“The main thing with peer review, if we help each other out, that is a quicker way to get a better result”
- Teachers’ experience of using peer review in the English classroom

"Syftet med kamratrespons, om vi hjälper varandra, är det ett snabbare sätt att få bättre resultat”
- Lärares erfarenheter av att använda kamratrespons i det engelska klassrummet

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Abstract

The aim with this study is to explore the use of peer review in a Swedish school context. The study focuses on the role of secondary school teachers of English, and the main research question is:

“What are teachers’ views of using peer review in the English classroom?” The interviews show that there are several ways and methods to work with writing such as projects that last for weeks or smaller task focusing on a certain area. Secondly, it is shown that peer review can be used in both written and oral tasks. Furthermore, the feedback given to the students can be oral or written, and the area of feedback alters depending on the task. Thirdly, the benefits of peer review are that it helps improve critical thinking, as well as the students’ way of discussing language. Lastly, the main challenge is the variety of language proficiency among the students, but with clear instructions, time and practice in an accepting classroom environment, this challenge does not have to be an obstacle.

Keywords: English teaching, feedback, language, peer review, process writing, secondary level,
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1. Introduction

During my education, I have learned that producing a well-written text is a craft and a process that does not happen overnight. Apart from language skills and content that is interesting enough, it also requires planning, purpose and motivation. In our English academic writing courses at Malmö University, we were taught how to write academic texts as a process. That included peer review, which I found very helpful when trying to meet all the requirements of satisfactory writing. That is, we wrote the text in several drafts that were submitted, and then received feedback between the drafts. This would help us to break down the writing into sections and improve one part before continuing to the next. Additionally, it decreased the risk of procrastination and leaving it all to the last night. The feedback we received shifted from being from the teacher to some of our peers which meant we all got to practice how to give feedback as well. For us to know how to peer review, we were instructed how to give feedback, supported by given questions that pointed out what to look for in the texts of our peers. Furthermore, we were also given feedback and grades from our teacher on the response we gave each other.

In our courses, we learned to peer review at a university level, as part of becoming teachers. However, as I observed my supervisor at the teacher practicum, hereafter called VFU, using similar methods whilst teaching both Swedish and English, it occurred to me that this way of working with writing could also be used on a secondary school level. From my observation, it worked well there and then in that particular classroom, but how does it align with the steering documents? In Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the recreation center 2011, (Skolverket 2011) it is written in the aim-section for English:

Through teaching, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop all-round communicative skills. These skills involve understanding spoken and written English, being able to formulate one’s thinking and interact with others in the spoken and written language. (Skolverket 2011, p. 32)

Working with peer review does help the learners to develop their language skills as the quote states. Not only does it force the writers to interact with each other, but also provides opportunities to improve the language skills in many ways. Firstly, as Cho and MacArthur (2011) concluded in their study, that through peer review, the students shift from just being receivers of feedback to also gain a reader perspective and are therefore exposed to various
levels of writing. Secondly, Ruegg (2015) states in her research that working with peer review does help the students to develop critical thinking (p.79), both by reviewing their friends’ texts from a reader perspective, but also when deciding how to use and apply the feedback they receive from their friends. Thirdly, Ruegg (2015) also argues that peer review forces them to formulate their thoughts on language and discuss it with their peers (p.75). Furthermore, the same section in the curriculum (Skolverket 2011) states:

Communication skills also cover confidence in using the language and the ability to use different strategies to support communication and solve problems when language skills by themselves are not sufficient. (p. 32)

Through peer review, students help each other to solve insufficient language skills. By reading and giving feedback on each other’s texts, they can help each other to discover mistakes in the texts they were not aware of, and therefore know how to improve it. Furthermore, they can share strategies or advice through the feedback and learn from each other how to improve their language skills.

Most of the previous research regarding peer review is conducted internationally at a university level. However, Berggren (2013) conducted a research in Sweden, on a secondary school level, regarding the use of peer review. She states that there is a remarkable difference in both proficiency and practical conditions between secondary students and university level students, and therefore, more research is needed on a secondary level (p.2). From my own experience, both from writing courses and VFU, and previous research as a point of departure, this study intends to find out more about peer review on a secondary school level in Sweden today. By interviewing teachers, I will investigate if, and how, peer review is used among teachers in the English classroom and what benefits and challenges they see.
2. Aim and Research question

2.1 Aim

The aim of this paper is to investigate the benefits and challenges of peer review as part of process writing in secondary level schools. By interviewing teachers in the county of Skåne, my intention was to find out how peer review is used in the classroom and what viewpoints the interviewed teachers had, based on their experience. Furthermore, this paper will compare and discuss those findings with previous research.

2.2 Research question

What are Swedish, secondary school English teachers’ views of using peer review in the English classroom?

2.3 Sub questions

1. How do the interviewed teacher work with writing, and is process writing included?
2. How is peer review used in a secondary, English classroom?
3. What do the teachers find beneficial about peer review?
4. What are the challenges of peer review, and how are these challenges managed?
3. Background

In this section a background of the topic will be presented, starting with how the sociocultural perspective is implemented in the Swedish school system. Further, I will present the concepts of process writing and peer review, followed by previous research to give an overview of how peer review has been used and evaluated in an international context.

3.1 The sociocultural perspective

The sociocultural perspective has its origin in Vygotsky’s work regarding development, learning and language (Säljö, 2014, p. 297). From this perspective, language and communication is a link between an individual and her surroundings. Further, by having a dialogue with others, one can take part of their reasoning and add to their own knowledge as well as gain a common learning experience together (Skolverket, 2014).

According to Säljö (2014), the sociocultural perspective developed during the 1920’s but disappeared to then come back again during the 1980’s and 1990’s. This because there was a growing interest for the theoretical view and how to apply it in education at that time. Likewise, in Sweden, the sociocultural perspective began to have an impact in the beginning of 1990’s in preparations for the steering documents that came in 1994 (Säljö, 2014, p.306). Furthermore, Säljö (2014), states that one reason for the sociocultural perspective to come back is the emphasis on social interaction to impact learning and development, that is by sharing knowledge and experiences with each other (p. 307).

Moreover, Nilholm & Göranson (2013) underline the importance of having a sense of community within the classroom, for the students to be able to trust the system as well as their fellow students. Therefore, to create that community, they argue that the ways to work in the classroom must cause the students to interact with each other and make everyone´s contribution important for the result, for that trust to be built (p.27). Interaction in the classroom does not only build trust and community, but just as the sociocultural perspective implies, it also develops common knowledge within the students as they experience it together (Säljö, 2014, p. 308).

In like manner the curriculum advocates dialogue and language as a method for the students to develop their communication skills as well as their personal identity:
Language, learning, and the development of a personal identity are all closely related. By providing a wealth of opportunities for discussion, reading and writing, all pupils should be able to develop their ability to communicate and thus enhance confidence in their own language abilities. (Skolverket, 2011, p. 11)

According to this statement which is part of the tasks of school, and aligns with the sociocultural perspective, language and communication is a link between the individual and her surroundings (Skolverket 2014).

### 3.2 Writing as a process

According to Lundahl (2012), the way of teaching writing as a process had its breakthrough in Sweden in the 1980’s. In the previously used method, also called *product-based* writing, the students received a task, did the writing by themselves and then presented the final product to the teacher who then gave a final grade with limited amount of feedback. This was replaced by *process-based* writing, where the students wrote in a process over time, in several steps, and feedback were given along the way, both from the teacher as well as from peers (p. 285).

Wang (2014) elaborates this further by explaining the steps as follows: in the planning, or prewriting stage, the students brainstorm, and both share and gather ideas with each other to decide what topic they will write on. Thereafter, in the drafting and editing stages, referred to as “while-writing” by Wang, the writing process contains three different drafts. The first one is a rough draft presenting main ideas and organization, followed by peer review. The second draft would be neater and with more emphasis on content and form and would also be followed by peer review. For the third draft, the student would edit the text to make it as accurate as possible, including punctuation and grammar. Lastly in the final draft, or postwriting stage, the teacher would give feedback which might lead to further editing before the writing process is completed (p. 89). However, Harmer (2013) describes process-based writing as recursive, where the stages are not necessarily made in a certain order as the writer might have to go back and forth in editing and revising. The stages included are pre-writing, drafting, reviewing, re-drafting, editing and a definitive version (p. 326). Additionally, Raimes (1991), describes in her study that a consequence of the shift from product-based to process focused writing has decreased the emphasis on language accuracy. Instead, the students are given time and space to create the content of their writing and successively build
and develop it through different drafts where they also receive feedback. Consequently, they can spend more time on each area and make it more thorough (p.410).

3.3 Peer Review

In the social perspective of process-based writing, writing is viewed as a dialogue between the writer and the reader, where the writer needs to keep the imagined reader in mind and adjust the text thereafter (Lundahl, 2012, p. 286). In the process-based writing, peer reviewing can be a significant help to do so as it will increase the audience from just the teacher to classmates also. Moreover, according to Harmer (2013) the fact that the writer will also read other classmates’ texts in a verifying way will help them to view their own text in a more examining way (p. 150). Mattisson, (2012) agrees that reviewing others’ texts helps students develop critical thinking that can also be applied on their own writing (p. 25). Moreover, Mattisson (2012) emphasizes that regardless of who gives the feedback, the student is responsible for deciding what feedback to use in revision to best improve their text. Consequently, peer review has a key role as it is given by students who are on a more similar level as the writer compared to the teacher. Therefore, it needs to be valued to a higher extent than teacher feedback (p. 27).

Harmer (2013,) claims that involving the students in the feedback process affects the group cohesion in a positive way as it causes the students to supervise each other, and that it improves their ability to develop writing skills (p. 150). The fact that the students are on a more similar level compared to the teacher could be positive as it forces the student to consider the feedback differently from the teacher feedback which is more automatically assumed to be correct (Muncie 2000, p.50).

3.4 Previous Research

However, there are also those who question peer review. For example, Nelson and Carson (1998) conducted a study on peer review with the conclusion that it should be re-evaluated in the ESL classroom. The authors claim that the students’ language proficiency does not allow them to give as valuable feedback as native speakers, and that they lack confidence in the language which make them unqualified as reviewers (p 128).

Successful peer review requires training. In their studies, both Min (2006) and Hu (2005) acknowledge these challenges previously presented by Nelson and Carson, however,
they do not see it as a reason for not using peer review, but rather emphasize the need to teach and train the students in how to review the texts of their peers. Therefore, as part of his study, Hu (2005) not only instructed his students but also showed them good and bad examples as well as discussed benefits and challenges before he let them practice peer review (p.331, 333). As a result, students found peer reviewing helpful to improve their own writing (p.339).

Likewise, Min (2006) suggests giving the students tools for the peer review to be successful, such as instructions, help questions as point of departure, conversations and grading on the given feedback (p.123-124, 135-136).

In a radio program, Jessica Berggren (2015) states that peer review can be used even on younger students on a primary school level. Berggren is one of the few who have done research on the benefits of giving peer review to improve the peer reviewers’ own writing skills on secondary level in Sweden. She concludes that to give feedback on other students’ texts adds several positive factors into their own writing. Furthermore, Berggren (2015), argues that even young children on a primary level can work with peer review as they too often have an opinion about texts they read or hear. However, both Berggren (2013), and Ruegg (2015) agree that peer review and teacher feedback can be focused on different areas of the texts, depending on the age and language proficiency of the students. For this reason, Berggren (2015) suggests that in the beginning the students focus their peer review on content and structure, and when the language skills are more developed, they can move on to other areas such as punctuation and grammar. The fact that the students begin to train their meta language and get used to talk about their own writing and learning is helpful, not only in language learning, but also in other school subjects.

Peer review not only helps the one receiving feedback but also the one who reviews. Cho and McArthur (2011) concluded four points in their study. Firstly, they enhance their own writing by getting the reader perspective (p.75). Secondly, it is easier to discover errors in someone else’s text and then also find it in the own writing (p.79). Thirdly, being exposed to various levels of writing helps development. Fourthly, students are forced to talk language, that is, to formulate their thoughts around language to make it understandable helps them develop thinking about and reflecting on language (p.75).

As mentioned earlier, the Swedish school system is permeated by the sociocultural perspective where interaction is highly valued. Likewise, Berggren (2015), states that language teaching serves to develop the students’ critical thinking and she argues that peer reviewing each other’s texts is a way to do so. Additionally, Berggren (2015) underlines that it is part of the steering document to work on and develop your own text to improve it. In the
curriculum (Skolverket 2011), a part of the core content for year 7-9 states: “Different ways of working on personal communications to vary, clarify, specify and adapt them for different purposes” and “Language phenomena to clarify, vary and enrich communication such as pronunciation, intonation and fixed language expressions, grammatical structures and sentence structures” (p. 35). To give peer review, Berggren (2015) argues, helps the student to work on their communication and find areas of improvement in their writing.
4. Methods

The method used for this research was semi-structured, qualitative interviews with four secondary teachers. In this section the different method concepts will be explained, and the choices of methods used for this research will be elaborated upon. The content of this section is the following: context of the interviews, the procedure of gathering information, why interviews were chosen, what kind of interviews, how was the sampling of interviewees done, and finally, exclusions and limitations of the methods used.

4.1 Context

In this study there were four different participants from three different secondary schools in Skåne county, who were given one occasion per interview in a timespan of two weeks. The length of the interviews varied between ten and 25 minutes. These teachers were selected by convenience sampling in combination with purposive sampling which will be elaborated further under sample method. Moreover, the original intention was to interview an equal number of teachers and students, however lack of time and other circumstances led to a change of plan. Since it was easier to find available teachers than students, the students were omitted, and the number of teachers increased.

4.2 The procedure

The procedure for these interviews followed the model presented by Bryman (2011) which contains six main steps as following: 1) General questions, 2) choice of relevant locations and participants to examine, 3) collection of data, 4) analysis of data, 5) working with concepts and theories and 6) report on results and conclusions (p. 346). Firstly, the background of peer review was researched, and general research questions were decided on. Secondly, I began to look for possible participants through my personal network of friends, previous work colleagues, my partner school and former student colleagues. Unlike Bryman’s model, the line between step two and three was not as clear, as I began the collecting of data with the first interviewees before the total number was chosen or decided on. The reason for this is that I did not know who would volunteer to participate. When the first contact was established via email, I informed the interviewee of the purpose of my research as well as the intended method and content of the interview. Thereafter they would suggest a time and date
on which I came to their schools. At the time of the meeting I once again informed about the method, the content and the purpose for the interview to make sure things were ethically correct and they knew what conditions they agreed to. Interview 1, 2 and 3 were held in the teachers’ workspace while number 4 were held in an empty classroom. Teacher 2 was the only male teacher and teacher 4 the only one I have not met before. The conversations were transcribed immediately after the interview occasion for best result, and additional comments expressed after the recorder was turned off were also added to these transcriptions when needed. The work with results, comparison and discussion began after all the material was collected.

4.3 Why interviews
As described by Alvehus (2013), interviewing is an effective way of doing research as the researcher interacts with the interviewee, and therefore not only gets the facts but also the thoughts, views and personal experience from the interviewee (p.80). Therefore, in this study I first intended to interview both students and teachers to gain knowledge both about their methods, and also their views and opinions from their own experiences regarding peer review. However, during the process, changes were made due to circumstances and lack of time, therefore only teachers were interviewed. Gathering material through interviews gives more opportunity for in-depth answers than for example surveys do. Additionally, it invites to follow up questions and discussion around the topic. However, Alvehus (2013) explains that the downside of using interviews as a method is that it only gives a limited insight due to a limited number of participants and should not be used to generalize the results (p 127).

4.4 What kind of interview.
There are several kinds of interviews that are used when doing research such as, structured, unstructured or semi structured. According to Bryman (2011), the structured interviews are common in quantitative research where the results are compared and measured against each other. Therefore, as the name suggests, these structured interviews are stricter where the interview follow a pre-written plan with the questions in a certain order. Furthermore, the questions in structured interviews are very specific and narrow, leaving little room for follow up questions or improvisation (p. 202). Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, are the opposite where the interview is more of a conversation between two people on a certain topic.
where the interviewer might just have one question in the beginning and then lets the interviewee continue to lead the conversation (p.415). While the structured interview is strongly driven by the interest of the interviewer to get certain information, the main purpose of an unstructured interview is to get the thoughts and views from the world of the interviewee, hearing what they choose to include shows what is important to them.

For this research, I chose the third type of interview, semi structured, which is a combination of structured and unstructured. The purpose of a semi structured interview is to find out the views and beliefs from the interviewee in an elaborated way, but relevant within the interviewer’s research area. Therefore, to be flexible an interview guide is used. Once again, this is a combination between structured and unstructured, and therefore interview questions, or themes that the interviewer want to include are prepared, together with potential follow up questions. However, the order of these themes is in no way strict but can be adjusted after the interviewee and the direction of the conversation (Bryman, 2011, p 413).

Moreover, the reason for choosing semi structured interviews before unstructured, was also the fact that several interviews was intended, and to use the same themes as departure points would ease the follow-up work of analyses and reflections. As shown in the interview guide, (Appendix 1) for this research, I prepared theme questions to frame the elements essential for the interviews. Examples of these are background about the teachers, how they work with writing in the classroom, how feedback is given, how they work with peer review, how peer review is instructed, how the students adapt to giving and receiving peer review and finally, general benefits and challenges with peer review. Additionally, examples of follow-up questions for these were “could you give an example?”,” how do you do this?”, so that the interviewed teacher could elaborate their answers or clarify.

Apart from an interview guide as a tool for these interviews, a smartphone was used for recording. There are several reasons why an audio recording was preferable to taking notes as stated by Bryman (2011). Firstly, what a person is communicating is not only the words spoken, but also shown through the way he or she says thing, and what is emphasised, which is captured on an audio recording. Secondly, the interviewer can concentrate better if notetaking is avoided during the interview, and the interviewer can rather focus on the interviewee and what is being communicated, which increases the flow of the interview as well as the interaction. The third reason, closely connected to the second, especially in a semi structured interview, it is important that the interviewer is paying good attention, listening carefully to the interviewee to lead the conversation further with the right follow-up questions, directed by what the interviewee says (p.428).
Before the interviews were conducted, the interviewees were given information of the purpose and content of the interview as well as asked if they would consent to being recorded, which everyone agreed on.

4.5 Sample method

The original idea was to interview both students and teachers to get a two-sided perspective of how peer review is experienced. However, because of limited time and availability, this was changed to only interview teachers and therefore increase the number of teachers being interviewed. The sample method was a combination of what Bryman (2011) define as purposive sampling (p. 350) and convenience sampling (p.194). Convenience sampling means that the interviewees were chosen out of accessibility, since I searched among my contacts, asking practising teachers if they, or someone they knew, is using peer review in their English teaching, and would agree to be interviewed on the topic. Furthermore, the sampling being purposive meant that the interviews were directed by my research questions, and therefore the interviewees needed to be within a certain frame. Firstly, the relevant age group was grade 7-9, so only those working within secondary level school were relevant. Secondly, they needed to be teaching English. Thirdly in their English teaching, they are currently, or have been using peer review previously so that they have a viewpoint or belief about it.

4.6 Ethical considerations

For the collection of information for this research, the four requirements from Vetenskapsrådet (2002) were followed. Firstly, the information requirement, the interviewees were given information about the purpose and the content of the research made as well as their part in it both through the first email connection made, and at the time for the interview. Secondly, the participation was voluntarily, and all the interviewees were grownups, older than 15. Thirdly, the interviewees first names were used during the recording, but replaced in the transcription and result section where I call them teacher 1, 2, 3, etc. to keep it anonymous. Likewise, the number of schools are mentioned, but not which schools. Finally, the information gathered will only be used for this research.
4. 7 Limitations

As mentioned above, the original intention was to interview both students and teachers which would have given another dimension to the result and discussion. Moreover, the first idea was to only include teachers using peer review in writing, however since the focus came to be on teachers only, the number of interviewees needed were increased and therefore the criteria for inclusion changed.
5. Results and Discussion

5.1 How do you work with writing in the English classroom, and is process-writing included?

When it comes to writing, teacher 1 tells me that she usually works with bigger assignments, giving the students a few lessons to work with writing as a process that is often connected to the theme they are working with at the time. During the writing-process, the students receive written feedback from the teacher, and if she finds that there are common mistakes, she brings it up with everyone in the classroom together. Sometimes, the writing is divided into several drafts, and some students might then ask her to read it through before they submit it. Furthermore, pointing to the curriculum, she explains that the focus of the feedback she gives in English is mainly on language rather than content since the curriculum emphasises that the student should be able to express oneself clearly with an understandable language.

Just like the first teacher, teacher 2 works with bigger assignments when it comes to writing, however that is usually when it is writing for grading purposes and finding out what level the students are on without help from teachers, friends or other tools. This way of working with writing is similar to the old product-based way that was more common before the 1980’s (Lundahl 2011, p. 285). As the name suggests, the focus was then more on the end-product than the writing-process.

Moreover, teacher 2 states that it is important to distinguish between practise tasks and tasks for grading, that they are different kind of writings for different aims. When writing for practice purposes, the teacher explains that they often work with smaller tasks and he emphasizes the importance to work parallel with theory and practice. “Words of the week” is an example of that, where the students apply the grammar in their writing:

They are supposed to take these words and put them into sentences, so one word per sentence, and then we give feedback, they hand them in and we feedback them when it comes to grammar. So, they will see their mistakes and then we do that quite often, so they will probably over time, not make those mistakes again. They need to practice for real, by working parallelly, it makes
them use it, and they need to use it to get it, to understand it, to have it within themselves.

He continues to say that when writing for practice purposes, the students can use computers or help each other out since the purpose is to practice and develop the skills over time. Moreover, regarding feedback, the teacher points out that to give written feedback takes time, but it does help the students, especially in tasks as the one used in the example, where they can see over time if the same mistakes are reoccurring. Additionally, oral feedback can also be used in many ways to help the students see the connection between theory and practise.

Teacher 3 explains that she mixes small and large writing tasks, but believes that it is good to write quite often. The bigger writings are often done as a process and in connection with the current theme they are working with, and for those, the students usually receive written feedback. Shorter writings, however, could be read out loud in class and discussed together. She also tells me that the students write on their chrome books and it varies if they work alone or pairwise. When it comes to instructions, she likes to combine both written instructions, on the screen or whiteboard, with explaining it orally, often with an example if possible: “I want them to understand my expectations. And sometimes there are texts that you can compare with, that you can share with them without revealing too much.”

On the contrary, both Teacher 1 and 4 usually work on bigger projects only, where writing is seen as a process, containing several steps. Teacher 4 elaborates by saying that the first steps are usually quite easy and not about writing a lot of text, so the students feel that it is doable. “I’m trying to teach them that this is how you build up your text, that it doesn’t have to be a colossal amount of text in one go. You just have to take it slow and step by step.”

This way of writing as a process divided into several steps, aligns with the form of process-writing that is explained by Lundahl to be more common in Sweden during the 1980’s (Lundahl 2011, p. 285). Further, this way of writing puts an emphasis on the students’ language development rather than just the end product, and therefore, it is necessary to allow the writing to take time. During the process, the students’ language development grows through a dialogue between the writing student, the teacher and other peers (Lundahl 2011, p. 285). Furthermore, Raimes (1991) concludes in her study that a consequence of process writing is that the writer works more carefully on each area (p.410), just as teacher 4 pointed out with her students writing the short story where the first draft was a sentence per section in the beginning, to then become a text of several pages when finished.
Regarding feedback, the interviewed teachers all give both oral and written feedback, depending on the type of writing task. Teacher 2 states that even though written feedback takes more time, it is necessary for him to show the students their errors so that they can learn from their mistakes, furthermore, it helps the teacher to see their development over time, for example when working with grammar. Additionally, he uses oral feedback as well, to help them see the connection between theory and practice. Likewise, the other three teachers give oral feedback during the lessons, especially if they find that several students tend to do the same mistakes, to explain or elaborate a certain area. Additionally, teacher 4 states that while oral feedback during the lesson is rather brief, the benefit with written feedback is that it is always there for the student to go back to:

I think it is an advantage to have it through “classroom” and “drive”, because they can always go back and see “oh what did she say about that, I remember it was something about past tense” for example. And they can go back and re-read the comment that I wrote.

By providing feedback during the writing process, the students can receive and apply it to their writing straight away which could mean a more immediate improvement in their writing compared to only receiving feedback in the very end of the writing process. Therefore, it could be beneficial to use the different steps of process-writing, but not necessarily in a certain order. Harmer (2013) describes process-based writing as recursive, where the stages are not necessarily made in a certain order as the writer might have to go back and forth in editing and revising. The stages included are pre-writing, drafting, reviewing, re-drafting, editing and a definitive version (p. 326).

5.2 Working with Peer review
Peer review in the English classroom is only used for oral group presentations by teacher 1 and teacher 4. Teacher 1, who also teaches Swedish, explains that she uses written peer review in Swedish since it is part of the knowledge requirements there but not in English, because of that and lack of time, she only works with oral peer review in English when the students do group presentations. Before the presentations are done, they get instructions, sometimes by using “two stars and a wish”, which means the reviewer highlights two aspects that was positive, and one that could be improved. At other times they use a matrix, with
different criteria so they know what to look for. Further, she states that by letting the student peer review their friends orally she gets an opportunity to see their language skills in a more spontaneous and unpolished way compared to an oral presentation:

So, there is a difference, cause when you prepare for an oral presentation, you have time to put in more transition words and you can boost your vocabulary a bit more. But if it’s spontaneous, it’s where you get to see the level of their natural conversation.

According to the curriculum for year 7-9, participating in conversations and be able to discuss is part of the core content as we can see in the three following points from Skolverket (2011):

- Conversations, discussions and argumentation.
- Language strategies to understand and be understood when language skills are lacking, such as reformulations, questions and explanations.
- Language strategies to contribute to and actively participate in conversations by taking the initiative in interaction, giving confirmation, putting follow-up questions, taking the initiative to raise new issues and also concluding conversations. (p.35).

Furthermore, it is part of the knowledge requirement (Skolverket, 2011) for year 9 to know how to improve their own interaction: “In addition, pupils can choose and apply basically functional strategies which to some extent solve problems and improve their interaction (p. 37).

Additionally, teacher 4 described that for the previous project where the student made their own podcasts, peer review covered structure and content but not so much grammar. This because the purpose of a podcast is to make it casual, and so the language used was intended to be informal. Furthermore, teacher 4 stresses the importance of clear instructions when using peer review to avoid that the feedback gets personal. She tells me that some students rather give feedback based on popularity among the students rather than how the presentation was performed:

I created things that they were actually supposed to look for. Because I don’t want them to add their own values in it. I don’t want it to be personal, like “you
were wearing an ugly shirt”, because that’s the sort that they focus on if you don’t give them the tools. Some people were grading after popularity: did they have 5 facts? “No.” What grade do you think they should have? “A.” You know, that’s students.

This emphasis on clear instructions when using peer review is in accordance with previous research from Min (2006) and Hu (2005). Just as the interviewed teacher, Min (2006) suggests giving the students both instructions and help questions for them to know how to peer review. Hu (2005) on the other hand, went even further by giving good and bad examples of peer review as well as discussing pros and cons before putting peer review into practice (p.331, 333).

On the contrary, teacher 2 and 3 also use peer review in writing and agree that structure and clear instructions are significant when working with peer review so that the students know what to look for. Teacher 2 states that it is about “creating situations where the students become the teachers to use their language capacity” and gives an example of working with grammar and past tense:

If we have irregular verbs, then I can give them a task that has to do, they have to write a text that has to do with yesterday. What happened, and then they need to use the irregular verbs and then look at this text, see if you can find as many irregular verbs as well, and if there’s a mistake, please tell the friend and so on, so that’s focused to that.

Furthermore, teacher 2 explains that in English, the feedback from peers is focused mainly on language rather than content, compared to the Swedish lessons where they peer review both. Teacher 3 on the other hand, shifts between including both language, grammar, structure and content, also in English. In contrast to these two teachers, Berggren (2015), argues that in the beginning, the focus of peer review should be on content and structure rather than grammar, since the students might not have the skills for accurate feedback on punctuation and grammar. Teacher 2 on the other hand, explains that in English, he lets the students peer review areas they have worked with, like his example with the past tense mentioned previously, if the one giving feedback knows the rules, the feedback would not be arguable.
Another way of working with peer review for writing is to do it orally together in the classroom according to teacher 3. She gives an example where they took a student’s text and put anonymously on the smartboard to talk through together:

They were supposed to correct the sentences, because there were common mistakes that I wanted to, I wanted them to notice them. Like “is” and “are”, they mix them together and it’s a lot of students who do that, so then I want them to see that it is a common mistake, but it is easy to fix it if you’re being careful.

By working with common mistakes together and letting everybody contribute, trust and a sense of community is built, just as Nilholm and Göransson (2013) claim to be necessary in the classroom. Furthermore, it causes the students to develop common knowledge which aligns with the sociocultural perspective (Säljö, 2014, p.308). Moreover, teacher 4 explains how important it is to create a mutual understanding with the students regarding oral presentations and feedback. This as the students in secondary school often are self-conscious and sometimes embarrassed to stand in front of the whole class, it is therefore very important that they don’t make fun of each other through comments, grinning or funny faces but that they treat others with the respect they want for themselves when doing a presentation. Likewise, teacher 2 puts emphasis on building a climate of acceptance in the classroom, similar to the sense of community previously mentioned, for the students to be able to trust both the system and their fellow students, not the least with working with peer review (Nilholm och Göransson, 2013). According to Harmer (2013), including the students in giving feedback could affect the group cohesion in a positive way as they are encouraged to supervise each other (p.150)

5.3 What do the teachers find beneficial with peer review?
The four interviewed teachers all agree that peer review is beneficial for the students’ language development as it forces them to think about and discuss language in a way they might not do otherwise. For example, teacher 1 argues that receiving peer review is beneficial for students’ own writing: “It gives a different dimension of discussing their own texts.” Further, she explains that the students are not obliged to use the feedback given from their peers in their texts when they work with peer review in Swedish, but that it nevertheless helps
them to discuss and argue for why they find it helpful or not. Additionally, she argues that to give peer review also helps their own writing: “because they also get to see different ways of writing the same kind of text, different solutions, ideas. And they might get their own ideas that they want to “steal” for their own texts.”

Similarly, teacher 2 argues that letting the students see writing from a teacher perspective by giving each other feedback, is a way to make them think differently about their own use of language in a quicker way which improves their results. He explains that the students go from just being receivers of teacher feedback, being told what errors to correct, to become an asset with useful knowledge and function. Especially since many secondary students today have a higher language proficiency level in English than they did twenty years ago. Therefore, he states that “you switch from being just producing a text and getting feedback, to be the person who gives feedback. And that’s a quicker way to make them think about how they use the language themselves.” Similarly, Cho and McArthur (2011) concluded in their study both that it is easier to find the errors in one’s own writing after discovering in someone else’s, and that being exposed to various levels of writing by reading texts from their peers helps the development. Both Mattison (2012) and Harmer (2013) agree that the students develop their critical thinking to read another student’s text which then can be used when reading their own. Additionally, the teacher states that peer review operationalize a combination between theory and practice since they might discover things in their peers’ texts that they haven’t thought about in their own writing:

Some students are much better at giving critique, good critique, then actually writing English. So, they understand the rules, but they can’t use them themselves. By doing this, they actually help themselves think about it when they write.

Furthermore, teacher 3 states that some students might be good at writing texts without having to think a lot, and therefore peer review forces them to both think about language as well as discuss it which contributes positively to their language development, which also was concluded by Cho and McArthur (2011) in their study. Consequently, teacher 4 explains: “When you are telling others what they did well, or what they could improve, you’re actually learning for yourself also, what did I do well, what could I improve?” Just as stated by teacher 2, Cho and McArthur (2011) concluded in their study that students enhance their own writing by getting the reader perspective. Additionally, Berggren (2015) stated in a radio interview
that peer review is a way to develop students’ critical thinking which is one of the aims with language teaching which is also beneficial in other school subjects.

Teacher 4 explains that she hasn’t worked with peer review long enough to evaluate its benefits for all students. However, she states that among the students that are on a higher level, she can already see how it helps them in draft writing since they already tend to discover error in their own texts and edit themselves during the writing process:

Which is really positive, because that is part of the writing process, and I want them to reach that level of natural processing, they are just going to do it, by autopilot. Because that’s what they need for high school, and college.

Furthermore, she tells me that the students enjoy giving peer review as it makes them the experts, and they also receive it as serious, even if it’s not valued as high as teacher feedback, they like to hear what their friends have to say.

5.4 What are the challenges with peer review, and how are they managed?

The greatest challenge when working with peer review in English is the varying levels of language proficiency since English is the students’ second language. This is a statement that all the interviewed teachers agreed on.

Teacher 4 explains that some of her students are newly arrived in Sweden and might not have been taught English at all previously, while others have already studied it for about four years or so. Furthermore, teacher 1 states that the various language skills might make it difficult for some students to provide constructive critique in writing, and that is one of the reasons why she does not work with written peer review in the English classroom. Likewise, Nelson and Carson (1998) came to the same conclusion in their research that students with English as a second language are not qualified enough to give peer review since they might lack both language skills and confidence (p.128). On the contrary, Mattison (2012) claims that the students receiving feedback are responsible for their own texts and therefore it is up to them if they are to apply the received feedback or not (p.27). Moreover, to make that decision helps them to improve their critical thinking (p.25).

Like, teacher 2 states that the greatest challenge with peer review is the variety of proficiency levels in English. However, he believes that the challenge can be dealt with:
But I think that if you have a good climate, if you understand your students, you can solve those problems as well. The important thing is that everyone feels safe in the classroom. If you can reach that kind of feeling in the class, you can do a lot of different things.

Moreover, teacher 3 states that it has to do with time and practice and needs to be done continually so that the students learn, and then get used to it so it seems easier. Consequently, she finds that even though it is time consuming, she believes it is worth it.

On the other hand, teacher 1 finds that time is a big issue for using peer review in writing. She explains that she only has two English lessons per week, and to add another element of peer review would take another lesson. Since peer review is not a part of the knowledge requirements for English, she chooses to prioritize other elements that are. However, she does use peer review orally for group presentations.

Additionally, teacher 3 points out the importance of dividing the students in an efficient way. That is, if they are working in pairs, it is necessary that they work with someone on a similar language level. If they work in groups of four on the other hand, they can be more mixed and help each other within the groups.

Regarding dividing the students into efficient groups, teacher 4 states that she divides her students out of their seating plan in the classroom. She continues to explain that the school had psychologists visiting, talking to the teachers about how to place students in the classroom based on their identity as students. That is how their motivation is in combination with the ability to work independently. Consequently, the motivated and more independent students can be like a motor that the others get helped by.

On the other hand, teacher 2 states that there is not one solution only, but it depends on the students. In some cases, it might even be better that the student only receive feedback from the teacher, however they can still participate in the peer reviewing by discussing other students’ texts, the teacher underlines that it has to do with the climate in the classroom.

In addition, teacher 4 believes that peer review still can be used despite the challenges, but points out that structure and clear instructions is crucial to avoid that the students give feedback that are connected to more personal views and values. Because the students are in an age where they are constantly observed and valued socially, judged from their outer appearance by their friends, it is important to show them that peer review is not about that at all, but concerns language skills only. Therefore, the teacher suggests using a matrix or a
checklist, for the students to know what is expected from them, what exactly they are going to look for:

I think that as grownups, we have to show them how to give somebody feedback. Because it has nothing to do with whether or not you have a good or bad hair day, or, you know, stuff like this, whether you have a Parajumper jacket. Socially, it could be a catastrophe, but when it comes to English, it doesn’t matter.

Teacher 1 also uses matrices when working with peer review orally. Teacher 3 occasionally works with giving feedback on written texts orally with the whole class which helps them to see specifically how to do and what to look for. Moreover, teacher 2 tells me he sometimes works with peer review within a certain area they have just learned, and it then get narrowed down to only look for particular things, such as past tense for example. In their research, Min (2006), and Hu (2005) also explains that peer review is something that need to be well instructed, giving the students the right tools and give them time and opportunity to practice for peer review to be successful. Furthermore, similarly to teacher 1 and 4, both Berggren (2015) and Ruegg (2015) explains that a way to get around the challenge of varying language levels is to focus the feedback on different areas. For example, work with content and structure if the language level is low, and grammar if the students are more advanced according to Berggren (2015).
6. Conclusion

The interviewed teachers used a wide variety of ways to work with writing. Some teachers worked on bigger writing projects over a longer time, as a process with several different steps. Other teachers mixed larger writing projects with shorter tasks, more specified to a certain area of grammar for example. A third example is to differ between writing for practice or for grading purposes. Furthermore, the way of providing feedback is decided by the construction of the task. Either written feedback could be given individually through google drive or similar tools. Additionally, oral feedback could be given in the classroom, group wise or with the whole class if the teacher has found common errors that need to be addressed together.

Moreover, two of the teachers use peer review for oral presentations in English, but not in writing, while the other two use it both for speaking and writing. However, all the teachers give clear instructions about what areas the students are to look at, either through a matrix or guiding questions. Regarding what to look for, the teachers work differently, both from each other, and from time to time, sometimes it is language only, other times it might also be content and structure. Furthermore, the teachers prefer to let the students peer review in groups rather than individually.

Peer review develops the students’ critical thinking as they gain the reader perspective. Moreover, it brings another dimension of discussion as they are forced to express their thoughts and opinion regarding language. Giving the students a teacher role as peer reviewers shift the view of them from just producing texts to become an asset with useful knowledge. Additionally, being exposed to other students’ text helps them amend their own writing.

The main challenge with peer review is that the students have such varying level of language proficiency in English. However, the interviewed teachers suggest a variation of solutions of how to deal with that. Firstly, make sure that the classroom is a safe place for the students, and that as teacher know the students well. Secondly, make sure to give clear instructions and tools to help the students know what to look for and how. Moreover, how they are divided into groups is significant so that nobody feels negatively exposed or left out. Thirdly, it does require time and practice, and even though it might be difficult in the beginning the students will learn over time.

Even though this research is conducted with qualitative methods and its main purpose is not to compare the findings, a conclusion can be made that all four interviewed teachers had a positive view about peer review. However, to what extent it was used varied between the teachers, as well as in what areas they worked with peer review in the classroom.
Because of this research, I would recommend active teachers as well as my student colleagues to give peer review a chance in English teaching to improve the students’ writing skills, as well as their critical thinking, and additionally, it also promotes interaction in the classroom. However, to do so it is important to know the students well and thoroughly think it through before getting started. Furthermore, one needs to keep in mind that there might not be immediate results, but peer review needs to be given space and time to be efficient.

It should be acknowledged that this study is limited when it comes to depth and width. Because of various circumstances regarding time and accessibility, the students’ perspective is missing, which would have added another dimension both to discussion and result. Moreover, the interviews were in some cases a bit short because of inexperience. As the interviewer, I take the responsibility for that since I learned a lot during the process and my experience grew for each interview which made them more efficient over time. Afterwards, I do realize this could have been avoided by making some pilot interviews prior to the real ones.

Because this research is qualitative and only shows the experience and belief of four teachers, it does not qualify to use for generalisations. Therefore, it could be interesting to carry out quantitative research too get a bigger picture of whether that is a common view on peer review or not. Additionally, in another qualitative research, teachers with a different opinion of peer review could be interviewed to present a different view and lead to further discussions regarding the benefits and challenges about peer review.
References


Retrieved from:


Skolverket (2014). Retrieved from Skolverket:


# Appendix

## Interview Guide

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