

## *Original Paper*

# Enhancing Peer Review Through Critical Reading: A learner Training Model

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### ***Abstract***

*The recursive and complex nature of the composing process, centred on peer review, involves multiple steps in the production of a text such as drafting, revision, rewriting, reshaping, and negotiation of meanings. This paper argues that in order for peer review to be an effective feedback delivery system, L2 students of writing need to be trained on critical reading before they embark on reviewing peers' drafts. The paper further argues that implementation of critical reading can improve the ability of both feedback provider and student writer to work together toward the accomplishment of the process of writing and production of final draft.*

### ***Key words***

*critical reading, learner training, peer review*

### **1. Introduction**

The growing interest in the field of second/foreign language teaching and learning on learner-centred materials and focus on the learner has developed in tandem with a strong tendency of researchers to explore the usefulness and validity of process-oriented and collaborative learning, peer review and revision for learners' written language in L2 writing classrooms (Nelson & Carson, 1998). The shift of focus from the traditional product-approach to process-oriented approach in writing has paved the way for the implementation of collaborative language learning, the composing process and peer review in L2 writing classrooms (James, 1998). The opponents of the product approach believe that the emergence of the process approach translates the need and justifications for new and innovative methodological trends and practices in L2 classrooms which can help language learners maximise their learning and develop better proficiency in L2. Silva (1990), for instance, stated that "the introduction of the process approach to ESL composition seems to have been motivated by dissatisfaction with controlled composition and the current-traditional approach" (p. 15). A typical L2 controlled composition classroom with an absence of

notions of collaborative learning is likely to reflect the development of negative attitudes and feelings, as well as anxiety by learners. According to Dörnyei (2001), “in many contemporary classrooms we can, regrettably, find the covert ‘norm of mediocrity’, which results in learners suffering social consequences for academic success”. Thus, “in such contexts”, Dörnyei claimed “a student’s lack of motivation can often be traced back to a real or imagined fear of being isolated or rejected by their peers” (p. 45). This suggests that the product approach to writing encourages negative competition among learners and minimises opportunities for socially-guided collaborative learning.

Another aspect of the teacher-centred procedure in writing classrooms is an absence of actual involvement of learners providing corrective feedback to peers’ texts. In this context, Atari and Triki (2000) argued that, “teachers tend to approach students’ compositions as final drafts to be evaluated and corrected rather than as texts developed over time and analysed in terms of writer’s intention, readers’ expectations, topic and purpose of writing” (p. 95). In the composing process practice, on the other hand, peer feedback is believed to have positive effects on L2 learner composing skills as it provides socially-supportive context for learning as well as an ample opportunity for student writers to explore, generate and refine ideas before producing final drafts. In the same context, Dörnyei (2001), has advocated cooperative learning by arguing that “studies from all over the world are unanimous in claiming that students in cooperative environments have more positive attitudes towards learning and develop higher self-esteem and self-confidence than in other classroom structures” (p. 100).

The essence of the process approach to writing is that it involves multiple identifiable stages which characterise writing as a recursive process where meanings are discovered; generated ideas are negotiated and revised during text creation (Hyland, K, & Hyland, F, 2006; Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996). The central concern for the writing process approach in this context is the “understanding that writing may be recursive, non-linear, and convoluted, writers are able to modify or even discard chunks of discourse or original plans as they review their writing, reconsider its function, and distance themselves from it in order to meet their readers’ expectations” (Zamel, 1983, p. 166). Thus, the intricate recursive nature of the composing process advocates feedback, active involvement of learners in text modification and revision as crucial elements of collaborative writing environment.

### *1.1 Rationale for Peer Review and Critical Reading*

In spite of the growing volume of research in the composing process, peer review and collaborative learning (Dörnyei, 2001; De Guerrero and Villamil, 1994; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Zamel, 1982, 1983) an important issue that awaits a thorough investigation is the type and quality of reading carried out by reviewers during peer review act, the type of feedback provided and the impact of that on the revision process. In other words, because peer review begins by reading drafts, researchers need to deepen the understanding on the possible positive impact critical reading can provide to the review sessions, feedback and text creation process. This is imperative because research in the composing process has advocated quality peer feedback for text creation. Emphasising the significance of supportive peer feedback for the text creation process, K. Hyland and F. Hyland (2006) argued that “effective peer

response is a key element of helping novice writers to understand how readers see their work” (p. 84). To provide feedback on peer written work through direct review act, students have to read drafts first before embarking on providing any comment on their peers’ essay drafts. Reading the draft then is a key step in the peer review and feedback-giving process. The reviewer, acting as feedback provider is a reader whose effective input is regarded as significant and motivating for the development of the text under construction.

It could be argued that a great deal of peer review act is affected by the type of reading taking place by reviewers. In order for feedback to be effective within the context of the recursive composing, reviewers need proper training whose essential step encompasses knowing what to read and how to read peer drafts and deliver comments on ideas written. According to Ferris (2002) “it could be argued that students can also profitably obtain editing practice through exercises using sample student essays (i.e., not written by anyone in their class), and indeed, such activities are critical to the process of building editing-strategy skills” (pp. 102-103). This view suggests a sound reason for regarding critical reading as an integral part of preparing students for academic success. Thus, critical reading is an important skill peer review participants must be exposed to and develop. In this context, it is useful to advocate the efficacy of integrating critical reading as a core element in the peer review process and as an important mechanism that can guide review process and provide a vital platform for positive feedback that can foster the composing and revision process. Thus, this study primarily focused on the importance of integrating critical reading and peer review in the composing process and collaborative language-learning environment for better feedback that can guide the text creation process.

The study set out to propose theoretical framework for modelling L2 learners into process-oriented and collaborative tasks in the composing process by integrating critical reading into peer review activity. Thus, the study looked into the value of incorporating critical reading in the review process for more effective feedback and in-depth revision. It argued that training L2 writing learners in critical reading in peer review context is imperative as it is deemed effective in fostering the review process, and enhancing the quality of feedback given.

Hence, the theoretical framework proposed by the study for integrating critical reading into peer review is deemed to include crucial elements suitable for the subsequent formulation and construction of an environment conducive for peer review practice and L2 learner development as it covers writer’s ideas analysis, negotiation of meaning, learner training, classroom interaction and peer-social collaboration.

### *1.2 What is Critical Reading?*

Critical reading means evaluating and weighing up the ideas and arguments of the writer. Richards and Schmidt (2002), defined critical reading as a type of “reading in which the reader reacts critically to what he or she is reading, through relating the content of the reading material to personal standards, values, attitudes or beliefs, i.e., going beyond what is given in the text and critically evaluating the relevancy and value of what is read” (p. 134). Critical reading then equips readers with the ability to analyse the text, evaluate and check the writer’s ideas. This suggests the idea that when reading critically, readers think

critically as well. Research has suggested that when students develop critical reading they get opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, and are expected to develop proficiency in academic reading as well. Richards (1998) stated that “critical reading may play a role in developing the capacity for critical thinking so important for success in higher education” (pp. 44-45). Reading critically within the recursive composing act provides students with potential opportunities to develop skills that can boost their learning success in demanding higher education settings.

Critical thinking according to Richards and Schmidt (2002) is seen as “a level of reading comprehension or discussion skills when the learner is able to question and evaluate what is read or heard” (p. 135). Troyka (2002) argues that critical reading and critical thinking are two processes that work in tandem because a reader’s involvement in critical reading calls for thinking critically as well. In the same vein, Cottrell (2008) believes that critical reading and critical thinking are inseparable processes and that critical thinking enables readers to:

- 1) explore the writer’s line of thought in the text
- 2) weigh up the writer’s purpose
- 3) examine the writer’s ideas between the lines to see what is stated and what is implied
- 4) evaluate evidence in the text
- 5) make connections between evidence and ideas
- 6) identify the writer’s conclusions
- 7) draw conclusions on whether the facts and evidence given support the assumptions and arguments made by the writer.

Thus, there are sound reasons why critical reading should be an integral part of the discursive peer review act. Critical reading has an essential role in developing critical thinking.

## **2. Integrating Critical Reading into Peer Review**

The recursive composing process, according to Troyka (2002), begins by planning and shaping in which writers discover and arrange ideas before organising these ideas into drafts on which they receive comments. As far as collaborative learning and composing process are concerned, peer review is widely advocated as an effective strategy for enhancing L2 learners’ composing skills and socio-cognitive abilities, and as an alternative for teacher error treatment technique (Ferris, 2002; Rollinson, 2005; Hansen, 2005). Thus, effective peer review activity for effective feedback is better enhanced by critical reading. Because the composing process calls for writers to get a second opinion on their ideas, feedback should be supported with clearly outlined peer review strategy to enable reviewers to critically assess drafts and tell writers about aspects need to be improved and developed in the course of text creation. It could be argued that reading peer texts carefully and critically allows the students of writing to view things from different perspectives which enables them to discover new meanings and ideas as they evaluate writers’ ideas and meanings. That is, involving L2 learners in peer review after being equipped

with critical reading means creating potential opportunities for effective L2 composing process and skills development.

The process of critical reading involves, according to Fulwiler and Hayakawa (2003), previewing, responding and revising. As an essential step in the critical reading process, previewing allows a reader to gather information about the text. Moreover, critical reading offers readers good opportunities for responding to the text during peer review by evaluating carefully its ideas, arguments, evidence, and structure. A key step at this vital stage of reading critically is meaning construction through annotating. To annotate the text, the reader must read critically and record his/her responses to the writer's ideas and argument. This process of recording reactions to the writer's idea facilitates understanding the text as well as making connection between it and the reader's own experience (Kirsznner & Mandell, 2002). Advocating meaning-making activity Fulwiler and Hayakawa (2003) argued that "annotating, or talking back to a text by writing in the margins, is an excellent way to make that text your own" (p. 20). In fact, "talking back" to the text is a necessary strategy for negotiation of meaning as the reader states points he/she may support, clarify or disagree with for further discussion with peer. Such constructed feedback on writer's ideas, assumptions, text structure and organisation is expected to enhance revision and the process of text creation and reshaping.

In this sense, an integration of peer review and critical reading provides an opportunity for both readers and writers to actively participate in meaning construction and text development. Furthermore, integrating peer review and critical reading is expected to develop reading and text evaluation abilities as well as writing process skills. Being aware of how readers read critically to make meaning of texts, L2 writing students exposed to peer review activities will try to exhibit the features of effective writing in their drafts. In other words, being a part of peer review environment, students will keep in mind facilitating readers' efforts to establish meaning and make connections out of the text under creation.

Critical reading is, therefore, useful for peer review and feedback because it directs the reader to focus on the essential elements of an effective essay or argument beginning from introduction, thesis statement, and ideas development to conclusion. It gives readers an opportunity to organise their evaluation of writer's ideas and try to explore the textual features such as cohesion, text organisation and ideas support and development. Thus, critical reading may grant direct feedback towards a more cohesive text.

The quality of draft reading carried by feedback providers in the peer review process is expected to shape the revision and reshaping process as well. Thus, the quality of revision and progress of writing and generating ideas depend basically on the type of feedback provided. If the review process involves critical reading, then the feedback is expected to be useful for the writing development. It is expected to guide the writing process and bring benefits for both writers and reviewers. However, for peer feedback to be effective, reviewers must understand the text first. This allows reader to identify text features, negotiate meaning and question writer's ideas and argument. Critical reading provides peer review a platform for analysing what is read, evaluating writer's ideas and conclusion. The multi-level nature of critical reading makes it a vital part of peer review and collaborative learning environment. In other

words, critical reading is a central step in the whole composing process because it is connected to feedback which affects the revision process. In this sense, critical reading is expected to enhance negotiation of meaning which shapes the revision process.

Hence, integrating peer review and critical reading can be justified as effective for enhancement of the composing process and learner language and skills development on the basis of the following assumptions:

- 1) it aids in critical thinking
- 2) it raises learners' awareness of the importance of connecting meaning to ideas
- 3) it makes readers view writer's ideas as negotiable rather than postulated facts
- 4) it focuses readers' attention to textual features and meaning
- 5) critical reading makes critical writers
- 6) readers view writers' ideas from different perspectives
- 7) it facilitates meaning-making and connections
- 8) it enhances social skills and collaboration, and
- 9) it brings readers closer to the text under review.

Thus, the proposed theoretical framework suggests that the integration of critical reading into peer review enhances the components of the recursive composing process. When learners participating in peer review are equipped with efficient skills of reading critically, it is believed that, they might develop effective reading and writing competences. This has great implications on learner training and language classroom practice.

### 3. Concluding Remarks

To conclude, critical reading in the context of the composing process encompasses strategies as crucial aspects that integrate and interact with other necessary factors of peer review including drafting, negotiation of meaning, meaning construction, revision and application. For peer review to be effective, text evaluation and feedback must be guided by well-designed learner training on critical reading. Involving students in integrated critical reading into peer review practices would provide rich learning experience within the social context of the composing process.

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