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Research Article

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Abstract

Students enrolled in the basic communication course often engage in peer feedback workshops to enhance presentational speaking competence. As such, peer feedback workshops in the basic communication course provide an opportunity for students to provide and receive feedback on speech form, structure, and delivery (Broeckelman-Post & Hosek, 2014). The present study qualitatively examined data from 110 students enrolled in a basic communication course to determine their perceptions of the peer feedback process and what role(s), if any, they believed they had in the peer feedback process. Our thematic analysis revealed that students' perceive peer feedback as a form of agency, influence, and skill building and perceive their role as a content editor, audience/body, and performance evaluator. Limitations and future research directions are also discussed.

Keywords: peer review workshop, peer feedback, basic communication course

Peer critique and feedback workshops are becoming increasingly popular (Rollinson, 2005) and are becoming a fixture in many student-centered and active learning classrooms (Poe & Gravett, 2016). In the basic communication course, peer feedback is now a common practice in many public speaking classes (Broeckelman-Post & Hosek, 2014; Sellnow & Trienen, 2004). Students are often encouraged to provide peer feedback during presentations, and the quality and types of feedback should demonstrate the language and ideas that students are learning in the basic communication course. This makes sense given that one objective of a public speaking course is for students to give specific, useful, and relevant feedback to classmates about their presentations.

Positioned by scholars as integral to student learning (Poe & Gravett, 2016), peer feedback has many important implications for student learning goals, learner empowerment, and career preparation. In terms of learning goals, students can practice giving valuable feedback and offer better suggestions for improvement through peer evaluation (Prins, Sluijsmans, Kirschner, & Strijbos, 2005; Cho & MacArthur 2011; Nicol, Thomson, & Breslin, 2014). Moreover, students can understand more about their own strengths and weaknesses as presentational speakers. In part, through the feedback process students should be able to make judgments about whether or not peers have met the requirements of an assignment (Falchikov, 2007) and in turn improve the likelihood they will meet the requirements themselves (Rieber, 2006). In regard to learner empowerment and career preparation, peer feedback enables students to feel more involved in the learning process (see Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Prins et al., 2005; Weimer, 2003). Peer feedback workshops stimulate the kinds of feedback that students will need to eventually give and receive in their careers (Gueldenzoph & May, 2002; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Prins et al., 2005; Reynolds, 2009). While much of the research on peer feedback focuses on writing courses; in the basic communication course, students are also developing transferable skills from outlining to peer reviewing speech delivery (McGarr & Clifford, 2013).

This study presents a nuanced understanding of students' experiences in providing peer feedback during speech workshops. The literature review articulates the pedagogical approaches to peer feedback and students' reactions to experiences with peer feedback in the classroom. Lastly, we advance a set of research questions that framed our study. To date, research on the basic communication course has yet to qualitatively examine students' perceptions of the peer feedback process and the role, if any, they see themselves playing in the process. This gap in the literature is

evident alongside a lack of current research on peer feedback in general within the field of communication studies (for exceptions see Broeckelman-Post & Hosek, 2014; McGarr & Clifford, 2013; Sellnow & Trienen, 2004). Hence, the current study seeks to expand our collective understanding of students' experiences with peer feedback in the public speaking classroom.

Pedagogical orientations on peer feedback

Peer feedback represents a shift in pedagogy because it alters the one-way teacher feedback approach and moves it to a more active and student-centered approach (Poe & Gravett, 2016). It is a beneficial pedagogical strategy because it may increase students' understanding of feedback (Rollinson, 2005) and helps students examine their own performance (Crisp, 2007; Sambell, McDowell, & Sambell, 2006), and students can learn just as much by giving feedback as receiving it (Nicol, Thomson, & Breslin 2014). Advocates for learner-centered teaching argue that peer feedback supports students throughout the entire learning process (Kolb 1984; Brown, 2004) and encourages students to make decisions surrounding their learning, e.g., choice in assignments (Cho & MacArthur 2011; Flatt, 2000; McCombs & Whistler, 1997; Mottet, Beebe, & Fleuriet, 2006). Further, peer feedback is an important pedagogical approach that allows students an opportunity to refine their understanding of course concepts. Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) suggest that if the process of peer feedback is led by the teacher the focus becomes more technical and is less interesting for students. If students are included in the process of evaluating their own and others work, perhaps they will view the process as interesting and as an opportunity for learning. After all, by situating the peer feedback process as less one-way (teacher to students) we also encourage students to view evaluation activities like peer feedback workshops as learning opportunities.

In all, students benefit when the approach and use of peer feedback is an integrated, organized, and clear part of the curriculum (Poe & Gravett, 2016). Pitts (1988) contends that teachers must carefully design and supervise feedback exercises in the classroom. In this way, Pitts highlights the fact that peer feedback requires deliberative implementation in the classroom and underscores the considerable amount time it requires. Despite the wide usage of peer feedback and workshops in written and oral communication curriculums (Broeckelman-Post & Hosek, 2014); there is the popular belief among teachers that peer/self-assessments are inaccurate or unreliable (Saito & Fujita, 2004). In contrast, researchers tend to speak favorably

of it (Saito & Fujita, 2004); yet, little is known about the role students believe they have, if any, regarding peer assessment and how students react to feedback from their peers.

Student reactions to peer feedback

Students have mixed reviews of peer assessment, and ultimately, all methods of evaluating students have advantages and disadvantages. In one study, 95% of composition students reported that the peer review process was helpful (Saito & Fujita, 2004). That said, when students commented about being dissatisfied with the process it was because they found peer reviews to be time consuming, they did not like the other student's topics, or they thought it was an excessive amount of work in comparison to the grade they receive for participating in feedback exercises. In other words, they believed too few points were offered for the amount of work required for peer review (Odom, Glenn, Sanner, & Cannella, 2009). In another study, Saito and Fujita (2004) assigned forty-seven Japanese university students to write two essays in English. Each essay was rated and given comments by two teachers, three peers, and the writer gave a self-evaluation. Students then completed a questionnaire on their activities. Findings revealed statistically significant similarities between peer and instructors' ratings of an essay's quality. Additionally, students who evaluated their own work were not more lenient or harsher in comparison to their peer raters. The level of peer feedback rating did not predict student's attitudes towards peer assessment.

Further, although students see the benefit to the peer feedback process, the act of criticizing peers or friends can be difficult and even face-threatening (Cartney, 2010). which alludes to concerns about social capital and cohort effects in this process. Hyland (2000) noted that students often provide positive feedback in the form of supportive suggestions rather than devaluing critiques. Yet, despite facework concerns, research suggests that peer review provides student feedback that they might not attain from an instructor (Cho, Schunn, & Wilson, 2006). Cho and McArthur (2010) suggest that similar age-group peers may provide feedback in a language that is more accessible than the formal phrasing of feedback given by their instructors. While feedback from peers is considered just as valuable and reliable as feedback they receive from their instructor (Cho et al., 2006), students who receive feedback from multiple peers tend to improve the quality of their work more so than those who only receive feedback from a single source (Cho & Schunn, 2007).

Another issue with peer feedback is that students can view it as busywork. This concern can be exacerbated if students view feedback as more valid and reliable when it comes from the instructor rather than their peers (Cho, Schunn, & Wilson, 2006; Ozogul & Sullivan, 2009). As such, peer feedback has drawbacks—sometimes students do not see the value of peer reviewers (Paton, 2002) and they focus on surface level errors (Paton, 2002; Brammer & Rees, 2007). In the basic communication course, this may look like students focusing too heavily on speaker delivery than on the message content, clarity, and organization.

Specific to basic communication courses, researchers have found that students created better speech outlines in learner-centered environments, or those that involve students in the decision making in a course and focus on deep learning, rather than teacher-centered classrooms that are teacher created and directed (Weimer, 2002). In fact, students in learner centered environments scored higher for content and structure on speech outlines (e.g., C+ to B-), in comparison to students who created speech outlines in teacher- centered classrooms (Kahl & Venette, 2010). Kahl and Venette (2010) argued that students in a learner-centered environment did better because they experienced the entire learning process. In all, when students have a clear understanding about how they benefit from self and peer-assessment, they see these activities as more effective (Carless, Joughin, & Liu, 2006) and may feel efficacious as a result of positive feedback (Vollmeyer & Rheinberg, 2005).

In all, the above research indicates that students inherently understand the value of peer feedback but struggle with its utility, critiquing peers or how to make sense of their peers' feedback. As such, it is unclear neither how students perceive peer feedback nor what role they believe, if any, they have in the process. To address these questions, we posed the following research questions.

RQ 1: How do students perceive peer feedback?

RQ 2: How do students perceive their role in the feedback process?

Method

Qualitative research embraces a humanistic approach to understanding and presenting participants' realities (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002 Tracy 2013). In order to answer our research questions, we utilized the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and performed coding procedures to organize our participants'

responses. Resultant analysis procedures provided insight into students' perceptions of the peer feedback process as an interactive co-learning experience and various roles they believe they have in the process. In the remainder of this section, we further detail our analysis procedures.

Site and participants

Upon Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the research team recruited participants from six public speaking courses at a mid-sized Midwestern university. Instructors (average age of 26) volunteered to utilize the peer feedback questionnaires (See Appendix A). One hundred and ten undergraduate students participated in the study. The sample consisted of 51 males (42%) and 69 females (58%). We did not collect specific age or race/ethnicity demographics from the classes involved in this study, but our overall assessment data for the year indicates the average age for participants is 19 years of age, and the majority (85%) are Caucasian. The majority of participants were classified as freshman and sophomores. The majors represented in our sample ranged from communication, psychology, physical education, biology, engineering, sports management, and many more. Students completed the questionnaires as part of their peer feedback experience during informative speeches. Students received attendance credit for their participation and all identifying information (e.g., names for attendance purpose and section number) were removed prior to analysis.

Data and procedures

Data from peer feedback questionnaires was collected over the course of three weeks and yielded a total of 110 one-page responses (i.e., one page per participant). On the first day of the informative speech workshop, students were given ten minutes to complete the feedback questionnaire that asked the following three questions: (a) "What do you believe your role is in providing peer feedback?" (b) "How, if at all, does the peer feedback you give to your classmates influence their presentational skill development?"; and (c) "How, if at all, does the peer feedback you receive from your classmates influence your presentational skill development?" Students were instructed to give constructive feedback that directly addressed the performer's content, delivery, and the overall composition of the speech. Participants elaborated on their experiences and the questionnaires yielded a rich source of data. After students completed the questionnaires, instructors returned the forms to the

first author who numbered each feedback form to serve as a proxy for participant numbers prior to distributing a copy of the entire dataset to the research team.

Data analysis

Prior to analysis, all questionnaires were numbered, copied, collated, and distributed among the data analysis portion of the research team¹. The data analysis portion of the research team (hereafter referenced as research team) relied on the constant comparative method to analyze the student responses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initially, each research team member independently read and re-read each questionnaire and identified first-level open codes. Together, we identified 32 first-level open codes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). First-level coding grouped together terms or students' experiences such as "motivational," "supportive," "gives students authority," "non-grading helper," "editor," "audience member," and "critic." These codes were organized into categories and explored until they became theoretically saturated. Next, the research team met and discussed second-level coding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) through a process of highlighting interesting comments and relationships among the initial first-level open-codes. During these conversations, the research team took note of interesting comments such as, "I act like a peer instructor," "peer feedback makes little difference towards my grade," or "help change her/his perspective." A significant portion of our analysis was dedicated to close readings and discussions of the codes.

After two subsequent meetings related to second leveling coding, the research team inductively agreed on the following themes to address RQ1: (a) agency, (b) influence, (c) skill building and the following themes to address RQ2: (a) content editor, (b) audience/body, and (c) performance evaluator. These themes connected and extended the second-level codes and grouped abstract or theoretical issues like "ownership and accountability," "impact of peer to peer feedback," "behavioral outcomes," "course participation," and "course expectations to peers." At this point in our analysis, with agreed upon thematics, we were prompted to revisit literature on peer feedback, student learning, and peer review workshops. All meetings were documented via notetaking by the lead author to facilitate the analysis process. In all, this process ensured that our data were under constant comparison and reflexively analyzed.

¹ The data analysis team comprised the first, second, fourth and fifth authors. The third author was present for all data meetings but did not analyze the data individually. The final author did not analyze the data but contributed substantially to other aspects of the project.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine student perceptions of (a) peer feedback and (b) their role in the feedback process. Research question one asked how students perceived peer feedback and our analysis revealed three overarching themes. The first theme indicated that students' viewed peer feedback as *a form of agency*. This theme was further divided into two categories to illustrate that *agency* can be derived from common age group identification and agency as a form of empowerment. The second theme revealed that students' viewed peer feedback as *a form influence*. Similarly, the thematic of *influence* was further delineated as positive influence and negative influence. Finally, the third theme indicated that students' perceived peer feedback as *skill building activities*. The thematic of skill building activities was further subdivided in to categories of performance, content clarity, and organization.

Research question two explored students' perceptions of their role in the peer feedback process. Three overarching themes emerged to explain the ways in which students view their roles in the peer feedback process. Specifically, students viewed themselves as *content editors*, *as an audience/body*, and as *a performance evaluator*.

Students' perceptions of peer feedback

For research question one, the researchers identified three main themes. The thematic areas that addressed the first research question were *agency*, *influence*, and *skill building*. Table 1 represents each theme, sub-theme, and representative exemplars.

Table 1
Student Perceptions of Peer Feedback

| Peer Feedback Perceptions | Perception Description | Exemplars |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| A. Common Age Group Identification | The present state of awareness that the target audience is themselves ... similar in knowledge, experience, and age. | <p>Feedback from peers sometimes is more reliable than from instructors (p28:2)</p> <p>I believe that my role in the peer feedback is to present someone with an opinion on their speech. Since we are relatively the same age it allows the person speaking to get an idea of how their peers understand their speech (p29:1)</p> <p>Give an honest opinion on how the person did (whether it was what they did well or what they could improve) from someone their age and with the same skill level (p48:1)</p> <p>Some people like hearing what people their own age think about their presentation (p66:1)</p> |
| B. Empowerment | A form of support and advocacy for fellow members to do better both inside and outside of the classroom | <p>I believe it is my duty to give the best feedback that I can help the speaker for the future (p4:1)</p> <p>Maybe if I think they did something well but the instructor doesn't it will make them not feel so bad about doing bad because another student thought it was good (p68:2)</p> <p>If they use it to better themselves for next speech, it will help them in this class and future speeches for say an interview or another important speech (p97:2)</p> <p>I will write as much as I can to encourage them to create better presentations (p 102:1)</p> |

(table continues)

| Influence: The capacity to have an effect on a student's presentation | | |
|---|--|--|
| A. Positive | The ability to highlight the positive results of utilizing, listening, and providing feedback to peers . | To give them confidence by telling them what they did well (p35:1) The feedback would help them see what they can't. Sometimes when speaking we lose sight of what we're doing but others can see it (p40:2) Helps you learn for yourself so that you can do your speech better (p110:1) |
| B. Negative | Notes the helplessness and inferiority the feedback is valued in comparison to that of the authority figure (teacher). | I wouldn't say much. The teachers feedback is all I am truly worried about because they give the grades (p77:3) Sometimes I think feedback is awkward coming from the class (p52:3) I honestly don't even look or care about peer feedback because they aren't the ones grading my paper (p54:3) |
| Skill Building: The ability to carry out a task as it relates to the performance, execution of graded guidelines, and the organizational structure of a presentation. | | |
| A. Performance | The necessity and awareness for advice to be given on the non-verbal delivery elements of a presentation. | Help them get less nervous (p13:2) To help the speaker overcome verbal fillers and little things that take away from the overall presentation (p44:1) The feedback I receive influences me to change my weakness I was or was not aware of while giving a speech for example: nervous habits like touching my hair, pacing, or hand movements without purpose (P96:3)) |
| B. Content clarity and organization | Ability to carry out a task as it relates to the performance, clarity and organizational structure of a presentation | Correct changes in the [outline] in a way that positively corrects their grade (p50:2) I can see how they set up their paper and bounce ideas off and make it my own (p34:2) I can make sure my speech is[n't] choppy and flows nicely (P36:3) Helps me fix any mistakes I might have made on the outline (p52:3) |

Agency

In the present study, the researchers identified elements of agency as responses that suggested the peer feedback process allowed students' ownership or power in the classroom setting. Agency in this sense pertained to how students addressed their ability to lead and guide the feedback process as opposed to the process being guided by the instructor. The theme of agency was further evidenced by the two categories of common age group identification and source of empowerment.

Common age group identification. This category emerged unexpectedly from our inductive analysis of the data. This form of agency was derived from students' perception of similar age group identification amongst themselves in comparison to their instructors. This makes sense given that age conveys important social meanings for people (Garstka, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004), and people identify themselves and others in terms of age group categories, e.g., young adult, middle-aged adult, older adult (Bultena & Powers, 1978). In this way, comments reflected a valuing of similarity with one's own age group during the peer feedback process. For example, participant's responses highlight this theme when they stated, "Giving the writer/speaker student to student feedback as an equal (P 20:1)," and a second student directly addressed age when s/he stated, "I believe that my role in the peer feedback is to present someone with an opinion on their speech. Since we are relatively the same age it allows the person speaking to get an idea of how their peers understand their speech (P 29:1)."

For the students in this study, being in the same age group represents a rich means of connection with their classmates and allows them to become more comfortable with the peer feedback process.

Empowerment. The category of empowerment was grounded in students feeling invested in supporting and advocating for their peers. Thus, comments reflected a want/hope for fellow members to do better both in and outside of the classroom and that they felt they could assist in that effort. The following exemplars illustrated this when students said, "I think main advice that I give is usually taken to heart because classmates usually trust other classmates (P 90:2)," and I believe it is my duty to give the best feedback that I can help the speaker for the future (P 4:1). For the students in this study, their comments seem to suggest that the peer feedback process is understood as a means of support and guidance for classmates.

Influence

In the present study, influence was defined as the ability to effect other students' presentation outcomes. The peer feedback process allowed students to address elements of the speaking act in order to help classmates improve, and as such, this thematic was divided into categories of positive influence and negative influence.

Positive influence. The category of positive influence was defined by students as being able to highlight the positive results of utilizing, listening, and providing feedback to peers. Comments in this area highlighted benefits students felt from the peer feedback process. For example, one student stated, "I will give them advice such as use personal experience or add explanations (P 102:2)," and another student shared: "Helping them learn what parts might need improvement (P 1:2)." For the students in this study, their comments seem to suggest that students understand that the peer feedback process can help not only the speaker, but also the individual giving peer feedback improve.

Negative influence. The category of negative influence was defined by comments that noted the helplessness and lack of value placed on peer feedback as opposed to feedback students receive from the instructor. In other words, this area highlighted drawbacks/shortcomings students identified within the peer feedback process. To illustrate, one student stated, "All depends on how the speaker responds to the feedback, sometimes it helps, sometimes it doesn't (P 4:2)," and another commented "I don't think it really helps (P 75:2)." In some instances, students stated that students would eventually defer to the feedback provided by their instructors. For example, one student stated, "It is for a good purpose but the teacher's feedback will override peer feedback (P 77:1). For the students in this study, comments suggest a clear understanding that the peer feedback process is only beneficial and effective if all parties actively participate and engage within the process.

Skill building

Skill building was defined as the ability to carry out a task as it relates to the performance, clarity, and organizational structure of a presentation. We identified skill building as responses that identified specific elements of speaking or evaluation acts in which the students felt they were helping themselves or classmates progress in their behaviors as speakers. This thematic was broken down further into two categories performance and content clarity and organization.

Performance. The category of performance was defined by comments that focused on the awareness and necessity to give classmates feedback on the nonverbal delivery of a presentation. Stated another way, these comments focused on strategies to help classmates control their body/voice during the speaking process. The intent to help peers with their nonverbal delivery is exemplified in the following two exemplars, “When I get feedback from my peers, I utilize it to adjust my speaking so that it comes across as more natural and prepared to my audience (P 76:3) and “The feedback I receive influences me to change my weakness I was or was not aware of while giving a speech for example: nervous habits like touching my hair, pacing, or hand movements without purpose (P 96:3). For the students in this study, comments illustrate a clear understanding of how important clear and purposeful actions are in a public speaking act.

Content clarity and organization. The category of content clarity and organization was defined as the ability to critique and use verbal information in a speech, or the capacity to develop ideas and construct clear and sound arguments. The following exemplar illustrates this category, “If they don’t understand something from my speech, I go back and try to improve section which is unclear (P 78:3).” Similarly, another student stated that their concern in this area, when providing feedback, was to, “Make sure same key points are coming through (P 1:1).” For the students in this study, comments regarding argument structure illustrated an understanding of the ways in which the peer feedback process can help to clarify and reorganize classmates’ speech content in order to improve clarity and audience comprehension.

In all, student comments for research question one clearly identified the ways in which the peer feedback process affords agency and power to students. Student comments also highlight that power process is related to being able to actively participate in the process. The level of specificity in student comments, specifically pertaining to content clarity and organization, suggests a depth of understanding students have about elements related to both speech writing and peer feedback processes.

Students’ perceptions of their role in the peer feedback process

The results of research question two suggested three overarching themes that illustrated the roles student believed they embodied during the peer feedback process. These roles were identified as that of *content editor*, *student as audience/body*, and

performance evaluator. These roles are examined in detail in the paragraphs below and Table 2 represents each theme, category (if relevant), and representative participant exemplars.

Table 2
Student Perceptions of Roles

| | | |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Agency: Age | The present state of awareness that the target audience is themselves ... similar in knowledge, experience, and age. | Feedback from peers sometimes is more reliable than from instructors (p28:2) I believe that my role in the peer feedback is to present someone with an opinion on their speech. Since we are relatively the same age it allows the person speaking to get an idea of how their peers understand their speech (p29:1) Give an honest opinion on how the person did (whether it was what they did well or what they could improve) from someone their age and with the same skill level (p48:1) Some people like hearing what people their own age think about their presentation (p66:1) |
| Agency: Empowerment | A form of support and advocacy for fellow members to do better both inside and outside of the classroom | I believe it is my duty to give the best feedback that I can help the speaker for the future (p4:1) Maybe if I think they did something well but the instructor doesn't it will make them not feel so bad about doing bad because another student thought it was good (p68:2) If they use it to better themselves for next speech, it will help them in this class and future speeches for say an interview or another important speech (p97:2) I will write as much as I can to encourage them to create better presentations (p 102:1) |

(table continues)

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Influence: Positive | The ability to highlight the positive results of utilizing, listening, and providing feedback to peers. | To give them confidence by telling them what they did well (p35:1) The feedback would help them see what they can't. Sometimes when speaking we lose sight of what we're doing but others can see it (p40:2) Helps you learn for yourself so that you can do your speech better (p110:1) |
| Influence: Negative | Notes the helplessness and inferiority the feedback is valued in comparison to that of the authority figure (teacher). | I wouldn't say much. The teachers feedback is all I am truly worried about because they give the grades (p77:3) Sometimes I think feedback is awkward coming from the class (p52:3) I honestly don't even look or care about peer feedback because they aren't the ones grading my paper (p54:3) |
| Skill Building: Performance | The necessity and awareness for advice to be given on the non-verbal delivery elements of a presentation. | Help them get less nervous (p13:2) To help the speaker overcome verbal fillers and little things that take away from the overall presentation (p44:1) The feedback I receive influences me to change my weakness I was or was not aware of while giving a speech for example: nervous habits like touching my hair, pacing, or hand movements without purpose (P96:3)) |
| Skill Building: Content clarity and organization | Ability to carry out a task as it relates to the performance, clarity, and organizational structure of a presentation | Correct changes in the [outline] in a way that positively corrects their grade (p50:2) I can see how they set up their paper and bounce ideas off and make it my own (p34:2) I can make sure my speech is[n't] choppy and flows nicely (P36:3) Helps me fix any mistakes I might have made on the outline (p52:3) |

Content editor

Students' viewed their role as content editors when they were their task was directed at providing feedback about the content, quality of arguments, and source

support used within speeches. When students enacted this role they perceived that they should provide feedback that was related to the creation, development, and structure of a speech, and not necessarily on the delivery of the speech. An example of the content editor function is highlighted in the following exemplar, “help the writer clean rough edges and make key points come through (P 1).” For the students in this study, comments suggested that they had a clear understanding of the importance of content editing as a means to enhance presentational speaking.

Student as audience/body

The role of student as audience/body highlights the relationship between evaluator and speaker. The role of student as audience/body was identified as a relational oriented role focused on giving support and affirmation to classmates. As such, when students view their role as that of audience/body they focus their feedback towards providing support through encouragement and advice to help their peers succeed. To illustrate, one student stated that their role was to “offer personal opinions and helpful criticism (P 28).” For the students in this study, their comments seem to suggest that students understood how important it was to be a good audience member, both for the sake of the speaker’s efficacy and for the individual providing feedback.

Performance evaluator

The role of performance evaluator focused on critiquing the actual speaking act of a classmate. To this end, comments focused on ways to overcome communication apprehension, stumbling, verbal disfluencies, swaying/shifting, and other elements of giving a speech in front of an audience. Comments such as, “help develop presentation skills (P 38),” and “help the speaker overcome verbal fillers and things that take away from the overall presentations (P 40)” typified this theme. For the students in this study, their comments suggested an understanding of how, they perceived, one should act/sound during a speaking situation. In sum, responses for research question two suggested that students had a clear sense of the roles they play in the feedback process and the benefits and challenges to engaging in each role.

Discussion

The goal of our study was to identify students’ perceptions of peer feedback and the roles they believe they fulfill in this process. The findings from this study offer several implications for pedagogical strategies, student experiences, and peer

feedback requirements and expectations in the basic communication course. In the remainder of this section, we forward analysis, implications, and limitations of our study.

First, based on the data analysis, we discovered that students' age identity was a salient group categorizer used to inform perceptions about peer feedback. In our study, many students commented on how they felt empowered to provide feedback in place of, in addition to, or better than their instructors. The students detailed that they felt this way because they were in the same age group as their peers. This makes sense given that age is an important identity marker (Hummert, 2010) and age conveys important social capital for people (Garstka, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004). More specifically, students viewed age as a positive group differentiator between themselves and their teachers. Thus, age was clearly an organizing agent for how students perceived peer feedback. Given this finding, instructors would do well to capitalize on the positive ways that age group identification can foster increased affect and empowerment in the peer feedback process. Overall, students and instructors should be encouraged by how our findings invoke the positive attributes of common peer age group identification for students to offer honest and constructive feedback to peers.

Secondly, in reviewing the data it is evident that students often feel ill equipped and less confident in their ability to provide quality feedback to their peers. Students also felt that the feedback that they provided was less meaningful than an instructor's feedback. This supports McGarrell's (2010) work that noted that students lack confidence about their ability to provide useful feedback, the challenges of providing feedback without impacting their relationship with a peer, and the difficulty of knowing what to comment on and how to phrase commentary.

Taken together, these two findings indicate that although students feel empowered to provide feedback to their peers, appear to trust the feedback from them due to similar age identity categorization (as opposed to their instructors), students still uncertain about their ability to give quality feedback. Therefore, we can conclude that students are willing to provide and receive feedback from their peers, but future research needs to determine how to build students confidence and skills towards and providing quality peer feedback.

Practical implications

The results of our study offer several implications for ways to design training for peer feedback that encourages classroom experiences that harness the saliency of age group affinity and build student confidence and skills. Previous research underscores the importance of peer workshops to increase student speech quality and presentational speech competencies (Broeckelman-Post & Hosek, 2014). Our study extends this work by laying in the need to capitalize on the value students place on peer feedback because they part of the same age group. As such, teachers should discuss with students the ways in which peer to peer feedback is often more believable and valued by students as a way to stress the importance of feedback activities and the unique perspective they can give each other. In turn, this may improve students' perceptions toward the value of their feedback and peer feedback activities.

Yet, providing space in the curriculum for workshops is not enough, they must initially build student confidence and skill towards giving useful and quality feedback.

As Rahmini (2013) noted, it is an often inaccurate yet common occurrence to assume students will engage in meaningful feedback when we simply put them in peer groups.

To remedy this, basic course instructors could train students on how and what kinds of feedback to provide their peers. Rahmini's work in this area has found that when students are trained on providing feedback, they focused more on providing global comments about content and organization rather than formal aspects of writing. In contrast, students who did not receive training focused more on formal errors in writing. Providing this training to students in a public speaking course would likely help students to provide more useful feedback to their peers.

Another approach would be to extend the peer feedback process beyond a class workshop approach. To do so, instructors can have students reflect on the quality of their feedback before they give it back to their peers. Future researchers could explore whether or not students who give versus receive feedback have higher learning outcomes and if students who complete peer evaluations receive higher grades than those that do not.

In sum, we agree with previous researchers (see Broeckelman-Post & Hosek, 2014, Rahimi, 2013) suggestions that peer feedback can be improved and made more comprehensive through training and a concerted effort to conduct research that

examines the peer feedback training process and its effect on students academic success is necessary.

Limitations and additional future research

As with all research, our findings should be interpreted with the following limitations in mind. First, after documenting biological sex demographics, all identifying evidence was removed before we analyzed the participant responses, and while this protected the identity of our participants it precluded us from exploring any potential trends surrounding participant biological sex or gender performance specific to our data. This is noteworthy because gender stereotypes influence how listeners perceive speakers (Aries, 1996). Similarly, researchers have shown that student peer evaluations are impacted by biological sex in terms of the types of comments speakers receive; male speakers tend to receive a wider range of positive comments whereas comments about female speakers were limited, and male speakers are more likely to be seen as persuasive (Sellnow & Treinen, 2004). Hence, future researchers should continue to explore how, if at all, the performance of gender impacts peer feedback form and content. Second, in a similar vein we did not analyze the data for any trends in feedback related to peer race and ethnicity. Future researchers would do well to explore the relationship, if any, between race and ethnicity and peer feedback. Researchers highlight the need for further study given the increased diversity in our classrooms and the extent to which students value collaborative feedback can vary depending on the students' cultural backgrounds (Sato, 2013). In addition, there are cultural differences in how students perceive peer and teacher feedback (Hu & Lam, 2010) that are important to consider so that we may best support our students' identities and learning goals.

Finally, the nature of the questions asked for this study directed students to reflect upon their general perceptions about peer feedback and their roles in the process, in doing so we may have unintentionally silenced other issues that students may have wanted to discuss. For example, a few students did not elaborate on how they planned to use the feedback they received to improve their presentations. In this way, it is unclear when students will use the feedback provided by their peers. In writing courses, Nelson and Schunn (2009) have shown that students are more likely to implement peer feedback if a solution is provided alongside a summary of the student's work. It appears that these factors help students' understand the problem areas in their work and in turn they can identify specific problems. It stands to

reason that a similar approach that provides detailed solutions for a speaker can be used in the base communication course. Future researchers should explore the ways in which a solution oriented peer feedback framework can be used in the basic course.

In general, students' value peer feedback, can identify its challenges, and have clearly defined ideas about their role in the process. As such, this study provided students an opportunity to share their ideas about peer feedback and can help instructors as they develop, conduct, and train students to provide useful and effective peer feedback. In order to make peer feedback experiences meaningful experiences for students in the classroom, it is imperative for us to continue exploring who are students are and how we can best adapt our pedagogy.

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