reviewers are likely to offer more feedback on micro-level issues of grammar and mechanics than the macro features of the text; others, in contrast, find that peer review can generate more meaning related comments than teacher feedback. Manglesdorf and Schlumberger (1992) investigated students' response stances during peer review and found the most common to be what they termed the prescriptive stance, in which reviewers focused on issues of form and error correction over those of meaning. In Connor and Asenavage's 1994 study, both peer review sessions resulted in more surface-based revisions than meaning-based ones. Conversely, Paulus (1999) reported that 63% of revisions resulting from peer review were meaning related. Keh (1990) points out that training is necessary to guide students away from their tendency to address mainly surface level issues, and also, pertinently, that this training is neither easy nor always successful; perhaps this observation, along with the varying cultural and educational contexts in which research has been undertaken helps to account for the lack of consensus on this point.

1.3 Resolving the issues

A judicious combination of teacher and peer feedback may go a long way towards ameliorating the problems outlined above. Nonetheless, a consideration of the various difficulties pertaining to the provision of feedback on writing led me to reflect upon whether the feedback students in my own writing classes receive adequately meets their needs. Two issues in particular concerned me: firstly, whether students get sufficient input on the content of their compositions; secondly, how they view the giver of feedback.

With regard to the first point, my feeling is that my own feedback tends to be concentrated primarily on the organization of student writing, with rather fewer comments on grammar, and fewer still on content. Conversely, my observations of peer review within my classes suggest that many students see this activity largely as one of grammar correction. Both positions may be difficult to alter: given that the focus of these classes is how to structure academic writing in English, I feel compelled to focus my feedback primarily on this; on the other hand, the students I teach have, in the main, experienced a high school English education largely based on grammar translation classes, and are thus, without substantial training in peer review, unlikely to prioritise global issues of writing over local ones.

Closely connected to this is the students' view of the person giving feedback. If their teacher is primarily correcting structural problems and their classmates grammatical ones, how likely is it that students will approach a piece of writing with any sense of audience? Even if the teacher's intention is to follow a process approach in which writing is seen as a communication between

writer and reader, without anyone to assume the role of a true audience, free from the task of correcting the work, it seems unlikely students will regard their own writing in this light.

Hirose (2008) suggests that many different forms of peer feedback should be devised according to their specific purpose. Following this line of thinking, and in view of the issues outlined above, this study investigates the possibility of using oral presentation of written work as a means by which to a) generate more feedback on content, and b) provide student writers with a more meaningful audience for their work. In this feedback format, freed from the perceived need to focus on grammar, students may find it easier to respond primarily to the ideas before them, rather than the language, allowing them to function more as an audience and less as judges or coaches. (Note: Although this style of feedback is also a form of peer review, for the sake of clarity this will be referred to as 'presentation feedback' and the more widely used written peer review as 'peer feedback').

Based on this proposition the following research questions were formulated to investigate the usefulness of presentation feedback in addressing these issues:

- 1) How many comments did students receive on content during peer feedback and presentation feedback?
- 2) Did students view the giver of feedback as primarily a) judge, b) coach, or c) audience?
- 3) How useful did students consider the feedback in revising their essays?

2. Methods

2.1 Participants and course

The participants in this study were four second year International Economics classes, comprising 56 students in total.

The course during which this research was carried out forms part of the compulsory English programme for first and second year students, and consists of two core components, academic essay writing and presentation. It builds on the previous semester's course which introduced students to academic essay writing and presentation skills. Over the semester students were required to write one 600 word persuasive essay on a topic of their choice, and to make a formal presentation of 15 minutes, working in groups of two or three. Due to the academic focus of the course I adopted a process-product approach to instruction, incorporating brainstorming, pre-writing and multiple drafts, but with a continuing focus on the rhetorical structure of the essay.

2.2 Multiple drafts and feedback sessions

The schedule for writing drafts and receiving feedback over the semester was as follows:

Lesson 5. Preliminary teacher feedback. Students had written the introduction to their essays for homework and received brief written and oral feedback on this to ensure they were on the right track in terms of topic focus and essay structure.

Lesson 6. First draft deadline.

Lesson 7. Presentation feedback. Students made a five minute poster presentation on their essay to groups of three or four classmates. In the previous lesson I had made an example poster presentation based on the model essay we had been looking at in class. Students were not permitted to read their essay verbatim, but were encouraged to speak naturally about their topic using their posters to assist them. This session was intended to have a dual purpose: to provide peer feedback on their essays and to give students a chance to practice presentation skills. After each presentation, I spent five minutes talking to the presenters (my feedback was only on presentation skills) while the other students completed a feedback form (Appendix One). The presenters then returned to their groups and had a further five minutes to get oral feedback from their peers.

Lesson 8. Second draft deadline/Presentation feedback survey.

Lesson 9. Teacher feedback. I provided written feedback on students' second drafts, using a system of codes to identify language problems, and writing further comments on essay structure and content both in the margins and at the end of the essay. When returning the drafts I had a brief 'mini-conference' with each student, explaining verbally the main points of my feedback and giving students the opportunity to ask questions.

Lesson 10. Third draft deadline/Teacher feedback survey. **Peer feedback.** After completing a peer review training exercise, students chose a partner and spent thirty minutes reviewing each others' essays using the questions in Appendix Two as guidelines, followed by ten minutes in which they discussed their reactions to their partner's work. During this time I was available to assist students with any problems.

Lesson 11. Final draft deadline/Peer feedback survey and final comparative survey.

2.3 Surveys

At the start of the class following each feedback session, after they had revised their essays, students completed a survey regarding the feedback they had received and their attitudes towards it (Appendices Three to Five). Although the primary comparative focus of this study is between peer and presentation feedback, the survey was also administered after the teacher feedback session. A final survey (Appendix Six), administered after students had submitted their final drafts, asked students to directly compare each type of feedback. All surveys were anonymous and provided in Japanese. Due to absences during either the feedback session or the following week, not all students completed each survey: of a total of 56 students, 44 completed the survey after both presentation and peer feedback, 53 after teacher feedback, and 51 the final comparative survey.

2.4 Analysis of feedback

After the presentation and peer feedback the written feedback each student received was counted and divided into the following six categories:

- 1) Feedback on content: praise

- 2) Feedback on content: suggestions for change, clarification or omission
- 3) Feedback on content: suggestions for inclusion or expansion
- 4) Feedback on language or mechanics
- 5) Feedback on structure
- 6) Feedback on presentation skills

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 How many comments did students receive on content during peer feedback and presentation feedback?

Tables 1 to 3 show a comparison of the written feedback on content received by students from the presentation and peer feedback sessions. Before comparing the figures two points should be noted. Firstly, while peer feedback involved only one person providing feedback on the essay, during the presentation feedback students worked in small groups and thus got feedback from three or four classmates. Secondly, as mentioned above, the presentations served two purposes: to generate feedback on the essays, but also on presentation skills, something which of course did not apply to the other format.

Table 1. Feedback on content: praise

	Presentation feedback (n=45*)	Peer feedback (n=42*)
1. Total feedback comments	131	17
2. Average feedback comments per student	2.91	0.40
3. Maximum number of comments	6	2
4. Minimum number of comments	1	0
5. Number of students with zero feedback	0	27

(*Note: 44 students completed the survey on presentation feedback; 1 was absent. 44 took part in the peer feedback and completed the survey, however 2 did not hand in a copy of their third draft.)

Positive feedback can be important in confirming what a writer has done well, affirming their self-esteem, and maintaining or increasing motivation. However, in the traditional peer review format, only 15 of 42 students received praise on the content of their composition, despite the first instruction on the peer review worksheet (Appendix Two) being 'Write one thing you find interesting about the essay at the bottom'. Conversely, during the presentation review all students received at least one positive comment, and an average of close to three. In this course, as stated previously, students were required to write a persuasive essay, in which they took a clear position on an issue of their choice and attempted to convert the reader to their point of view. Topics included the death penalty, tobacco tax, testing cosmetics on animals, and American military bases in Okinawa. If the act of writing is to be more than an academic exercise, especially when it includes personal views about such controversial issues, it seems essential that learners receive some recognition of the value of the main point they are making. In this respect, presentation

feedback appears to offer a clear advantage over peer feedback.

Table 2. Feedback on content: suggestions for change, clarification or omission

	Presentation feedback (n=45)	Peer feedback (n=42)
1. Total feedback comments	78	5
2. Average feedback comments per student	1.73	0.12
3. Maximum number of comments	5	1
4. Minimum number of comments	0	0
5. Number of students with zero feedback	12	37

Table 3. Feedback on content: suggestions for inclusion or expansion

	Presentation feedback (n=45)	Peer feedback (n=42)
1. Total feedback comments	159	4
2. Average feedback comments per student	3.53	0.10
3. Maximum number of comments	5	1
4. Minimum number of comments	1	0
5. Number of students with zero feedback	0	38

While positive feedback is valuable, it has little immediate impact on improving a specific piece of writing, and to help a writer overcome flaws in logic, clarify ambiguous points and strengthen their arguments, constructive criticism is also needed: perhaps for these reasons, research indicates that students prefer to receive negative feedback from their peers (Manglesdorf, 1992; Nelson & Carson, 1998). Tables 2 and 3 show that in this study, peer feedback achieved almost nothing in this respect. Only 5 out of 42 students were offered advice on content that required change, clarification or omission in this session; on the other hand, during the presentation feedback almost three-quarters of the students received at least one comment of this type. Similarly, fewer than 1 in 10 peer reviewers pointed out ways in which writers could strengthen their position through expansion of an existing point or inclusion of an additional one, whereas during presentation feedback every student received at least one such suggestion, and on average more than three.

Although some research disputes this (Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ashwell, 2000), there would seem to be little benefit in either teachers or peer reviewers providing feedback on the grammar of illogical or off-topic sentences which may later be cut from an essay. Zamel (1985) proposes that simultaneous provision of feedback on local issues such as grammar and mechanics and global issues of content and organization is likely to confuse students, and that a more effective way to give feedback is to first concentrate on issues of meaning and logic and only at later stages of the feedback process to deal with error correction. Whatever the order in which feedback is provided, if writing is viewed as communication, not as mere grammar practice, it is necessary at some point for second language writers to receive feedback on the content of their compositions. However, despite using a worksheet which specifically asked students to comment on content as well as language points, the traditional style of peer review generated a total of only 26 comments on the content of 42 essays. Presentation review, in contrast, generated 368 comments on the content of 45

essays: a quite staggering difference. Of course, when listening to an oral presentation, even in L1, providing feedback on specific language points is a challenging task, and probably one which is beyond the majority of English learners in Japanese universities. Although students also wrote comments on their classmates' presentation technique and poster design, it nevertheless seems that by taking grammar out of the equation, learners can be encouraged to focus on what their peers have to say, rather than just on how they are saying it.

Table 4. What did you talk about during the feedback session?

	Presentation feedback (n=44)	Peer feedback (n=44)	Teacher feedback (n=53)
Language	3	23	15
Structure	0	14	17
Content	22	7	21
Presentation skills	25	N/A	N/A

(Note: more than one answer was allowed)

Students' own assessment of what they discussed during the oral part of the feedback sessions appears to confirm that presentation feedback stimulated a greater focus on content than did peer feedback, with three times as many students reporting that they talked about content during the former. Given that presentation skills are a stated goal of this course, it was perhaps inevitable that many discussions also centred on this. Were the course entirely dedicated to writing it may be that many of these 25 students would also have received more oral feedback on the content of their work. Although almost as many students reported discussing content during teacher feedback, with a limited time available to give feedback to individual students I felt it necessary during the mini-conferences I conducted to focus mainly on the aspect of the essay which required most improvement; thus, these students are likely to have been those whose essays I felt to be off-topic, illogically argued, or insufficiently persuasive. In this case, although the teacher is responding to the content of students' essays, it is clearly as a teacher, and not as a reader.

3.2 Did students view the giver of feedback as primarily a) judge, b) coach, or c) audience?

Table 5: Perceptions of the giver of feedback

Did you feel the person who gave you feedback was...	Presentation feedback (n=44)	Peer feedback (n=44)	Teacher feedback (n=53)
a) Judging the quality of your writing / presentation?	13	11	6
b) Helping you to improve your writing / presentation?	18	32	49
c) Interested in reading your writing / listening to your presentation?	13	3	0

(Note: more than one answer was allowed)

As can be seen from Table 5, in each case the most common student perception of the giver of feedback was as a collaborator in the writing task, rather than as judge or audience. It is also striking that a substantial majority viewed the teacher as adopting primarily the role of coach, with a small minority also selecting the judge role – the two positions perhaps most traditionally associated with a teacher. For these students at least, it seems that the teacher is not viewed as a person with any intrinsic interest in the content of what they have to say: whether this is due to the way in which I provided feedback or ingrained attitudes as to what the role of a teacher entails is not possible to say. Somewhat surprising, however, is that in both presentation and peer feedback, more students felt their classmates to be judging their work than they did the teacher.

Thus, in line with previous research (Manglesdorf, 1992; Tsui & Ng, 2000), students could clearly relate to their peers as an audience for their work more than they could the teacher; furthermore, presentation feedback offered a distinct advantage over peer feedback in this respect, with four times as many students perceiving their classmates as having an interest in their work in the former. Although the precise set up of each type of feedback will also have an influence, it may be that the combination of speech and visual images in the presentation style is more conducive to creating a sense of audience than peer review of the written work itself. While feedback on grammar, organization and mechanics is also necessary in a writing course, following a more integrated skills approach may encourage learners to adopt a somewhat different view of the purpose of writing.

3.3 How useful did students consider the feedback in revising their essays?

Table 6: Student opinions on the usefulness of feedback in improving specific areas

On a scale of 0 to 5, how useful was the feedback in improving...	Presentation feedback Mean	Peer feedback Mean	Teacher feedback Mean
a) Language?	2.37	3.11	4.19
b) Structure?	2.80	2.82	4.09
c) Content?	3.11	3.00	4.19

The data presented in Table 6 is based on student responses to the surveys administered immediately after each type of feedback. In line with much other research, teacher feedback was clearly viewed as by far the most useful in improving all three aspects of students' essays, perhaps indicating that students at this level lack confidence in the ability of their peers to offer meaningful feedback. Given the difficulty of offering feedback on specific language points during an oral presentation, and the low number of comments on language recorded during the presentation feedback it is to be expected that few students considered this format useful in improving the language of their essays – indeed one purpose of using the presentation feedback style was to reduce the focus on discrete grammar points. What is more surprising is that despite receiving an

average of more than eight comments on content during the presentation feedback, this was only rated as marginally more useful than peer feedback (and considerably less so than the teacher feedback) in this respect, perhaps indicating that revising the content of their compositions was not something that these particular learners prioritized.

Table 7: Student opinions on the overall usefulness of each type of feedback

Feedback format	Students' rating of each format on a scale of 1 to 5						Mean
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Presentation feedback	1	2	8	26	10	4	3.06
Peer feedback	1	3	11	20	14	3	3.06
Teacher feedback	0	0	2	5	15	29	4.39

Table 7 is based on responses to the final comparative survey administered after students had experienced all three types of feedback. In general these statistics indicate similar attitudes to those shown by Table 6, with teacher comments clearly the most valued form of feedback overall. Despite providing almost no feedback on linguistic or structural points, presentation feedback was rated as highly as peer feedback overall, suggesting that these learners did, to some extent, appreciate the comments on content this provided.

As a brief aside, a comparison of the mean ratings shown in Table 7 with those obtained in an earlier pilot study reveals an interesting point. The pilot study, although following a slightly different procedure and thus not strictly speaking comparable, resulted in mean scores of 3.89, 3.79 and 4.26 for presentation, peer, and teacher feedback respectively, and hence showed a far smaller gap in the perceived value of teacher and peer feedback (of both types). The students who took part in the pilot study were, on average, considerably more proficient English speakers than the participants in this study, reinforcing research suggesting that the utility of peer review may be sensitive to the English level of the participants.

3.4 Limitations of this study

Any conclusions which may be drawn from this study are necessarily limited by both the context in which it was carried out and the research design. Firstly, the dual focus of the presentation feedback as both a means to stimulate revision of essays and at the same time practice presentation skills, although necessitated by the goals of the course, may have served to blur the picture. In a course devoted entirely to essay writing, learners may feel less need to comment on presentation skills, and so spend more time discussing the content of the presentations. Secondly, the order in which the three feedback sessions took place may well have influenced the amount of feedback given and students' perceptions of its usefulness: as students revised and improved their work, resolving major problems as the course progressed, it is possible that feedback may have

become relatively less useful. In order to give a more accurate picture of the relative utility of each feedback format a counterbalanced design would have been useful; unfortunately, the logistical constraints of the course precluded this.

Conclusion

Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) observe that the priority level accorded to a particular category of feedback should be determined by contextual factors such as the cultural background of the students, their immediate needs, and the nature of the specific writing assignment; an evaluation of the outcome of the current research would thus be incomplete without a consideration of the context within which it took place. Given that, according to Koike et al. (1985, cited in Hirose, 2001), only 3.1% of over 10,000 Japanese university students surveyed stated that they wanted writing instruction, it is worth questioning how writing classes in Japanese universities can best be used.

Much research into feedback has been carried out in an ESL setting and stresses the importance of providing students with global level feedback on content and organization; however, in an EFL context, particularly one in which students have no immediate need for English writing skills per se, it may be entirely appropriate to pay relatively more attention to language issues. However, the responses to question 4 of the final comparative survey, shown in Table 8, suggest that language is the aspect of their writing that these students were least concerned with improving, and reinforces the importance of devising ways in which students can receive meaningful input on the content of their written work. Harmer (2007) distinguishes between 'writing for learning' and 'writing for writing'; it may be that learners are best served by a combination of these two approaches.

Table 8: Student goals for their writing ability

	Language	Content	Structure
What aspect of your English writing do you most want to improve?	12	24	15

In summary, presentation feedback as described in this paper appears to offer a clear cut advantage over the more traditional form of peer review in generating feedback on content. Moreover, in this format, learners were more likely to view the givers of feedback as adopting the role of an audience for their work than in either peer review or teacher feedback. While both teacher and peer feedback certainly have important advantages, the inclusion of presentation feedback alongside these more widely used formats may also offer other benefits. Variety is important to create a stimulating learning environment; especially for students, such as those in this study, who have not chosen to study English writing, the integration of a formal speaking task

into a writing course may represent a welcome change of pace. Moreover, its usefulness in stimulating revision is not the only yardstick by which this technique can be measured: as anyone who has done so well knows, the prospect of orally presenting your work to a group of your peers generates a quite different motivation to that created by the knowledge a teacher or peer will read your written work. Keh, investigating peer feedback, conferencing and teacher written feedback, concluded that “each type of feedback has its own uses and advantages” (1990, p. 10), an observation which may also be true of presentation feedback. In this particular study, the participants clearly perceived teacher feedback to be the most useful mode overall; nevertheless, the survey responses indicate that students appreciated the value of all the types of feedback they received.

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Appendix One: Presentation review worksheet

CW4 Presentation Feedback

Presenter's name: _____

1) What did you learn from this presentation?

2) What was the most interesting point of this presentation?

3) Were there any parts that were not so interesting or unnecessary?

4) Were there any points you didn't understand?

5) What else would you like to know about this topic? Try to write at least two things.

6) Do you have any other advice for the presenter?

Appendix Two: Peer review instructions

CW4 Peer Feedback

Step 1: Find a partner and switch essays.

Step 2: Read your partner's essay carefully.

Step 3: Do tasks i) – iv) below.

- i) Write one thing you find interesting about the essay at the bottom.
- ii) If there are any sentences you can't understand, please underline them like this and write a question mark next to them????
- iii) Check the structure, content and grammar of the essay. Look at the questions on page 12* again. Are there any problems with these points? If so, write some advice next to the problem part.
- iv) Is there anything else you would like to know about this topic? Write your ideas at the end of the essay.

Step 4: Talk with your partner about your essays. Give each other as much advice as you can.

*Note: The page 12 questions referred to in Step 3 are reproduced below.

1. Structure

Does the paragraph have a clear topic sentence? Are there any problems with the topic sentence?

Does the paragraph have support sentences?

Does each supporting sentence have enough examples and details?

Does the paragraph have a suitable concluding sentence?

2. Content

Does the paragraph focus on the topic stated in the title?

Are there any irrelevant / off-topic sentences?

3. Grammar, format and accuracy

Are there any sentences you can't understand or that are unnatural English?

Does the paragraph use sequence markers?

Are there any other problems with grammar or vocabulary?

Are there any mistakes with format, punctuation or spelling?

