

Feedback Revisited: The Impact of Peer Commentary on Students' Attitudes and Writing Performance in the EFL Classroom

Alexandra Anastasiadou* & Parodos Aristotelous

*State School Advisor-Teacher trainer in the Regional Directorate of Education for Central Macedonia Greece, 65Leoforos Georgikis Sholis

Thessaloniki Greece 57001

E-mail: dhm3kat@yahoo.gr

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to delve into young learners' perceptions towards peer feedback which is used during the applicability of the "process writing" approach in learning English as a foreign language as well as the impact of peer review on their writing performance. To this end, a study was conducted at the sixth grade of two Greek state primary schools involving two experimental (44 students) and two control (46 students) groups. Entry and exit questionnaires were administered to the participants of the study in order to explore their perceptions in the beginning and the end of the research and trace any differences due to the intervention, regarding both inter-group and intra-group responses. The data analysis confirms an inter- and intra- group change of attitudes and points to the metacognitive awareness of the experimental group students as far as their notions towards writing are concerned. Moreover, the subjects' performance was measured in a pre- and post-writing test revealing a statistically significant change of the written capacity of the two groups corroborating, thus, the salience of receiving peer commentary during writing in English as an FL.

Key words: Peer feedback; process-writing; reflecting on the learning process; fostering positive attitudes towards L2 writing; improving writing skills.

1. Introduction

In the Chomsky a theory of language the role of error in both native and second language learning has been redefined. Instead of being identified as “vicious tendencies” (Chomsky cited in White, 1988, p. 95), mistakes can be viewed as a proof of improvement. Therefore, errors are considered both as inevitable and as an inseparable constituent of learning a language. Seen in this light, errors acquire a positive status in writing as they can be transformed into useful tools to help learners locate their deficiencies and make an effort to ameliorate their performance.

Since errors are indispensable in the process of the students’ cognitive and linguistic improvement, feedback is imperative as it is the predominant means to trace errors. The theoretical basis of feedback is consistent with Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which points out that children can improve their performance through the collaborative interaction between themselves and the skilled assistance provided by an adult or a peer. Within this framework, in the current research this support is provided to students by the peers in the stages of revising their written text through aiding them to identify and rectify their errors. Thus, the significance of negotiating meaning among the learners is highlighted in the procedure of developing their cognitive abilities and building their social interaction skills. Therefore, in the Vygotsyan perspective the students manage to proceed from their original developmental stage to a higher level maximising their potential. Finally, Hyland (2003) avers that feedback is regarded as a key issue in language learning in general and in learning how to write efficiently, in particular.

The implementation of peer feedback has been looked at within the process-writing approach which surfaced as an opposition to the linearity and excessive preoccupation with form and prescribed text patterns that constituted the focal point of the previous pedagogies to teaching writing. In the process writing philosophy, the main concern is the process of writing, which is deemed as a cyclical and problem-solving sequence to indentify and negotiate meaning. Under no circumstances, does this

concentration on process imply any negligence of form, though. On the contrary, Hedge (1994) stresses that process writing rates equally both form and procedure, incorporating, at the same time, the learners' level and preferences for writing. Elaborating more on the underlying assumptions of process writing other theorists like (Hedge, 1988; Byrne, 1988; White & Arndt, 1991) maintained its creative thinking dimension encompassing other important tenets, as well. These entailed the purpose, the intended audience, context and collaboration among the students during composing and revising, and between the students and the teacher integrating, in this way, the interactive and social angles in writing. Last, White & Arndt (1991) pointed to the importance of the experimentation with the characteristics of various text types.

In the current research, the process writing paradigm was singled out with the aim of enabling the young learners to familiarise themselves with the process of presenting diverse discourse texts and participating in the correction of their own and their peers' texts through constructive feedback. In this way, they will become able to gauge their own progress in writing and way of learning. In this decision, the researcher was greatly influenced by the tenets of (1) Atkinson (2003 and personal communication, March 06, 2006) who advises teachers to employ the process-writing method and expand it by embracing social and cultural elements and (2) Matsuda (2003) who stressed the necessity of the continuation of the process paradigm in the post-process (Trimbur, 1994) era whereby the importance of process writing was questioned and a social turn was adopted. In an effort to argue in favour of process writing, Matsuda (2003), supported the view that the importance of process writing is prevalent but the multiplicity of L2 writing theories and approaches should also be acknowledged.

1.1 Presentation of feedback

There is not only one way of giving commentary to student writing, neither is there one unique provider. Consequently, feedback is classified into diverse categories concerning the source and the method. Teacher feedback and peer feedback are the most common types presented by O'Brien (1999). The present study focused on peer response which was

based on a correction code adapted from Pinheiro-Franco (1996) and Chrysochoos, Chrysochoos & Thompson (2002), (appendix A), where there are symbols along with their meaning and some examples.

1.1.1 Peer feedback

Peer feedback involves provision of constructive criticism in the form of suggestions or commentary among learners while reading and assessing each other's pieces of writing. Many researchers (Edge, 1989; Lee, 1997; Frankenberg-Garcia, 1999) claim that it is essential to make it the norm that students participate in the correction and assessment of their texts individually, in pairs, groups or as a whole class both while writing and after the text has been produced. Developing this notion more, Liu & Hansen (2002, p. 75) state that in this process the “learners undertake roles and responsibilities normally assumed by formally and properly trained teachers”. Therefore, students become active participants in their own learning process and the focus shifts from a teacher-centred approach to teaching and learning to a learner-centred one, as corroborated by Farrah (2012).

1.2 Description of the process-oriented pedagogy

Since peer commentary (Frankenberg- Garcia, 1999) attains the best results if applied during writing, the best approach to implement in-writing comments is the process-writing one because it incorporates the stages of drafting, redrafting and revising.

Emig (1971) was the first scholar to divide process writing into five stages: (a) prewriting (being given initiative to write, generating ideas, outlining and rehearsing, writing down notes), (b) drafting (writing in progress individually or collaboratively), (c) revision (replanning, adjusting their on-going text according to audience, and redrafting after receiving input from peer or teacher correction), (d) editing (getting ready for publishing the written text), and (e) publication (sharing the final text with the teacher and the fellow students).

While this whole procedure is in progress, the writers take into account the intended reader, the aim of writing, the specifications of the

topic, the required organization of the genre of the text and the social context within which writing is formulated (White & Arndt, 1991). Seen in this light, writing is recursive and in this sense it empowers the writers to move backwards and forwards following the stages of writing.

Furthermore, the teacher, the peers and the writer collaborate in a shared endeavor, namely the writing procedure and the creation of the text. This cooperation is best materialized during drafting, revising and redrafting when they capitalize on teacher and partner commentary.

2. Research background

2.1 Review of research on peer feedback

A significant body of research geared towards the benefit that can be accrued from peer feedback providing evidence that peer response can promote both the students' linguistic and cognitive proficiency.

Hedgecock & Lefwowitz (1992) conducted an empirical study with a control and an experimental group mastering basic L2 writing skills. The control group were administered only the teacher's written comments, whereas the experimental members were allocated into small groups each one consisting of three students who read their texts to their peers followed by receiving and giving oral response. Recapitulating their findings, the researchers admitted that peer review enabled the learners to self-correct their errors, develop their skills in a supportive environment and gradually become competent writers. Two subsequent studies were conducted by Villamil & De Guerrero (1996, 1998) employing peer revision whereby the learners had been offered adequate practice. The students were divided in dyads in which one student assumed the role of the writer while the other acted as a reader whose task was to aid the writer to rectify his/her writing. This collaboration proved that peer response boosted the students' linguistic potential, aided the authors to realise the importance of a sense of audience and internalize the social dimension of writing.

Another representative study of whether to employ peer reinforcement or not was conducted by Jacobs, Curtis, Brain & Huang

(1998). The participating students, who were familiar with process-writing, were asked to fill in anonymous questionnaires stating their preference of lack thereof of peer response and try to account for their choice. A striking percentage of the responders (93%) replied that they favoured student assistance while writing, the main reasons being: (a) partners were capable of indentifying problematic areas which the writers themselves could not locate on their own and (b) other students could discover more ideas.

Al- Jamal’s (2009) study on peer response entailed a different approach in that it differentiated between genders (male and female) rather than mixed gender experimental and control group. In the pre-questionnaire both genders were not inclined towards using peer reinforcement while in the post-course questionnaire both groups admitted the usefulness of peer reviewing, increased their confidence to make suggestions to peers’ work and were free from their embarrassment to offer comments in the writing class.

A last study referring to peer feedback was the one by Farrah (2012) who investigated both the effectiveness of peer feedback and the process writing approach to teaching writing, with 105 students of both sexes from an undergraduate writing course implemented in the English Department at Hebron University. The instrumentation tools were a pre- and post- questionnaire which revealed that experimental group learners considered peer feedback as beneficial.

As there is a scarcity of studies on peer feedback while writing at the upper state primary school both in Greece and internationally, this experiment was ventured in the Greek state primary school environment so as to investigate the efficacy of the provision of peer commentary during the process-writing context to ameliorate the students’ attitudes, cognition and performance at this level.

3. Aim and scope of the study

The aim of the current study was to explore the application of peer feedback during a writing component incorporating the process-writing approach in teaching young learners in the Greek state primary school

with the aim of exploring their attitudes towards writing concerning the employment of peer feedback. Furthermore, it sought to probe the enhancement of the students' writing capacity due to the implementation of peer review. The study was carried out in the sixth grade of two primary schools in a town in Northern Greece using the course book *Fun way English 3* assigned by the Greek Ministry of Education. (The specific schools are not provided for anonymity reasons. If you feel though I should mention them, please let me know).

The original assumption of the present research is that it is the lack of active student participation in the correction of their own and their fellow students' texts and in the whole writing process in general, which inhibits learners from unfolding their writing ability in English and developing useful insights into the ways they think learn and write in L2. Bearing all these in mind, a new syllabus was prepared for the purpose of the present research (Author, 2010) based on the "process-focused" (White & Arndt, 1991) approach to writing. Moreover, the present study attempted to seek whether, during the intervention, participation and collaboration is promoted through mutual feedback and finally if "metacognition" (Bruner, 1988 p. 265) is instilled on learners, in the form of the evolvment of their potential to reflect on their own learning and thinking. Additionally, their writing proficiency was put under the lens.

To this end, the following research questions were addressed:

- Will the students of the experimental group of the sixth grade of Greek state primary schools, who receive peer feedback during the implementation of process writing tuition, alter their attitudes and perceptions towards the importance of peer commentary and change their stances towards writing as compared with the control group members?
- Will the experimental group members benefit from fellow-student commentary and manage to outperform their control group counterparts in terms of their writing ability in English?

4. Methodology and design

A longitudinal research was carried out lasting one school year which was part of the survey of a doctoral thesis. The study was carried out in the sixth grade of two state primary schools in a northern town in Greece presenting the traits of the majority of the state elementary schools all over Greece as far as the student population is concerned, in that the vast majority of the students are Greek and a percentage of them come from families who have emigrated from the countries of the former Soviet Union, Albania, Poland and Romania. The instructor was the researcher.

4.1 Participants

Four mixed proficiency classes were the subjects of the research: two experimental (44 students) and two controls (46 students). One class from each of the two schools was randomly defined as the experimental group while the other two classes were selected as control groups. In Greek state schools, the students are allocated in classes alphabetically from the first grade, therefore, limiting the risk of selection bias to a minimum.

The control group members attended the materials of the course book while the experimental group students were taught seven writing lessons specially designed by the researcher in accordance with the process writing philosophy. Both groups were asked to produce the same writing assignments so as to reach comparable results.

4.2 Instrumentation

For the purpose of the present study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques was selected with the aim of “ensuring greater reliability through triangulation” (Hyland, 2002 p. 158). The objective was to apply more than one method of obtaining data in order to guarantee a more extensive, balanced and reliable research. Furthermore, dependence on a single method exclusively was avoided, which could affect bias or even distort the event under investigation.

More specifically the quantitative technique entailed the employment of:

- I. A pre-course and post-course questionnaire were administered to the participating groups of students in order to specify their preferences towards writing and pinpoint to any dissimilarities in the entry and exit point of the study between the two groups and within the groups, as well. The questionnaire (Appendix B) consisted of two parts: a) Part one referred to: 1) General attitudes towards writing, 2) Attitudes toward specific techniques which can help students improve their writing and 3) Attitudes towards peer correction based on the questionnaire used by Hedgecock & Lefkowitz (1994) and b) Part two entailed: Background information about attendance of lessons in private foreign language schools or private lessons at home.
- II. An entry writing test determined the students' writing proficiency before the research whereas an exit writing test of equal difficulty measured their writing ability after the study in an effort to evaluate the influence of the intervention on the participants' performance. Two raters assessed the pre- and post-tests one of whom was the researcher.

The qualitative technique involved the investigation of the presentation and sequencing of the ideas in the learners' texts as well as their coherence during consecutive drafts in a writing lesson after having received peer feedback.

4.3 Procedure

During the stages of drafting, revising and redrafting the experimental group members received treatment as follows:

1. As the first lesson aimed at familiarizing students with diverse genres and their traits as well as identifying the purpose and target audience, it did not require any actual writing from the students. Therefore, feedback started in the second lesson in which students began to produce pieces of writing.

2. In lesson two, the students produced two drafts receiving feedback only from the teacher following a specific checklist (appendix A) which was fully explained to them.
3. In order to facilitate students to benefit from providing and receiving feedback, a special lesson was designed for the experimental group, supplying them with ample practice with correction symbols. The researcher prepared a correction code, explicitly explained the meaning of its symbols to the students. Then the researcher provided the students with two texts with correction symbols and asked them to locate the mistaken forms and correct them. This task was carried out as a whole class activity. In the third text, the students were expected to individually spot the errors and mark them with the equivalent symbols, so as to be capable of applying this procedure when trying to rectify their partners' writings. Most of the students did not find any difficulty in identifying the errors, even though it was the first time they encountered a correction code. As it was anticipated, the weak students were in need of more practice and guidance which was offered to them by the researcher and more skilled peers.
4. In lessons three, four, five and seven the students were “scaffolded” (Bruner 1975, 1978), that is, they were provided with assistance by their peers in their first draft, whereas the second draft received intervention from the teacher. Lesson six differed in the preparation and correction. The students worked in pairs, each dyad producing two drafts and a final product. The pairs corrected each other's first draft, while the teacher intervened in the second draft. Each writing lesson focused on diverse aspects of error correction namely organisation of ideas, spelling errors, punctuation errors, wrong use of verbs, good points, weak points, etc. (see symbols for error correction in Appendix A). This selective error treatment was employed in order to establish priorities and facilitate the learners to participate in error rectification rather than involve them in the correction of all their errors which would trigger confusion and discouragement (White & Arndt, 1991). Both peer and teacher

response was based on the same symbols which were predetermined for each writing lesson.

Both groups were provided with feedback by the instructor to their final product which aimed at highlighting good points and indicating recurring errors so as to help them improve their writing without disheartening them, though. Moreover, the two groups received similar summative treatment with a view to attempting to verify the first research question, that is, if the peer feedback obtained during process writing manages to differentiate the students' perceptions towards writing.

4.4 Analysis of the collected data

The statistical analysis was conducted employing the SPSS 15.0 (SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL) and the significant value was set at 5% level. More specifically, the independent samples *t*-test was employed to measure the attitudes and the performance of both the control and experimental group at the entry and exit point of the study. The paired *t*-test was used to determine whether a significant difference exists between the average values of the attitudes towards certain aspects of writing of either the control or the experimental group (within group comparison) both at the beginning and the end of the intervention. Finally, the chi-square test counted the statistical significance or lack thereof of the answers of both groups to certain perceptions towards writing techniques at the outset and the final point of the research.

5. Findings and interpretation

This part of the paper introduces and interprets the results of the study in an effort to detect whether the research questions were substantiated, to seek for ostensible explanations and discuss the pedagogical implications of the obtained data.

5.1 Quantitative analysis-Questionnaires

5.1.1 General attitudes towards writing

For the sake of our discussion, it must be stated that whenever the Likert scale was used the codification of the questionnaire items was as

follows: always- 1, usually- 2, sometimes- 3, rarely- 4, never- 5, clarifying that the lower the mean score, the more the students agree with the given statement.

A. Experimental and control group comparison

The independent samples *t*-test was employed to trace any differences of opinion between the two groups before the study started. Table 1 clearly illustrates that the two groups exhibited a similar reaction towards cooperation among the students and the usefulness of using an error correction codification. They opposed to cooperation and the use of symbols for the improvement of their writing.

Tick (✓) the phrase which shows what you think about each sentence	Group	N	Mean	SD	<i>p</i>
1. I can spot my mistakes if the teacher gives us a code for error correction	E	44	3.27	1.264	.469
	C	46	3.48	1.410	
2. I feel embarrassed when my classmates know my mistakes	E	44	2.57	1.283	.436
	C	46	2.35	1.386	
3. I would like my partner to help me to correct my mistakes and organise my text	E	44	4.07	.950	.069
	C	46	4.46	1.048	

Table (1): General attitudes towards writing of the experimental (E) and control (C) group prior to the study.

Table (2): presents the responders’ stances towards the same issues at the final point of the study. The independent samples *t*-test revealed that, whereas the control group remained almost in the same levels, the experimental group altered their perceptions radically. This finding shows that the experimental participants’ attitudinal reaction towards writing was influenced by the application of peer feedback during the process writing component, hence, substantiating the first research question. Specifically they value the importance of commentary in the form of using an error correction code and receiving suggestions from their partners.

Tick (✓) the phrase which shows what you think about each sentence	Group	N	Mean	SD	p
1. I can spot my mistakes if the teacher gives us a code for error correction	E	44	1.66	.861	.000
	C	46	4.65	.900	
2. I feel embarrassed when my classmates know my mistakes	E	44	4.50	.849	.000
	C	46	1.74	1.255	
3. I would like my partner to help me to correct my mistakes and organise my text	E	44	1.61	.689	.000
	C	46	4.48	.863	

Table (2): General attitudes towards writing of the experimental (E) and control (C) group after the study.

B. 1 Intra- group results in the beginning and the end of the research – Experimental

While the preceding section compared and contrasted the responses of the two groups both at the outset and the final point of the study with the aim of tracing homogeneity in the beginning and finding out similarities and differences of attitudes at the end, this part will explore the two groups separately so as to measure any changes of their opinions.

The paired *t*-test yielded statistically significant results (Table 3) clarifying that the impact of the application of feedback triggered an overwhelming alteration of the experimental subjects’ opinion towards writing, namely the importance of receiving assistance from a peer through a code.

Tick (✓) the phrase which shows what you think		N	Mea	SD	p
1 I can spot my mistakes if the teacher gives us a code for error correction	Pre	44	3.27	1.264	.000
	Post	44	1.66	.861	
2 I feel embarrassed when my classmates know my mistakes	Pre	44	2.57	1.283	.000
	Post	44	4.50	.849	
3 I would like my partner to help me to correct my mistakes and organise my	Pre	44	4.07	.950	.000
	Post	44	1.61	.689	

Table (3): General attitudes towards writing of the experimental group prior to and after the study.

B. 2 Intra- group results in the beginning and the end of the research – Control

On the contrary, Table 4 exhibits a noticeable finding, which is that although the control subjects’ perceptions presented statically significant changes in items 1 and 2, they became more negative concerning the use of error correction about which they had obtained no practice whatsoever and felt more embarrassed (item 2) or similarly indifferent (item 3) when exposed to peer intervention since they are not accustomed to cooperative error correction.

Tick (✓) the phrase which shows what			N	Mea	SD	P
1	I can spot my mistakes if the teacher gives us a code for error correction	Pre	46	3.48	1.410	.000
		Post	46	4.65	900	
2	I feel embarrassed when my classmates know my mistakes	Pre	46	2.35	1.386	.004
		Post	46	1.74	1.255	
3	I would like my partner to help me to correct my mistakes and organise	Pre	46	4.46	1.048	.868
		Post	46	4.48	.863	

Table (4): General attitudes towards writing of the control group prior to and after the study.

5.1.2 Attitudes towards specific techniques which can help students improve their writing

A. Comparison between the experimental and control group before and after the study

Question 3 (Appendix B): Your partner can help you to correct your errors

Before the study

In Table 5.1 the members of both groups provided equally high percentages in acknowledging unfavorable disposition towards the importance of peer correction, a fact mirroring the prevalent teaching practice in Greek school reality where students are not accustomed to sharing their piece of writing and submitting it to the scrutiny of their classmates due to the national cultural context within which the Greeks

tend to keep ownership of their own writings.

EXPERIMENTAL				CONTROL				TOTAL			
Good idea		Bad idea		Good idea		Bad idea		Good idea		Bad idea	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	2.3	43	97.7	3	6.5	43	93.5	4	4.4	86	95.6

$$\chi^2(1) = 0.956, p = 0.328$$

Table (5.1): Your partner can help you to correct your errors.

After the study

Table 5.2 corroborates the impact of peer feedback on the experimental group which unanimously endorsed the salience of collaboration with their fellow-students, whereas the control group retained the minimal percentage approval of peer correction and kept the idea of text ownership in a very limited perspective. Hence, the statistical variation reached 0.000.

EXPERIMENTAL				CONTROL				TOTAL			
Good idea		Bad idea		Good idea		Bad idea		Good idea		Bad idea	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
44	100	0	0.0	2	4.3	44	95.7	46	51.1	44	48.9

$$\chi^2(1) = 82.344, p = 0.000$$

Your partner can help you to correct your errors

5.1.3 Attitudes towards peer correction (Appendix B)

A. Experimental versus control group

Comparing the reaction of the two group members in the beginning of the research (Table 6) only one statistically significant response (at $0.038 < 0.050$) emerged, which refers to the provision of comments from a partner on a fellow student’s weak points (item 10). This difference indicates a more adverse consideration to a peer offering negative commentary on their writings of the control group compared to their

experimental counterparts. It is worth mentioning that both groups were similar in their unfavourable attitude to correction originating from a fellow student because peer correction is a very rare practice in the Greek educational system. The questionnaire included ten items which can be divided into four parts, namely commentary on a) content, writing style and organisation (items 1, 2, 3), b) mechanics (items 4, 5, 6), c) ways of highlighting the errors (7, 8) and d) strong or weak points (items 9, 10). The purpose of this multi-item questionnaire was to incorporate various aspects of error correction with a view of encompassing all possible areas concerning peer review.

Generally I improve in writing when my partner	Group	N	Mean	SD	p
1. Comments on the content of my writing (i.e. ideas, evidence, examples, etc.)	E	44	4.05	.834	.533
	C	45	4.16	.824	
2. Comments on the organization of my writings (i.e. paragraph sequencing, logical development, etc.)	E	44	4.09	.858	.342
	C	46	4.26	.828	
3. Comments on my writing style (i.e. expression, tone, etc.)	E	44	4.11	.868	.422
	C	45	3.96	.976	
4. checks my vocabulary (i.e. accurate word usage)	E	44	4.00	.940	1.000
	C	46	4.00	1.011	
5. highlights grammatical mistakes	E	43	4.33	.808	.412
	C	46	4.46	.690	
6. Highlights mechanical mistakes (i.e. punctuation, spelling, capitalization, etc.)	E	43	4.21	.940	.473
	C	46	4.35	.875	
7. identifies errors with correction symbols	E	43	4.30	.989	.529
	C	45	4.42	.783	
8. highlights errors with a red-colored pen	E	44	4.30	.930	.949
	C	46	4.28	.958	

9. comments on the good points of my writing	E	44	2.50	1.067	.537
	C	46	2.35	1.251	
10. comments on the weak points of my writing	E	44	4.18	.922	.038
	C	46	4.57	.807	

Table (6): Attitudes towards peer correction of the experimental (E) and control (C) group at the entry point of the study.

The respondents' beliefs towards peer feedback at the end of the research are presented in Table 7. The independent samples *t*-test revealed a significant variation at $0.000 < 0.050$ between the two groups in all items except the ninth where they reacted similarly to the receipt of encouraging classmate commentary. The findings indicated a clear preference of the experimental group concerning peer feedback, while the original aversion of the control group either remained at the same levels (items 1, 2, 6) or became stronger in statements 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10.

Generally I improve in writing when my partner	Group	N	Mean	SD	<i>p</i>
1. Comments on the content of my writing (i.e. ideas, evidence, examples, etc.)	E	44	1.48	.731	.000
	C	46	4.52	.623	
2. Comments on the organisation of my writings (i.e. paragraph sequencing, logical development, etc.)	E	44	1.50	.731	.000
	C	46	4.61	.649	
3. Comments on my writing style (i.e. expression, tone, etc.)	E	44	1.57	.695	.000
	C	46	4.35	.566	
4. A checks my vocabulary (i.e. accurate word usage)	E	44	1.59	.757	.000
	C	46	4.46	.546	
5. highlights grammatical mistakes	E	43	2.74	.759	.000
	C	46	4.70	.553	

6. Highlights mechanical mistakes (i.e. punctuation, spelling, capitalization, etc.)	E	44	2.75	.651	.000
	C	45	4.71	.626	
7. identifies errors with correction symbols	E	44	1.43	.789	.000
	C	46	4.78	.417	
8. highlights errors with a red-colored pen	E	44	3.23	.711	.000
	C	46	4.85	.363	
9. comments on the good points of my writing	E	44	1.34	.745	.335
	C	46	1.50	.810	
10. comments on the weak points of my writing	E	44	2.00	.863	.000
	C	46	4.89	.315	

Table (7): Attitudes towards peer correction of the experimental (E) and control (C) group at the exit point of the study

B. 1 Responses of the experimental group in the beginning and the end of the research.

The original and final preferences of the experimental group towards peer correction were traced in Table 8, signifying an overwhelmingly significant diversity of 0.000 in all items. This sheds light on the fact that their original opposition to peer feedback was diverted because of the integration of the process component in their syllabus as well as the cooperation in error treatment, which is a key point in the process writing philosophy.

Generally I improve in writing when my		N	Mea	SD	p	
1	Comments on the content of my writing (i.e. ideas, evidence,	Pre	44	4.05	.834	.00
		Post	44	1.48	.731	0
2	Comments on the organization of my writings sequencing, logical	Pre	44	4.09	.858	.00
		Post	44	1.50	.731	0
3	Comments on my writing style (i.e. expression, tone, etc.)	Pre	44	4.11	.868	.00
		Post	44	1.57	.695	0
4	checks my vocabulary (i.e. accurate word usage)	Pre-	44	4.00	.940	.00
		Post	44	1.59	.757	0

Generally I improve in writing when my		N	Mea	SD	p	
5	highlights grammatical mistakes	Pre	42	4.33	.816	.00
		Post	42	2.76	.759	
6	Highlights mechanical mistakes (i.e. punctuation, spelling,	Pre	43	4.21	.940	.00
		Post	43	2.74	.658	
7	identifies errors with correction symbols	Pre	43	4.30	.989	.00
		Post	43	1.44	.796	
8	highlights errors with a red-colored pen	Pre	44	4.30	.930	.00
		Post	44	3.23	.711	
9	comments on the good points of my writing	Pre	44	2.50	1.067	.00
		Post	44	1.34	.745	
10	comments on the weak points of my writing	Pre	44	4.18	.922	.00
		Post	44	2.00	.863	

Table (8): Attitudes towards peer correction of the experimental group at the entry and the exit point of the study.

B. 2 Responses of the control group in the beginning and the end of the research.

Similarly, the answers of the control group revealed statistically significant differentiation at the outset and end of the study in all items as seen in Table 9. Nevertheless, it is clearly evident that attitude alteration was opposite to the change of the experimental group. The experimental group ended up exhibiting overwhelming preference of peer correction, while the control group reinforced their original aversion to all dimensions of peer feedback apart from item 9, which is about receiving positive comments by a peer. Thus, the first research question was verified.

Generally I improve in writing when my		N	Mean	SD	p	
1	Comments on the content of my writing (i.e. ideas, evidence,	Pre	45	4.16	.824	.006
		Post	45	4.53	.625	
2	Comments on the organisation of my writings (i.e. paragraph	Pre	46	4.26	.828	.012
		Post	46	4.61	.649	
3	Comments on my writing style	Pre	45	3.96	.976	.018

Generally I improve in writing when my		N	Mean	SD	p	
	(i.e. expression, tone, etc.)	Post	45	4.36	.570	
4	checks my vocabulary (i.e. accurate word usage)	Pre	46	4.00	.011	.009
		Post	46	4.46	.546	
5	highlights grammatical mistakes	Pre	46	4.46	.690	.026
		Post	46	4.70	.553	
6	Highlights mechanical mistakes (i.e. punctuation, spelling,	Pre	45	4.36	.883	.017
		Post	45	4.71	.626	
7	identifies errors with correction symbols	Pre	45	4.42	.783	.002
		Post	45	4.78	.420	
8	highlights errors with a red-colored pen	Pre	46	4.28	.958	.000
		Post	46	4.85	.363	
9	comments on the good points of my writing	Pre	46	2.35	1.25	.000
		Post	46	1.50	.810	
10	comments on the weak points of my writing	Pre	46	4.57	.807	.008
		Post	46	4.89	.315	

Table (9): Attitudes towards peer correction of the control group at the entry and exit point of the study

In Greece, it is commonplace for students, apart from state school tuition regarding EFL, to receive private instruction in English which is divided in FL schools “frontistiria” or private lessons. This provides evidence about the prestige of the English language in Greek reality, as it is viewed as a means for professional, academic and financial improvement. The item 4 (Appendix B – part two) which focused on the attendance of private tuition for both the control and the experimental subjects brought to surface a striking finding, namely the control group had benefited more than their experimental group counterparts having received tuition at private lessons rather than at private FL language schools. The former kind of tuition is deemed as more effective than the latter, since it addresses the needs of the individual, aiding, therefore, the learners in a more effective way (Table 10).

This result corroborated the fact the experimental group participants’ attitudes towards exploiting commentary on their written texts changed

and their performance improved as a result of the impact of the implementation of peer feedback within the general framework of process-writing rather than any other external variables. Consequently, both research questions were substantiated.

	EXPERIMENTAL		CONTROL		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
FRONTISTIRIO	32	88.9	30	75.0	62	81.6
PRIVATE LESSONS	3	8.3	10	25.0	13	17.1
BOTH	1	2.8	0	0.0	1	1.3

$$\chi^2(2)=4.636, p=0.098$$

Table (10): Did you attend English classes at a private school (frontistirio) or in private lessons at home?

5.2 Quantitative analysis-Entry and exit tests

Table 11 is a clear sign of the homogeneity of the writing performance of the two groups at the onset of the study, since no statistically significant differentiation was disclosed between the experimental and the control group.

GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t - score	p (t-test)
CONTROL	46	4,272	2,62	-1,365	0,176
EXPERIMENTAL	44	5,080	2,98		

Table (11): Independent samples *t*-test for grades at pre-test according to group.

In Table 12 it is explicitly illustrated that the experimental group subjects outperformed the control group students at a high statistical significance of $0,003 < 0.05$.

GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t - score	p (t-test)
CONTROL	45	4.62	2.67	-3.041	0.003
EXPERIMENTAL	44	6.47	3.04		

Table (12): Independent samples *t*-test for grades at post-test according to group.

Therefore the second research question concerning the students' performance was verified.

5.3 Qualitative analysis

Having presented the beneficial influence of peer feedback within the process writing framework on the writing improvement of the experimental group students in the previous section, this part will centre on an attempt to detect evidence of the effects of peer review on the quality of the students' performance. To this end, an analysis of an experimental student's successive drafts will be discussed. This learner's texts will be introduced in exactly the original wording. It should also be stated that, in the specific teaching session, the learners were required to focus on and underline the following errors so that the authors could manage to remedy them:

1. ? I don't understand what you are trying to say
2. G something grammatical is wrong
3. SP spelling mistake
4. P punctuation error
5. C capitalisation error

Student 33 E - Level A2 Lesson seven - Description of a pet

First draft

My pet's name is "Mermedia". She is a fish girl and I have bought her when I was five years old. Mermedia is bluck and a little fat. She eat

food for fish and she leaves in a beautiful bowl with clean water and wonderful water-plant. But every Saturday I put her bowl in a cupboard, 'cause my cousin is visit us with her cat. This kitty is brown with white and he has green eyes. Her name is Fisarionas and he always, when he is coming, he is break a doll of my collections with my dolls. I love Fisarion and we have fun together as and with Mermedia.

Second draft (after receiving peer feedback)

My pet's name is Fisharionas. He is a horse and he has brown eyes. He is brown and he has long hairs and he leaves in our garden and he likes to play with my sister's puppy, Samantha. Samantha is white and she has blue eyes and she loves to come with me at the park for a walk. She is eat food for dogs. Fisharionas is eats horse's food and he is a wonderful player to volley. We play together and because he knock the ball with his head I am call him Voukefala. I love Fishariona as and Samantha. We have fun together.

It can be easily seen that the student took advantage of the peer feedback in the second draft ameliorating its components namely the ideational, organisational and structural. A striking finding is that the content of the first draft altered, in that a fish was selected in the beginning but in the second attempt the focal point was modified presenting a horse. This is in accordance with White & Arndt's (1991) view that, even though learners begin with an overall organisational scenario, they may need to rearrange their original plan as new ideas may surface while they are composing. In other words, writing must be deemed as an on-going replanning and resequencing of both ideas and content instead of a predetermined process in which the ideational and structural organisation is "a preliminary and finite stage" (ibid, p. 78). This is evidential support that rather than numbing the learners' inventiveness and moulding their way of thinking as various opponents (Reid, 1984a, b; Horowitz, 1986; Hyland, 2002) of the process writing approach argued, it furthers their resourcefulness. Limited as the present qualitative analysis as it may be, it explicitly shows that the first part of the second research question was fulfilled, that is the experimental group

students benefited from their fellow students’ review in their writing performance.

6. Discussion

All the data gathered so far corroborate and expand the research review presented in section 2.1. To be more specific, the results obtained from the pre- and post- questionnaires build on Al-Jamal’s (2009) and Farrah’s (2012) studies showing that even though experimental students were not favourably disposed towards peer reinforcement in the beginning of the study, they appreciated its merits at the end of the research.

The analysis also revealed that learners acknowledged the importance of a partner’s contribution to their errors which complies with the findings of Jacobs et al. (1998) that fellow students can help developing writers to spot mistaken forms and develop ideas. The fact that collaboration during written text correction aided students to dispose of the feeling of embarrassment of being exposed to other classmates is aligned with the findings of Villamil & De Guerrero (1996, 1998) which emphasised the importance of having a sense of audience during the composing process and the salience of the social aspect of writing. Finally, the improvement in writing competence and the qualitative analysis disclosed similar results with Hedgecock & Lefkowitz (1992).

A significant finding of the present research which was not adequately stressed in previous studies was the assistance of the provision of a correction code by the teacher which facilitates learners to trace their own and their partners’ errors. Furthermore, brief as the qualitative analysis as it was, it nevertheless, revealed that multiple drafting in the process writing component boosts the learners’ creativity.

7. Teaching implications

An effort will be made in this section to introduce certain recommendations with reference to the provision of peer feedback within the framework of the process-writing approach to teaching writing.

7.1 Providing training on peer commentary

As peer commentary contributes to the development of students' sense of audience, purpose and performance in writing, proper training in peer review is needed that is students should be offered intensive practice on how to conduct peer feedback, which incorporates both receiving and providing commentary, after raising the learners' awareness about the benefits obtained from peer feedback.

7.2 Fostering writing ownership

This shift of focus from regarding students as passive feedback recipients to rendering them into active receivers and transmitters of commentary enhances the learners' sense of writing ownership. Students assume responsibility of their own piece of writing and feel committed to ameliorating their texts, when they are given the opportunity to fully capitalise on peer feedback by incorporating it in subsequent drafts during process-writing.

8. Conclusion

In order to contribute to the need for more research on the effectiveness of peer assessment and the provision of explicit correction symbols, the present study investigated the extent to which the partners' comments and the employment of a code for rectification enabled the students of the experimental group of the sixth grade of Greek state primary schools to change their attitudes towards writing techniques and enhance their writing capacity in comparison to their control group counterparts. It was found that the experimental subjects developed positive attitudes towards peer feedback in their process-writing class. Moreover, it seems that exposure to process-writing techniques offers students insight into their own writing and learning progress and empowers them to acknowledge the benefits of their own participation in the correction of their own and peers' writing. Consequently, the first research question was substantiated.

Finally, their overall writing performance was improved and their capacity to produce more organised and better-structured texts was developed. In this sense, the second research question was verified.

A limitation of the present study is that it measured the students' attitudes and performance in an immediate post-test and post-questionnaire due to time constraints. A delayed post-questionnaire and post-test would explore the retention rate of the positive influence of peer feedback on students' attitudes and their written output. Thus, it would shed light on evidence that the strategies acquired during the intervention could be implemented independently after the intervention.

The contributions of the current study are the following:

- The students seem to have comprehended that by participating in the correction of their own and their peers' written texts; they enhance their linguistic, cognitive and metacognitive capacities. At the same time, they are meaningfully involved in the learning process and are offered the possibility of monitoring and maximizing it.
- Even though, the Greek learning context is not in favor of cooperation, despite the efforts of Greek theorists (Matsaggouras, 2004) who have repeatedly stressed the benefits of cooperative learning, pedagogical and methodological innovations can succeed if properly designed and applied. Thus, notions of collaborative production of writing are proven to be viable options in the Greek classroom reality.

Further research can be conducted in other teaching milieux, such as secondary schools so as to determine the efficacy of peer feedback to empower students to use proper writing strategies and become more competent writers.

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APPENDIX A

Symbols for Error Correction

(Based on the symbols by Pinheiro Franco, 1996:130 and Chryshoos *et al.*, 2002: 82)

Symbol	Meaning	Example
SP	Spelling mistake	<p style="text-align: right; margin-right: 20px;">SP</p> <p>She's a teachar. /</p> <p>She is a teacher.</p>
P, P/	Punctuation errors	<p style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 5px;">P P</p> <p>They both, speak Italian </p> <p>They both speak Italian.</p>
VM	Verb missing	<p style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 5px;">VM</p> <p>He a doctor.</p> <p>He is a doctor.</p>
WM	Word missing	<p style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 5px;">WM</p> <p>was born in New York.</p> <p>He was born in New York.</p>
/	Omit this word	<p>The bag is / a blue.</p> <p>The bag is blue.</p>
WV	Something wrong with the verb form	<p style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 5px;">WV</p> <p>He go to school.</p> <p>He goes to school.</p>

VT	Verb tense	$\begin{array}{c} \text{VT} \\ \\ \text{I go to Athens last week.} \\ \text{I went to Athens last week.} \end{array}$
G	Something else grammatical is wrong	$\begin{array}{c} \text{G} \\ \\ \text{The twin are in the garden} \\ \text{The twins are in the garden.} \end{array}$
C, c	Capitalisation error	$\begin{array}{c} \text{C} \\ \\ \text{both brothers are University} \\ \text{Students.} \\ \text{Both brothers are University students.} \end{array}$
WW	Wrong word	$\begin{array}{c} \text{WW} \\ \\ \text{How are you? I'm good.} \\ \text{How are you? I'm well.} \end{array}$
WO	Word order errors	$\begin{array}{c} \text{WO} \\ \\ \text{I went yesterday to the club.} \\ \text{I went to the club yesterday.} \end{array}$
?	I don't understand what you are trying to say	
GP	good point	

Appendix B

Students' questionnaire in English

Part one

General attitudes towards writing

Please read carefully every sentence and then put a ✓ only in one square from the five ones which are next to it and which you feel that best expresses your opinion.

Put a (✓) in the expression which shows your opinion about each statement.

1. I can spot my mistakes if our teacher gives us a code for error correction	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
2. I feel embarrassed when my classmates know my mistakes	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
3. I would like my partner to help me to correct my mistakes and organise my text	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never

Attitudes towards specific techniques which can help students improve their writing

Are the following ideas good or bad?

Read carefully and mark your opinion with a (✓).

	GOOD idea	BAD idea
1. You can participate in the correction of your text		
2. You can learn from your own mistakes		
3. Your partner can help you to correct your errors		

Attitudes towards peer correction

(Based on the questionnaire used by Hedgecock, J. and Lefkowitz, N. (1994) Feedback on feedback:

Assessing learner receptivity to teacher response in L2 composing. *Journal of Second Language Writing* 3, pp. 141-163.)

B. I improve in writing in English when my partner

1. Comments on the content of my writing (i.e. ideas, examples, etc.)	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
2. Comments on the organization of my essays (i.e. paragraph sequencing, logical development, etc.)	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
3. comments on my writing style (i.e. expression, tone-formal/informal, etc)	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
4. checks my vocabulary (i.e. accurate word usage)	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
5. Highlights grammatical mistakes (e.g. wrong tense, etc.)	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
6. Highlights mechanical mistakes (i.e. punctuation, spelling, capitalization, etc.)	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
7. identifies errors with correction symbols	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
8. highlights errors with a red-colored pen	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
9. focuses on the good points of my written texts	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
10. focuses on the weak points of my written texts	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>

Part two**Information about attendance of lessons in private language schools or private lessons at home**

- A. Please read carefully every sentence and then put a ✓ in only one box with the word which best expresses your opinion.

1. Do you like English?	YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Have you received any instruction in English apart from school?	YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. If so, how many years?	1-3 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	4-5 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Did you attend English classes at a private school (frontisterio) or in private lessons at home?	Private school	<input type="checkbox"/>	Private lessons	<input type="checkbox"/>