

The affective effects of the revisions stage of the writing process

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Johnny is a typical adolescent novice writer, who like most teenagers his age, despises the thought of looking stupid in front of his classmates. His teacher also makes him kind of nervous, especially when she gives writing assignments and asks him to interchange papers with his peers. The prospect of having his teacher revise his paper does not make him feel too comfortable either. The fact is, the thought of peer revision and teacher evaluation makes him so anxiety-ridden that it often impedes his ability to proceed with his writing.

This scenario, according to composition experts, is more common than composition teachers would hope, particularly when incorporated into a process-approach teaching strategy. Teaching composition through process inherently recognizes the cognitive steps that a writer undertakes when trying to transform ideas into words. Although there are many different recipes for how to pedagogically implement the process approach, there is agreement among experts that revision plays a major role. Not only is revision an internal process that writers continually implement in their work throughout all stages of the rhetorical task, but it also needs to be a part of the process imposed from the teacher's perspective, so that student writers have feedback from their audience before their final piece is completed.

The problem is that this revision process, where students must submit their work to the criticism of peers and teacher often causes anxiety, and although this anxiety may sometimes stimulate the student to better performance, it more often than not results in frustration and stunted progress. Adolescent writers, who are particularly sensitive to group acceptance and teacher praise, are at high risk when considering this issue. The purpose of this study is to investigate writing anxiety when confronted with different types of revision. In essence, the question to be answered is, «Does the revision stage of the writing process cause more writing anxiety in adolescent writers when considering peer revision or teacher revision?»

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher on this project was working under three basic assumptions which will only be briefly dealt with here due to space restrictions. They are:

- A. Writing is a process, both cognitive and pedagogical (Flower and Hayes, 1984; Berthoff, 1982; D'Aoust, 1987).
- B. Revision is a necessary stage in the writing process (Blau, 1987; Perl, 1980; Golab, 1994; Willis, 1993; Kyrby and Liner, 1981).
- C. Revision can be an anxiety-provoking activity, whether done by peers or by the teacher (Berthoff, 1982; McLeod, 1987; Larson, 1985).

3. SUBJECTS AND METHODOLOGY

The subjects of this experiment were two groups of native English-speaking 7th and 8th grade students in an international school in Santiago, Chile. Students were first assigned to write a narrative essay, following instructions and strategies previously given by the teacher. After the students wrote their first drafts, they were randomly assigned into groups of four. With a list of revision tasks given by the teacher, students did silent revisions of each others' papers, making comments in the margins. An oral revision followed where the group was asked to come to a consensus concerning each paper's evaluation. With these comments in mind, students then undertook their second drafts and repeated the silent revision activity. Students were then asked to fill out a survey regarding their attitudes toward the revision process, juxtaposing their feelings toward student revision and teacher revision.

5. RESULTS

Thirty-three students were given a measuring instrument containing twelve questions. The highest score possible was 60. The average score of the students was calculated at 46.79%, with a standard deviation of 4.835. The students surveyed demonstrated an extremely favorable attitude toward peer and teacher correction (77.98%), with the discrimination data showing very little difference in scores between students (28.33%). The reliability of the measuring instrument was also high where the estimated similarity between the demonstrated and real attitudes of the students was calculated at 69.09%.

The T-Student equation was used to discover if a difference existed between students' attitudes toward teacher revision as opposed to student revision. To make this T-Student calculation, the investigator hypothesized that the students' attitudes toward peer and teacher revision would be relatively equal. It was discovered, however, that there is a significant difference ($\alpha = .05$) in favor of students' attitudes toward teacher revision as opposed to peer revision. However, when ($\alpha = .01$), no significant difference was noted. Therefore, although there was a degree of statistical significance with 95% security, no significance was found at 99%.

The subjects' responses on the survey indicated high acceptance of both peer and teacher revision, however, there was a slight difference between the feelings they had toward peer revision as opposed to teacher revision. Although students did not demonstrate great discomfort with peer revision methodology, they did show a preference for teacher revision. The question to be answered now is, what are the contributing factors that make students feel less comfortable in front of their peers as compared to their reactions toward the teacher? The answer is multi-faceted and relatively complex. Among the possible explanations are 1) the adolescent age of the subjects; 2) the experience and previous pedagogical formation of the students; and 3) group selection.

Adolescence is a delicate period of life. Not only are children in the physical transitional stage to adulthood, but they are also going through psychological and emotional transformations. Being the outsider is a difficult position (Stassen-McLaughlin, 1991), and being put under scrutiny by peers has the potential result of the student being pushed out. Furthermore, two of the most important components of students' self-esteem include feelings of being well-liked and feelings of doing well academically (Manning and Lucking, 1993). These components are also put under fire when students' writing is being evaluated.

Another possible cause for the lower disposition of the students toward peer revision may

rest in the fact that they are not as accustomed to working with their peers as they are with the teacher. Traditional methods of education place the teacher in an omniscient, omnipotent position, and call for minimal interaction between students. The teacher has always been the provider of information and the evaluator of progress, so when the role changes, and students are asked to work together to revise, improve, and evaluate, the sudden shift may catch them off guard and make them feel uncomfortable.

The groups in this study were randomly-selected. This was done to avoid ability grouping and the negative affective repercussions of students who are not invited to join a group. However, although teacher appointed groups have been shown to be more effective, most students in this study would have preferred to elect their own group members. During an informal feedback session after the application of the survey, students mentioned that their responses toward peer revision would have been more highly affective if they could have chosen their own groups. Therefore, the lower affective response toward peer revision could be a result of the fact that the students were grouped randomly without consulting them on their preferences. Students were grouped with others who were not necessarily their friends.

6. CONCLUSION

Thirty-three students in the seventh and eighth grade at an international school participated in an experimental process to discover whether their level of comfort was equal when confronted with peer as opposed to teacher revision. After progressing through the initial steps of the writing process (pre-writing, first draft), the students were put into randomly-selected cooperative groups and were asked to revise each other's work according to pre-determined evaluation criteria. The teacher then handed out a survey that measured the students' comfort level juxtaposing teacher versus student revision methodology.

Through the implementation of the T-Student statistical measure, it was discovered that a statistically significant difference exists between the levels of anxiety toward teacher and student revision – in favor of teacher revision with level of significance of .05. However, this significance was proven to be slight in that with a level of significance of .01, there was no difference noted.

Nevertheless, a difference does exist, and students do feel less comfortable when being revised by their peers. Possible reasons are related with the adolescent age of the student, his inexperience with cooperative grouping teaching strategies, and the methodology used to form the peer groups. However, teachers can improve the effectiveness of group work by structuring lessons, curricula, and courses cooperatively and implementing the five essential elements of interdependence, interaction, accountability, social skills, and group processing.

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