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Prohibiting or Promoting Learning: An Exploration of Peer Feedback in Collaborative Academic Writing

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Abstract: Past literature on peer feedback has identified a number of learning benefits to students (higher confidence, greater autonomy, better understanding, etc.), yet few have explored whether and how peer feedback prohibits learning. To close this gap, this study recorded 12 students' classroom feedback sessions over seven weeks when they collaboratively wrote a book review. The text-talk analysis revealed three feedback patterns: empathy, compromise and disapproval. The subsequent interview showed that while the students gained higher sensitivity to review writing, they complained about the excessive cognitive load of the activity and even doubted peer feedback usefulness. Based on those findings, the paper suggested a revised design on peer feedback sessions in academic courses.

Keywords Peer Feedback; Learning Benefits; Book Review Writing; Collaborative Writing

1. Introduction

Peer feedback can be seen as a collaborative learning process where equal-status learners exchange their views on learning process/outcome and negotiate shared understanding [1-3]. Its learning benefits occur when students help each other develop their cognitive, emotional and behavioural abilities through a form of reciprocal teaching [4]. Many studies indicated that peer feedback could supplement, if not supplant, teacher feedback in formative assessment and learning [5,6].

While peer feedback does provide favourable conditions for students' learning, the limit of its learning scaffolding is not yet fully discussed, let alone examined. According to Strijbos & Sluijsmans[7], one major limitation of the feedback research is that few empirical studies have systematically investigated the mechanisms of peer feedback. i.e. how (much) does peer feedback promote learning. This topic is especially research-worthy in the area of EFL (English as Foreign language) students' collaborative writing of academic articles for the following two reasons.

First, the task of academic writing has a strong need for collaborative writing and peer support, especially for students with limited English proficiencies [8]. Regarding the features of the task, academic writing requires an extended writing process with multiple rounds of submission and revision, as well as high language quality and disciplinary knowledge, so it has a strong need for peer feedback support. Regarding the characteristics of learners, many students engaged in academic writing are MA or PhD students who have limited teacher lecture time but have a strong initiative for peer feedback and self-regulated learning. Their writing process is thus complete with frequent and voluntary comment seeking/sharing. An inquiry into this particular task with this particular student group could reveal the potential and limit of feedback's learning benefits.

Second, a study of peer feedback in collaborative academic writing has important practical implications, too. Anxiety related to academic publication is now affecting an increasing number of postgraduate students [9], yet there is a dearth of attention to students' difficulties as well as macro and micro policies, interventions and strategies that can alleviate their struggles [10]. With a better understanding of feedback support in their writing process, policy makers could modify their investment in areas like peer tutorial sessions [11], while teachers can modify and negotiate learning goals with students [12].

The current research context was a postgraduate class called English Academic Writing, in which EFL students formed

writing groups to prepare their manuscripts for academic publications. The aim was to investigate the features of peer feedback sessions and the role they played in scaffolding students' academic writing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Peer Feedback in Collaborative Writing

Collaborative writing refers to a process where two or more writers co-author and share responsibility for a jointly composed text [13] Only pairs displaying collaborative stances with high mutuality can experience more transfer of knowledge and conditions more conducive to learning [14].

The theoretical basis for collaborative writing is the social-cultural theory, which believes that language development is not simply determined by the relative accuracy of linguistic performance, but, crucially, is a function of the frequency and quality of regulation (i.e., help) negotiated between collaborators [15]. Language learning is first constructed via external regulation (e.g., peer feedback) and then appropriated through self-regulation (i.e. internalized by learners themselves) [16].

Peer feedback in the context of collaborative writing has some unique advantages compared to feedback in other contexts. First, learners exhibit higher motivation in the reciprocal feedback and in their deliberation. Storch argued that peer feedback in collaborative learning was superior to conventional peer-response activities [13]. Since learners had a stronger sense of responsibility and ownership for the entire text, they were more likely to be motivated to provide feedback, to consider the views of their co-authors, and to engage with the feedback provided.

Second, learners exhibit unique feedback patterns in collaborative writing. The traditional 'request-response' interaction pattern is replaced by the pattern of joint planning and production. Feedback is provided not only in response to errors or requests for help, but is also driven by a conscious desire to produce a joint text of highest quality, with all authors invested in this endeavour [13]. In addition, learners are engaged with the whole process of writing (planning-formulation-revision) rather than the last stage (i.e. revision). Arnold et al. found that when revising a draft, students would more frequently revise each other's language quality. By contrast, when planning a draft they tended to be content focused; they would divide their labour and contribute individual section of texts to form a complete product [17].

2.2 Peer Feedback in Academic Writing

The arrangement of collaborative writing groups does not necessarily lead to success of peer feedback. Writing tasks, as part of the socio-cultural context, play a mediating role in the quality of group interaction and peer feedback [18]. For EFL learners, academic writing poses a double burden as they have to use the appropriate discipline-specific academic register and relevant rhetorical structure which can be different from what they are already acquainted within their local contexts [19,20].

Comparing peer feedback patterns in academic writing with feedback in other tasks, Basturkmen [21] stressed that the former is typically extended and more indirect and complex. She noted that feedback on academic writing went beyond the initial elicitation, informational, or directive positions because speakers frequently provided further information, justification, or support for a point and often followed up over the course of several turns [21]. Crosthwaite et al. listed some unique patterns in academic discussions: asking of direct/indirect questions to other members, rebuttals of other candidates' claims, the derivation of counter-arguments to a speakers' own stance, and the presentation of facts, opinions or statistics from academic sources (i.e. spoken citations) [22].

Taken together, past literature has discussed some unique restraints facing peer reviewers as well as their interaction patterns in academic writing. What has been largely ignored is a closer examination to the relationship between peer feedback pattern and their learning benefits. In particular, previous studies often view learning benefits from the perspective of writing product (revisions adopted by writers or score changes across writing tests) [23]. By contrast, the learning benefits to students' writing process have rarely been reported, where students'

planning, writing and revision behaviour could all be modified and improved. To narrow the gap, the current study chose one particular area of academic writing (book review) to investigate the peer feedback patterns in collaborative writing groups and learners' perceived benefits throughout the process.

2.3 Research Questions

The current study will address the following research questions:

RQ1) What were the main peer feedback patterns observed throughout the process of collaborative writing?

RQ2) What was the impact of feedback on learning as perceived by members of collaborative writing groups?

3. The Study

3.1 Context and Participants

The current study took place in 2019's spring semester at a course called 'Academic English writing' at a research-intensive Chinese university. The 12-week course was aimed at cultivating postgraduate students' ability to cooperate with peers in planning, writing and revising their research articles. Each week contained two parts: teacher instruction (45 min) and collaborative work (45 min). Week 1 was an introduction where the instructor explained the course objectives, the format of collaborative writing, and two writing tasks: a book review (Week 2-8) and a report (Week 9-16). Week 2-Week 8 involved writing a book review of of Lee's work published in 2017 (see 5.2) [24] and was used for the current study. The seven weeks included two stages: Week 2 to Week 4 was joint planning; a group of four students congregated and the first member submitted his outline of book review for group feedback. Next, the second member built on the earlier outline and submitted a revised version for discussion. One week later the third member submitted his version. Eventually after all feedback sessions the fourth member (also the captain) was responsible for producing the final version of the outline (the process was known as jointly producing one text. [13]. Week 5 to Week 8 was joint formulation, where a similar iterative process was repeated and members built upon earlier drafts to produce a final manuscript. The seven weeks' collaborative writing was shown in the following Table 1:

Table 1. Co-Writing Process and Peer Feedback Sessions

	Before class	During class
Week 2	1st member prepared an outline (version 1) for book review	Group feedback session 1 (jointly planning a draft)
Week 3	2nd member incorporated earlier feedback, wrote up a revised outline (version 2) and sent it to other members to read	Group feedback session 2 (jointly planning a draft)
Week 4	3rd member incorporated earlier feedback, wrote up a revised outline (version 3), and sent it to other members to read	Group feedback session 3 (jointly planning a draft)
Week 5	4th member (the captain) wrote up the final version of outline, expanded it into a complete draft, and sent it to other members to read	Group feedback session 4 (jointly formulating a draft)
Week 6	1st member incorporated earlier feedback, wrote the second draft, and sent it to other members to read	Group feedback session 5 (jointly formulating a draft)
Week 7	2nd member incorporated earlier feedback, wrote the third draft, and sent it to other members to read	Group feedback session 6 (jointly formulating a draft)
Week 8	3rd member incorporated earlier feedback, wrote the fourth draft, and sent it to other members to read	Group feedback session 6 (jointly formulating a draft)
Note: After feedback session 6, the 4th member (the captain) wrote up the final draft and submitted the four-author-manuscript to the teacher.		

3.2 Data Collection

A total of 12 students registered the course (male 4, female 8). Aged between 23 and 24, all were native Chinese, first-year post-graduate students majoring in applied linguistics. Prior to the course, all had learned English for 12 years and have passed China's English proficiency test for English majors (Band 8), equivalent to IELTS band 7, so it was reasonable to posit that they were comparable medium-high level English

learners. The present course marked their first experiences with research article composition and collaborative writing.

The instructor of the course, a female lecturer in applied linguistics, had taught academic writing for two years. The present author was a co-worker of her and they two formed good relationship. Before the study he and his research assistant (a PhD student majoring in applied linguistics) approached her, explained the research objectives and were permitted to sit in and record the course. He also explained his research to all 12 students in Week 1 and got their consent. Throughout his study he adhered to the ethics of anonymity of all participants.

From Week 2 to Week 8, at the first half of each class the lecturer used 'Classroom writing assessment and feedback in L2 school context' as the book to be reviewed [24]. Sealey's guideline in 2015 was adopted for book review writing. Three reviews of Lee were used as exemplars [25-27].

At the second half of each class the 12 students broke into three groups of four and proceeded with feedback sessions. No students changed their group throughout the course. To address the first research question, the researcher audio-recorded all three groups' discussions over seven weeks, transcribed them in the original language (English) and coded them in Nvivo11 (see 5.3). In addition, he collected seven discussed texts (three versions of the outline and four drafts, see Table 1) as well as the course instructional material (guideline, exemplars, etc.) to identify feedback patterns.

To address the second research question, after Week 8 he conducted one-on-one interviews with students at his office. The prompt questions included ‘what is your general impression of earlier writing and discussions’, ‘how do you like the peer feedback sessions’, ‘in which way does peer feedback improve or inhibit your learning’. The interviewees were allowed to use their native language (Chinese) so as to elicit their full understanding. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and then translated into English.

3.3 Data Analysis

To identify specific patterns of feedback, the transcripts were coded in relation to the instructional material, using a data-driven approach and following a procedure similar to that reported in [28]. Initially, under a second level code, first-level data-grounded codes were subsumed, which were consistently invivo codes based on keywords from the discussion and the reviewed text. For example, under ‘comments featuring putting reviewers into the writer's shoe’, 12 first-level codes were subsumed, corresponding to the keywords of speech by peer students. In view of the research questions, the categories of codes were then re-organized to focus on feedback patterns, a step which led to three interim, broad groups of third-level codes: empathic pattern, conflict-management pattern, and group disapproval pattern. After initial coding, the researcher modified and re-organized the codes and categories which fell under each of the afore-mentioned interim third-level codes, thus moving from more descriptive and topic-based coding to more interpretive and focused coding.

Regarding the coding of interview answers, the same three-level coding and modification procedure was performed, leading to three themes of students' perceptions. To check and improve reliability of both coding procedures, the researcher used three measures. First, as he and his assistant observed feedback sessions, they individually noted down as detailed as possible students' behaviour. That way their notes could complement recordings to capture full details of feedback patterns. Second, they each independently coded the first 30 minutes of the transcript and then met to compare their results. After sorting out their differences, they proceeded to code the remaining data. Third, after the research the author wrote up and emailed his draft article to the instructor for comments. She responded favourably, saying that the coding was reasonable and the report represented the status quo of co-writing in her class.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Feedback Patterns

To address the first research question, the study identifies three most frequent feedback patterns: empathic, compromise and disapproval feedback.

4.1.1Empathic feedback

The most salient pattern observed in the sessions is empathic feedback, which in this

study means that reviewers give comments as they put themselves into the student writer's shoe, and the latter also expresses the shared feeling in his counter-comments, as the Excerpt 1 and 2 in Table 2 illustrate.

Table 2. Excerpt 1 of a Feedback Session in Week 2

Talk	Text	Talk
Member 2: I like the arrangement of your introduction; I would use that. Member 1: Yes, I want to narrow down, gradually.	Outline (prepared by Member 1) 1. Introduction 1.1 Why this topic 1.2 Why this book 2. Book's content ...	Member 3: I would add 'why this author' as 1.3, you know, the common rhetoric step in... Member 1: Yes, I have thought about that, but I decided to put it to the end. Member 4: I agree with him (Member 1). If I were him, I would also place the author in the closing evaluation.
Note: Shaded parts were indicative of empathic pattern		

Throughout Excerpt 1, peer reviewers show their appreciation and approval of the writer's outline choice. The use of subjunctive mood in their feedback ('I would', 'If I were him') clearly displays reviewers' ability to put themselves into the writer' shoes. Regarding the writer (Member 1), in his response to peer comments he not only justifies his choice (e.g. 'I want to narrow down') but also expresses his empathy of reviewers' concern (e.g. 'I have thought about that'). His active engagement and full preparedness also indicate a high degree of mutual understanding between discussants.

Table 3. Excerpt 2 of a Feedback Session in Week 5

Talk	Text	Talk
Member 2: I find you intentionally highlight target readers in the first sentence, this is smart, because it naturally leads to the importance of the topic Member 3: Yes, I see that too. the use of 'be relevant to' is a good way to introduce the topic	Draft 1 (prepared by Member 4) The topic of assessment and feedback is highly relevant to EFL teachers, especially those dealing with large size classes and young learners. However, its theoretical discussions and practical applications are still lacking. To address this gap, Icy Lee published the book...	Member 4: I had some difficulties in developing, or realizing our earlier outline. You see? how to proceed from topic to book. Member 1: I also find that your transition from topic to book is, not so smooth, maybe you can compare this book to other books under the same topic? Member 3: Especially comparing those studies on university classrooms, because this is the book's distinctive feature. Also the wording, eh, Lee published the book, but why this book? Member 4: Well, I now understand why writing one book review requires reading multiple books.
Note: Shaded parts were indicative of empathic pattern		

In Excerpt 2 in Table 3, a draft prepared by Member 4 stimulates frequent exchanges, many of them exhibiting a typical empathic pattern. Reviewers use language like 'I find you intentionally' or 'I see that too' to express their understanding of the writer's efforts. In addition, the writer himself seems eager to communicate his difficulties in draft writing or his awareness of the task requirement. For example, he uses 'you see' to draw attention to the difficulty of 'realizing earlier outline'. He also uses 'I now understand' to indicate his better appreciation of the task and of his fellow writers.

Comparing Excerpt 2 with Excerpt 1, it is interesting to note that reviewers shift from

more speculative, general idea at the planning stage ('I would use that') to more affirmative, specific suggestions at the formulation stage ('the use of ... is good'; 'the transition... is not so smooth'). Further, the writer's empathic comments also shift from 'I have thought about that' to 'I now understand'. Such shifts in language have two implications. First, as students proceed from planning to formulation, their ideas become materialized and their outlines flesh out. Consequently, they can fully evaluate which part is unnecessary or what language is inappropriate. They start to appreciate the writer's choice at more local level (use of language, use of transitional devices, etc.), thus extending the length/scope of their empathic comments. This change in feedback pattern is largely consistent with Arnold's study, which also found students' growing emphasis on language use when moving from planning to production stage [17].

Second, student writers become much keener to share and communicate his feelings. While in the planning stage writers can feel relatively secure and confident in producing outlines, in the formulation stage their awareness of writing difficulties increases, and their empathic ability is arguably stronger, as evidenced in their response to comments. Additionally, Member 1 of Excerpt 2 appears particularly keen to explain difficulties and to seek suggestions from other members, because he is the next writer to proceed with the current draft. It is likely that his empathic evaluation is driven by the requirement of collaborative writing to incorporate revisions and improve the draft's quality. Therefore, the nature of the task (collaboratively writing a paper) seems to lead to students' frequent use of empathic feedback.

4.1.2 Compromise feedback

Another frequently observed pattern in the feedback sessions is compromise feedback, which means that student writers make compromises towards conflicting suggestions from reviewers, or writers themselves disagree with one reviewer and invite others to negotiate such disagreement. Both excerpt 3 and 4 in Table 4 and table 5 illustrate this pattern:

Table 4. Excerpt 3 of a Feedback Session in Week 2

Talk	Text	Talk
Member 2: I don't find any uniqueness of your outline. All other books have these two contributions. Member 2: Really? It looks alright to me. Member 3: How about 4.1 unique conceptual choice and 4.2 unique method choice?	Draft (prepared by Member 1) ... 4. Closing evaluation 4.1 theoretical contribution (e.g. assessment; L2 teaching) 4.2 pedagogical contribution (e.g. curriculum; didactics) 4.3 weaknesses	Member 2: I don't see your (Member 3) suggestion being any better. Discussing the choice of concepts and methods seems too restricted. Member 3: But still, the current one is too formulaic, didn't our instructor advise against.. Member 1: Maybe we can wait till drafting? I think uniqueness is not how you plan, but how you actually write.
Note: Shaded parts were indicative of conflict-compromise feedback		

In Excerpt 3, the outline prepared by Member 1 stimulates heated debate in the group. While Member 3 challenges the uniqueness of their book review, Member 2 is active in defending and justifying Member 1's chapter arrangement. Interestingly, Member 1 becomes the one to end their argument, and his solution is simply to delay the final decision, to 'wait till drafting'. This 'wait-to-see' attitude appears common in the joint planning stage and is frequently used by other groups to manage conflicts.

Table 5. Excerpt 4 of a Feedback Session in Week 7

Talk	Text	Talk
Member 1: About the last paragraph, I doubt whether it is a good idea to criticize the book.	Draft 3 (prepared by Member 2) ...	Member 4: I think the current one is OK, she (Member 2) used nice phrases from Zou

Member 3: Not a good idea, it's very tricky, you know, to balance good points with bad points Member 4: But didn't our teacher advise us to comment both sides, good and bad? Member 3: Who are we to judge those famous scholars. Plus, why don't you choose some easy target, like, like the language? Member 2: But I tried, there is no language points to criticize, I can only come up with the content	In sum, this book demonstrates a number of good points as well as a few weaknesses. .... It would have been useful to include more illustrative examples for pre-service teachers, and to include university classrooms as its target area.	and Kong's sample, like 'it would have been.....' Member 1: There is another point I disagree, I don't think it is weakness. The book is not intended for the university level, how could you say it's a bad point. Member 2: But not being inclusive is a weak point. Member 3: No, No, no book can include everything. Maybe this is too difficult for us. Member 2: Well, I guess we have to just delete bad points altogether then.
Note: Shaded parts were indicative of conflict-compromise feedback		

As is shown in Table 5, In contrast to 'wait-to-see' mode at the joint planning stage, peer students at the joint formulating stage turn to the 'delete it altogether' mode in their conflict-management. What is noteworthy is the possible factor leading to this particular feedback pattern: Member 1 initiates the challenge of the content ('I doubt'). Member 3 echoed this possible loophole by providing additional risks (difficulties in balancing points, inability to judge experts). The counter-arguments from Member 2 (no language points to criticize) and Member 4 (the teacher advises us to do so) seem not convincing enough. Indeed even the latter two students themselves are not confident when it comes to the content (language is an easier target, but no language errors could be found). To end this controversial point, the author himself comes up with a safe solution (delete altogether then). Based on their interaction, it is reasonable to conclude that students' lack of confidence and experience in their book review writing lead to their reservation about the last paragraph and the decision to delete it altogether.

Situating this finding against feedback literature, it is not rare to see students' hesitation and mutual challenge in their oral feedback. Mochizuki found that writers need to constantly negotiate and defend their intentions in group writing conferences. After all, a lively, mutual-challenging discussion is expected as the goal and strength of peer feedback [29]. However, this study also determines that students only achieve limited gains from this conflict-management pattern; While a level playing field encourages various criticism from all contributors, it lacks authoritative sources to guide, to facilitate, and to solve their conflicts. As Basturkmen [21]keenly observes, students' discussion is idea focused without a teacher and solution-driven with a teacher. If students stick to an ostrich-style conflict management mode (wait-to-see, delete it altogether), their feedback can only prohibit rather than promote academic writing[21].

4.1.3 Disapproval feedback

A less frequent pattern than the first two is the group disapproval feedback, where one writer presents his work and the whole group start to pour negative comments towards its weaknesses, as Table 6 illustrates.

Table 6. Excerpt 5 of a Feedback Session in Week 6

Talk	Text	Talk
Member 2: I am afraid your last paragraph is a bit too general and perfunctory. Member 3:	Draft 2 (prepared by Member 1) ...However, no book is comprehensive and flawless, so	Member 1: I copy that from Zou and Kong... Member 4:

Your claim about not being 'comprehensive and flawless' is too wishy-washy	readers should be critical towards this book's suggestions and conclusions.	But you didn't provide any substance, and nothing new
Note: Shaded parts were indicative of group disapproval feedback		

In Excerpt 5, towards Member 1's draft, the whole group are engaged in multiple rounds of criticism. Member 2 initiates an overall judgment (whole paragraph too general), joined by Member 3's specific comment (the phrase of 'comprehensive and flawless'). Although Member 1 tried to defend his choice (copy it from a reference article), his justification is again dismissed by Member 4 (nothing new).

In sum, the text and talk analysis of all feedback sessions highlights three feedback patterns: emphatic, conflict-management and group disapproval. While the first is frequently reported in similar inquiries, the latter two have not been widely reported, much less discussed, in feedback literature. Why do peer feedback sessions display such seemingly negative patterns? In which ways do they prohibit learning? The current study continues to collect students' perceptions.

4.2 Students' Perceptions

To address the second research question, the study analyzes and identifies three main themes of students' perceptions towards feedback's influences. According to the students, while peer feedback can cultivate their sensitivity to review writing, it nevertheless increases their cognitive load and demotivate their improvement of review writing.

4.2.1 Higher sensitivity to review writing

The students unanimously report gains in their understanding of the genre of book review. Some illustrate such gains as a more nuanced knowledge of reviewing a book, as in excerpt 6 and 7 from the interview script:

Excerpt 6: After so many rounds, I am now much clearer what a good review should be like.

Excerpt 7: Peer feedback corrects my misunderstanding of those trivial things too, like structure and chapter sequence.

In addition, many students also report that they form a critical attitude, a review-style living habit that can be transferred to other tasks and disciplines.

Excerpt 8: I don't know if it is just me, I now see every book, everything from both positive and negative sides.

Excerpt 9: One good thing about review feedback is that, you seem to be genetically modified to read books with critical eyes.

The saying 'genetically modified' vividly describes how students form a sustained, transferable competence and attitude in review writing. After multiple rounds of peer feedback, they seem to be better able to detect weaknesses, to evaluate things from more perspectives, and to see things more critically.

4.2.2 Heavier cognitive load

An equally frequent yet unexpected theme is that the students see peer feedback of review writing as a high cognitive load, as the following excerpts explain:

Excerpt 10: Having these peer feedback sessions is really demanding for us. I mean, we appreciate the guidance, the reference articles, the peer support, but they are just so many, sometimes you even have difficulty in choosing which source to consult.

Excerpt 11: I think feedback on review is surprisingly difficult, at least for us. I used to assume that reviewing a book is easy, just copy the content and say a few nice things. But after formulating and joint production, I realize it requires rich knowledge and expert perception. Otherwise you can't deal with those conflicting peer queries, and peer feedback is no more than a chit-chat, wishy-washy, nothing insightful.

According to the interviewees, peer feedback of book review poses unique cognitive restraints. One is the variety of input they receive, including the reviewed book, the reference articles (three sample reviews), the guideline article by Sealey [30], as well as co-writers and peer reviewers. The sheer number of references causes huge difficulties for them, sometimes unable to determine 'which source to consult'. Second, this activity can more easily expose students' weaknesses in knowledge base and in evaluation competence [31]. Although past literature suggests that peer feedback fosters students' evaluation ability in many tasks [32], this study contends that at least in the task of book review students are overwhelmed by the cognitive demands and make limited, if any, progress in

their critical thinking.

4.2.3 Lower confidence in feedback usefulness

In addition to the complaint of a higher cognitive load, the students also report that they are increasingly intimidated and discouraged by the daunting task of review writing.

Excerpt 12: Peer feedback is originally OK, but when combining with the task of review writing, it becomes, eh, how to say, too much for us. Each week we feel dehydrated after giving and receiving comments, but still, we can't see light at the end of the tunnel.

Excerpt 13: We are not sure peer feedback is a good way for improving review writing. Don't get us wrong, it is nice to cooperate and revise each other, it's just, we don't think this is the best efficient way for us beginners. Plus, isn't review writing meant for more experienced scholars, as Sealey warned?

One interesting observation from the interview is that while the students appreciate the arrangement of peer feedback sessions, they feel that they lose courage, if not faith, in continuing their review exercises. One student aptly points out that they 'can't see light at the end of the tunnel'. Another student cites Sealey to report high demand of review writing, and expresses his doubt of task suitability to 'us beginners'. Taken together, the interview script points to two unexpected perceptions: First, the students feel that peer feedback of review writing is intellectually too challenging. Second, they also doubt that this activity is suitable or useful at all for learners at their current proficient level. In fact, the suitability of review writing for beginners has received conflicting views. Mur-Dueñas held that reviewing a book gives the opportunity to read and revise it thoroughly and also to situate it within the research, assessing its main strengths and likely shortcomings, which also allows for the development of important skills and competences for novice (L2) scholars [33]. However, Altinmakas & Bayyurt [19] found that student scholars trying to review books lacked critical thinking skills and EAP skill. They also lacked the ability to construct argument and/or filter and organize ideas. This study further argues that setting up peer feedback sessions in review writing may bring unwanted consequences, like frequent compromises and group disapproval in their feedback. In addition, students themselves may be overwhelmed by its high demands and thus lose confidence in the activity.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study records seven weeks' peer feedback sessions and collected peer students' perceptions under the task of book review writing. Based on the recordings it discovers that feedback sessions are featured with three patterns: empathy, compromise and disapproval. The students' interviews reveal that while peer feedback enhances their sensitivity to review writing, its high cognitive load affects their learning gains and shaken their confidence in feedback usefulness.

Comparing these findings with previous feedback literature, this study argues that the learning benefits of peer feedback is largely dependent on the task-learner relation. If learners are at the relatively low proficiency level but the task is easy and manageable, they are more likely to achieve clear and sustained gains. Conversely, if the task is insurmountable with high cognitive demands, then learners would lose their orientation and even motivation. Therefore, a better design for peer feedback in the academic writing course is that instructors take a step-by-step manner, to provide students with enough scaffolding before rushing to the feedback sessions. Where it is necessary, they could even scrape the peer feedback sessions altogether and give students hands-on training instead. Specific to this study, I would argue that only with considerable knowledge of the topic knowledge (e.g. feedback in L2 classroom) and experiences in writing a few articles can students start to benefit from meaningful, insightful peer discussions.

The methodological implication of this study is the text-talk analysis of feedback sessions. Despite a large number of feedback studies, only recently has the text-talk analysis been fully applied to understand feedback patterns. The strength of this method is to compare what peers write with what they actually say so as to derive a more convincing feedback pattern. The results of text-talk analysis can then be cross-checked with other artefacts (teaching material, retrospective reports, etc.) to improve their reliability.

This study is not without limitation. It only investigates seven weeks' classes at one particular instructional context. More peer feedback sessions or alternative data sources like teacher interviews could be added to confirm the observed feedback patterns. However, given the insufficient inquiries into feedback's learning influences, the author hopes that the current study could serve as a starting point to further investigation into this underexplored yet promising area.

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