Critical Issues in Teaching English

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Abstract

In an effort to create socially just classrooms, this critical action research was aimed at implementing dialogic and participatory feedback practices on the written drafts of writing students in the Gulf region. The study undertaken in a multicultural and multilingual Middle Eastern writing class in the UAE, examines how oral, collaborative feedback practices on the written work of students can promote equitable pedagogy and motivate learners towards more agency in the classroom. First an action research plan based on preliminary investigations on the feedback preferences of students, an action plan, an intervention and finally an examination of the intervention based on student responses were conducted. The student's socio-cultural experience and knowledge that indicated a preference for oral, collaborative feedback on their written work was the basis of the action plan and intervention that led to greater student agency and social justice in the classroom. The research redefined the traditional approaches of teacher centered written feedback and assumed the methodology of leaner centered collaborative feedback, that not only allowed greater empowerment and motivation of students, but also led to more effective feedback practices. Thus the study demonstrates that despite the previous experiences and expectations of learners for a more traditional, teacher centered pedagogy, the adoption of transformative teaching methodologies encourage student voice, social inclusion and dialogic practices and lead to effective learning environments.

Keywords: dialogic, multilingual, equitable pedagogy, social inclusion and dialogic practices.

I INTRODUCTION

1.1   Purpose of Study

The purpose of this critical action research study was to create socially just classrooms through the introduction of dialogic and participatory feedback practices on the written drafts of writing students in the Middle East. It was my aim to critically examine how oral, collaborative feedback practices on the written work of students can promote participatory pedagogy (Auerbach 1995), motivating learners towards more agency and encourage learner centered classrooms (Auerbach 1995; Murphey and Falout, 2010). Through such collaborative methods, not only can feedback become more effective, it can also lead to the empowering of students and the involvement of students in the learning process. I first came up with an action research plan based on my exploration of the feedback preferences of writing students enrolled in undergraduate program at an institution in the UAE and how motivated they felt towards writing and the writing class. I then negotiated an action plan and an intervention with my students promoting participatory, collaborative approaches in providing feedback on the essay drafts of learners, creating dialogic writing classrooms.

In adopting Auerbachs' (1995) approach to participatory pedagogy, my critical agenda supported greater student agency and social justice in the classroom. The results of this study post intervention redefined the traditional approaches of teacher centered written feedback and assumed the methodology of participatory, collaborative feedback on the written drafts of students. Student writers were more empowered and motivated in the writing class, which led to an increase in the effectiveness of feedback practices on their

written drafts. The study demonstrates that despite the previous experiences and expectations of learners for a more traditional, teacher centered pedagogy, the adoption of transformative teaching methodologies encourage student voice, social inclusion and dialogic practices which lead to effective learning environments.

1.2   Background information

Students in most Middle East institutions are distinguished by their cultural diversity and multilingual capabilities (Ronesi 2009). Despite the large number of students who speak English as their second or sometimes third language, it is of note that amongst the student population in many language centers in the UAE, over half of them feel more comfortable speaking in English rather than their native languages and come from a British or American education systems (Ronesi 2009). Similar to students educated in Western countries, students at UAE institutions echo the litany of writing woes and instructors have problematized the writing of said students as having a disregard for documentation rules, plagiarism, first language interference and lack of familiarity with English rhetorical conventions (Ronesi 2009).

Instructors at the Writing Studies Department I teach at in the UAE are mostly required to teach a total of 4 undergraduate courses, with a mixed- sex class load of 18-23 students per course. Due to the outcomes of the course syllabus, and the students that require significant help with their writing, each instructor has to often mark approximately 80 essays every two weeks, providing feedback on students work at every level of the writing process. After 5 years of teaching Writing Courses at The Department of Writing Studies, I started falling into a 'lecture-based' teaching style whereby I would present writing strategies twice a week to my students and fall back into the drudgery of providing feedback and comments in the hope of raising the writing standards of my students and helping them understand their areas of weaknesses.

Students seem to always lament that they are forced to write in these courses, an activity that they are not fond of and often feel is irrelevant to the undergraduate courses they are enrolled for. Specifically, they complained about the effectiveness of instructor feedback on their written essay drafts and how such feedback was insufficient, unhelpful, boring or difficult to understand.

After reading the literature on critical pedagogy I found myself wondering how much of this resistance demonstrated by students is due to the lack of democratic participation in the writing class. I felt that by engaging in participatory pedagogy (Auerbach 1999), whereby instructors focus on student centered learning that prioritizes on the active learning of students, instead of just actively lecturing to them, teachers can alleviate some of the resistance students might harbor towards the writing class.

In understanding that feedback on student work can be more effective by making students feel as if they are a part of the pedagogical process (Auerbach 1999), rather than excluding them from it, instructors need to understand and incorporate student views in order to work towards education that is truly student centered; and make the process of feedback in writing classes a more effective one. Researchers have previously lamented that the value of feedback depends upon the perception of student to it. Weaver (2006) explains, students who do not share the same understanding of academic discourse as their instructors would have difficulty understanding and utilizing the feedback in an effective manner.

In order to bridge the gap between the shared knowledge of instructors and students, a collaborative method of feedback on essay drafts need to be approached. In such a way, instructors can negotiate feedback with their students and ensure that feedback is based on a shared set of understanding between the student and the tutor (Murphey and Falout, 2010). Practically an idea that I have to make students more receptive to feedback on essay writing is to employ 'participatory feedback' practices in my writing class. Instead of the traditional methods of feedback which involves me as the teacher providing feedback on the essay drafts

of students, students should participate in 'writing workshops' during class that allow collaborative feedback on the paragraphs written by students from the rest of the class, as well as the instructor.

Through such a participatory process this critical action study aims to;

1.   Explore how students feel about collaborative oral feedback versus traditional written feedback;

2.   Implement participatory pedagogy by promoting collaborative learning whereby all students work cooperatively with the instructor in providing collaborative, oral feedback on the students written work;

3.   Discover how students feel towards the collaborative participatory feedback methods post intervention.

2   Literature Review

2.1 Critical Pedagogy

The framework for this study is based on critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy which is a critical approach to education and ELT, focuses on associating the classroom with the larger society (Pennycook 2009). Derived from Freire's work (1970, 1996), this method of research "tries to raise students consciousness and prepare them to engage in larger social struggles for liberation" (Radawi & Troudi 2013, pg. 74). Canagarajah states that critical pedagogy is not a set of ideas, but a way of 'doing' learning and teaching (2005:932). This approach to research focusses on issues related to relationships of power between student and teachers, student and student, the learning process in the classroom and the effects of this on the learner identity of students.

2.2 Participatory Pedagogy

Murphey and Falout (2010) state that in order to minimize the marginalization of learners views in second language acquisition (SLA), students need to participate in classrooms, through such participation based on a mutual process of understandings between teachers and

learners we can work towards improving education as a whole. I believe that teachers especially in ELT should adopt a participatory pedagogy, participation that is based on the practice of democracy in the classroom (Auerbach 1995). Participatory pedagogy does not exclude the knowledge of learners; rather it empowers learners by centering pedagogy on the learner's experiences and knowledge (Auerbach 1995). The approach is one that I feel very strongly relates to my teaching practices. Through the collective dialogue, mutual learning and democratic decisions related to the educational process, students and teachers can work together in creating language learning practices that change conditions of powerlessness in the classroom.

Proponents of participatory action research as well as cooperative inquiry assert that in order to improve credibility in research and education instructors need to engage their students in participative research that investigates how teaching and learning can be implemented in a more collaborative way (Campbell & Burnaby 2001).   Based on Freirian (1970)   and Deweyian (2004) frameworks that emphasize student participation, such frameworks revolve around the noticing, exploring, analyzing, acting and noticing the changes and then "beginning a new cycle of investigation" (Murphey & Falout 2010).

2.3 Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning is based on a participatory approach to education that aims to develop the knowledge of participants through dialogue and sharing (Auerbach 1995). The teacher and students are involved in catalytic processes that reflect on the lives and experiences of students in a dialogical and dialectic process. Bolling (1994) explains that collaborative learning is advantageous as it increases the confidence of students in themselves, improves student voice, reinforces critical thinking abilities and engages students in active process of teaching and learning. By combining collaborative learning practices in negotiating feedback of essays, I believe that instructors   can   create   active   learning classrooms that aim to include students in the

educational process rather than marginalizing them.

Marzban (2014) in his critical action research of Iranian intermediate EFL learners found that he was able to improve the efficiency of his writing class while providing effective feedback to learners through collaborative negotiated feedback as opposed to the traditional teacher-written feedback. The researcher concluded that participants of the experimental group, who were exposed to collaborative negotiated feedback, outperformed the other group.

2.4 Feedback

Corrective feedback is an area that has recently became a subject of interest for scholars and researchers. Feedback is supposed to provide beneficial information to students that can lead to students' improving themselves in a given area of instruction (Ferris 1999). However, research has shown that feedback also has the potential of turning out to be more harmful than beneficial when not provided in a proper way by demotivating students, affecting their self-confidence and causing them to become more frustrated with themselves and the whole educational process (Marzban 2014). Ellis (2009) discusses the behaviorist and cognitive theories associated with corrective feedback and how it is seen as a factor that can benefit language learning. The structural and communicative approaches to language learning see feedback as a potential process in increasing learner motivation and improving linguistic abilities (Ellis 2009).

In line with the aims of this research I believe that feedback is a significant tool in learner motivation, competency and agency in the classroom. While studies have talked about the various types of feedback, the role they play in the classroom, and the impact they have/ do not have in improving the written errors of students (Truscott 1996, 1999, & Ferris 1999. 2004), many researchers are investigating interactional or collaborative feedback based on negotiations between teachers and students in the language classroom (Ferris, 1999, 2004, Truscott 1999, Pica 1994). Such reform in the area of feedback

stem from an aim to involve students in the process of providing feedback; encouraging student voice and participation in the learning process; and foster a reflective process to education.

In 1996, Truscott's article "The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes" initiated a controversy on whether corrective feedback on errors made by second language learners were actually beneficial to them and examined the 'how' of this. In his article Truscott summarizes that the correction of linguistic errors is not beneficial to teaching writing and thus needs to be excluded from writing instruction. The two reasons he provides to substantiate his conclusions include; error correction failing to recognize the slow and continuous process of second language acquisition; and secondly the fact that corrective feedback does not address the difficulties that emerge in the context the feedback takes place in. He posits that error correction not only obstructs the productivity of writing classes but tends to waste valuable time and energy without positive results.

2.5 Types of feedback.

An increasing number of studies have been investigating the effectiveness of different types of feedback on the writing improvement of students. Many of these have differentiated between indirect and direct feedback strategies and the effect of them in improving the writing skills of students (Robb, Ross & Shortreed, 1986; Ferris & Hedgecock, 1998). The findings of such studies have elicited some interesting results. Although many of the studies report that teachers and learners lean towards explicit feedback (direct) in comparison to implicit (indirect) feedback (Komura 1999, Ferris & Roberts, 2001), a high number of studies also show that indirect, implicit feedback result in a higher level of improvement in the writing skills of students (Robb, Ross & Shortreed, 1986; Lee 1997). Lee's (1997) study into error correction of second language learners was based on EFL college students in Hong Kong. In her study she reported that there was a significant effect for the students who received

error correction as opposed to those who did not have their errors corrected.

2.6 Teacher v. Peer Feedback

With the paradigm shift towards student centered teaching strategies and participatory pedagogy there has much research that has been focused on the effectiveness of peer feedback in improving the writing of students. Researchers have emphasized on allowing students to self-correct and advocate that such methods of correction contribute to an increase in self-confidence, an ability to think critically and offer a sense of achievement for the students (Mutch 2003). Rollinson (2005) argues that when self-correction is not viable, students should be encouraged to participate in peer correction activities. Rollinson (2005) says that such peer feedback offers potential benefits as it is less threatening than teacher feedback; empowers the students by encouraging student voice; results in a more active and supportive classroom environment.

2.7 Collaborative Feedback

Ghorbani and Nezamoshari (2012) in their experimental study titled "Cooperative learning Boosts EFL Students grammar achievement" investigated the grammatical achievements of 64 female students in a university in Iran. Their study results indicated that cooperative learning was superior to grammar translation method in improving the grammar of the EFL students. They used control groups of cooperative learning in their study. Additionally, Marzban (2014), in his study of collaborative negotiated feedback versus teacher written feedback on EFL Learner's writing, explored the ways to improve the effectiveness of providing corrective feedback for EFL writers. His study of 30 Iranian students indicated that the experimental group who received the negotiated feedback outperformed the control group who received teacher written feedback. His study indicates the efficacy of collaborative negotiated feedback and calls for more research of this nature to improve feedback in EFL pedagogy.

3   Methodology

The methodology of this study is based on critical action research (Cohen et. al 2011). Cohen et. al. (2011) describe critical action research as research that "impacts on, and focuses on practice". It is strongly empowering and emancipatory in that it gives participants a 'voice' (Grundy 1987). In such contexts, critical action research is concerned with intervening in existing pedagogical practices and ensuring the effectiveness of said intervention.

Although the above-mentioned methodological approach in education offers a number of advantages, as it accords power to those who are participating in the contexts the study takes place in (Cohen et. al. 2011), critical action research is relatively powerless in mandating changes in educational policy (Carr Kemmis 1986). Morrison (1995) summarizes the criticisms against critical action research as; having a deliberate political agenda which interferes in the researcher's ability to be objective; its claims to empower participants as researchers as being over-optimistic; and that the power exercised in classrooms often does not extend to society.

Despite such weaknesses, critical action research can offer significant insight on the pedagogical practices of teachers with an aim of improving such practices post intervention. However, the limitations of this approach can somewhat be minimized by recognizing the ability of action research to empower participants in their own context and situations and to participate actively in the pedagogical process that they are involved in (Cohen et.al.). As stated by Mack (2012. pg. 16), "Since students are part of the classroom processes that engender other students' ability to participate, this action research could change the individual students shared understanding of classroom participation and enhance student agency".

3.1 Methods

I used surveys and interviews to collect the information for my study. Reams and Tale (2008: 272) state that this approach is necessary

to "uncover information and perspectives, increase corroboration of the data and render less biased and more accurate conclusions". By combining survey and interview questions, researcher bias can be reduced.

3.2 Whole Class Surveys

The survey questions were distributed to all 53 students from the three sections of the intermediate level composition course I was teaching in the Spring semester of 2014. The questions focused on the "individual as the main source of interpretation" (Troudi et.al. 2009: 548), and were distributed via the online Survey Monkey Application to students. A convenience sampling method was used whereby "the nearest individuals to serve as respondents" (Cohen et. al. 2011:155) was selected. This convenient sampling is appropriate for the aims of this critical action study, as it allows the initial investigation into feedback preference for writing students in my class.

The focus of the survey questions was to understand the types of feedback students had experience receiving and how they felt about previous feedback they had received. I was also interested in finding out how students felt about the writing course they were enrolled in and what expectations they had regarding the type and method of feedback they should receive in the writing course they were enrolled for. The questions in the survey included both closed questions, as well as open ended questions whereby students were able to respond freely (Dorniyei 2003). In survey two distributed to respondents at the end of the spring semester post-intervention, a total of 43 students from the intermediate level writing course took part in the survey. Pilot surveys were used to reduce the ambiguity and redundancy of survey questions (Morrison 1995).

3.3 Interviews

The students were asked to volunteer for the unstructured interviews sessions held in my office. The interview questions were based on the elucidating survey responses by students. I contacted a total of 6 students for the unstructured interview sessions however only 2

students volunteered for the interviews which were held in the last three weeks of the fall semester. The interviews were recorded and participants were informed that participation is completely voluntary, confidential and would not affect their grade in the writing class they were enrolled for in any way. The interviews were transcribed and the data was coded and emerging themes were analyzed (Mack 2012).

3.4 Participants

A total of 53 freshman students enrolled in the intermediate level composition course (WRI 102) I was teaching in the spring semester of Spring 2014 took part in the first survey of this study. This is an acceptable number of participants to generate qualitative data (Cohen et.al. 2011). For the second survey distributed post intervention, 4 students who had dropped out of the course and six who were absent did not participate in the second survey that was distributed in the last few weeks of the semester. Out of these respondents, two students were selected and consented to participate further in the one on one unstructured interviews.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants from the different composition courses and students were assured that the responses would have no effect on their evaluation and subsequent grade within the writing course they were currently enrolled in. The students represented the multilingual population in the UAE and were from diverse cultural backgrounds. The participants were from Gulf Countries', India, Pakistan, and U.S amongst others.

4   Analyzing the Data

4.1 Pre-Intervention Analysis

To organize my intervention, I analyzed the data elicited from survey responses given in the first two weeks of the Spring semester. The following is the analysis of the survey responses of 53 students enrolled in the intermediate level composition course. The survey questions were based on my research of the preference of students for traditional

teacher written as opposed to a more participatory and student-centered feedback method.

The surveys open ended questions were targeted at allowing students to provide answers that were different from the problems identified. They were directed at understanding whether students felt satisfied with the written feedback they had previously received and why. The following themes were categorized and codified from the data analyzed; i) Feedback received previously; ii) Preference for oral feedback; iii) Written feedback vs. Collaborative feedback; iv) Problems with written feedback received.

4.2 Pre-Intervention Survey Analysis

i) Feedback received previously.

Table 1: Results from the pre-intervention survey for the types of essay feedback students have you received previously.

What types of essay feedback have you received in previous writing courses you have completed? (Select all that apply)	
Answer Options	**Response Percent**
Written feedback without rubrics	34.0%
Written feedback with rubrics	64.2%
Collaborative feedback	22.6%
Oral feedback	20.8%

The results of the survey indicated that a majority of students (64.2%) had received written feedback (with rubrics) and 34% written feedback (without rubrics), in previous writing courses. Some students seemed to also have received collaborative feedback (22.6%) and oral feedback (20.8%). The data corroborates the hypotheses I had that a majority of students would have been exposed to the traditional methods of written feedback due to the teacher centered education systems they come from.

ii) Preference for oral feedback

Table 2: Results from the pre-intervention survey for students would prefer to receive oral feedback.

Do you think that oral feedback would be a good way to receive feedback on your essay?	
Answer Options	**Response Percent**
Yes	67.9%
No	34.0%

In contrast to my assumption, a majority of students (68%) responded that oral feedback would be a good way to receive feedback.

iv) Collaborative Feedback vs. Written Feedback

Table 3: Results from the pre-intervention survey the type of feedback students prefer to receive.

What type of essay feedback would you prefer to receive?	
Answer Options	**Response Percent**
Written feedback	79.2%
Collaborative feedback	20.4%

Although a majority of students seemed to prefer written feedback in contrast to collaborative feedback, it is important to understand that these students have not been exposed to or had limited exposure to collaborative or participatory learning strategies.

4.3: Pre-Intervention Open-Ended Survey Analysis

v) Problems with written feedback received.

In the open-ended question of the survey which asked students how they felt about the written feedback they had previously received on their writing, many students indicated that they were dissatisfied with the written feedback they had received from their instructors. Many students mentioned that dissatisfaction from the written

feedback they received was due to; a) being unable to understand the written feedback; b) the written feedback was unhelpful c) the written feedback was only given once; and d) the written feedback did not improve their writing. I have subdivided the categories into the following;

a)   Unable to understand.

Many students in the survey reported that they were unable to understand some of the written feedback they received on the essay drafts they submitted to their teachers. They explained that they were not able to read the handwriting of the instructors and sometimes they were not able to understand what the instructor was referring to as the terms were unfamiliar to them. They felt it was a complex explanation of the errors and they were not provided with an example of how they needed to improve on their writing.

Some of the responses students gave in their open ended survey questions include:

The handwriting was so confusing….I just couldn't understand or even read what she was saying.

The explanations were complicated I wish she had given some examples of what she means.

I couldn't understand what she was saying and how I needed to improve.

Some students stated that they felt there was a lack of explanation from instructors when giving feedback. One student said "She didn't provide any explanations". The fact that some students found the written feedback unhelpful is elaborated on further in the following category.

b)   Unhelpful

Students also seemed to feel that some of the written feedback they received was unhelpful. Many students seemed to feel that the instructor provided feedback only on a particular element in the essay draft and failed to provide feedback on other aspects. This made them unable to improve other aspects of the essay which then resulted in them receiving a poor

grade for the final essay. For example one student responded by saying that the instructor only provided feedback on APA citations, and although that helped them improve their in-text citation and reference list, it was not helpful in improving other aspects of their writing.

Students also felt that sometimes the feedback they received was very general and thus was not helpful in improving specific aspects of their essay. For example one student says "I only was told that my essay doesn't have cohesion and not how I can improve my cohesion". This student felt that not only was the feedback general, the instructor failed to provide a suggestion of how the area of weakness needed to be improved on. The student was unable to improve the essay because they did not know what 'good cohesion' is.

c)   Was only given once

For some students, the fact that the instructor only viewed their draft one time was frustrating. They said that they submitted one draft and then the instructor did not look at the improvements they made and they were expected to submit the final essay for grading. This was something many students seemed unhappy with. They said that they were never given a second feedback opportunity to check and ensure that the area of weakness had been improved on. 'There was only a first draft, he did not see if we worked om improving and the next thing I know, I got a low grade".

Some students claimed that they were unable to meet with the instructor and get direct feedback. This they felt hindered their process of understanding the complex and often confusing feedback provided and also made it impossible for them to talk to the instructor about the improvements they planned to make. It is interesting that students who seemed more satisfied with their instructor feedback all mention how the oral feedback they received helped them understand the written comments in a clear manner.

d)   Did not improve my writing

Overall many students seemed dissatisfied with the written feedback they received. And although student seemed to prefer written feedback to collaborative feedback (see table) many of them expressed that the written feedback was not able to improve their writing.

"My writing was the same and received a low grade even after the drafts".

"I changed everything and did all the improvements but my grade was low".

Still others claimed that despite the changes and improvements they made to their essay drafts, they still received a low grade for their essay. They felt that the feedback was not helpful in improving their writing.

4.4   The intervention

The survey results were discussed and shared with students in all three of my writing classes, without exposing the anonymity of students. After sharing the data with students, I asked them to divide into small groups of five and discuss what collaborative feedback means to them and how they could incorporate peer and instructor feedback into the classroom in an interactive way. The solutions provided by each group were then voted on by the whole class and the method receiving the highest number of votes was chosen as the feedback method for the first written assignment in the class.

Students seemed to be a little unclear on the ideas of what collaborative and participatory meant, and so we discussed these terms with the whole class and I realized that it was important for all the students to have a shared understanding of these terms in order to come up with similar methods of feedback practices that can be voted on.

During the intervention class we discussed methods through which students would participate actively and still receive valuable feedback on their essay drafts. Students suggested that the instructor needs to mediate these sessions and when necessary provide additional feedback to students. Students were eager to include oral feedback sessions and

seemed inclined to leave out the written aspect of the feedback session. Based on the discussion and methods that were voted the following are some of the feedback practices students agreed to implement:

The students decided that they will participate in "collaborative writing workshops" once a week for a total of 10 weeks until they completed the draft revisions for both their major written essays in the semester. For each major essay they needed to complete 5 "collaborative workshops" sessions allocated once a week throughout the semester. Each workshop session would last 90 minutes and all students would need to participate in it. During this workshop session the tables and chairs should be arranged in a circular pattern. The instructor will sit amongst the students and also participate in these sessions. As part of the writing workshop sessions it was agreed on that students will;

1.   Complete the paragraphs of the essay assignment and bring it with them to the writing workshop.

2.   Sit in a circle during the workshop session and take turns reading out their paragraphs.

3.   Once a student has read his/her paragraph other students will provide feedback according to the guidelines provided to them by the instructor.

4.   Students will take turns to provide feedback and ensure that the feedback is positive rather than critical and help identify the weaknesses in a constructive manner.

5.   Students will note down the feedback provided to them and maintain a positive attitude to the feedback given to them.

6.   Students will incorporate the feedback they received and improve on their paragraph before the following workshop session.

The students also agreed that the instructor will:

1.   Provide a guideline of the various paragraph students needed to complete. For

example if it was the introduction paragraph then the instructor would provide an outline of how the paragraph should be constructed. A copy of this guideline will be circulated to all students via Blackboard and each student will need to print it out and bring it with them to the workshop.

2.   Mediate the workshop sessions and ensure no rudeness or negativity results from the feedback sessions.

3.   Encourage and remind students to provide feedback.

4.   Penalize students who fail to bring the completed paragraph for the feedback session. Students agreed that attaching a penalty would be the best way to ensure all students completed the work to participate in the workshops. They requested that the penalty be kept minimal. It was agreed that 2% of the final essay grade would be deducted the first time a student failed to bring the completed paragraph and it would increase to 5% in subsequent workshops.

5.   Provide additional feedback if the feedback given was insufficient or unclear.

6.   Guide students towards proving effective feedback.

The first "collaborative writing workshop" took place in the third week of semester. By this time students had been given their essay topics and had been introduced to some essay writing guidelines. I had also uploaded a guide to the essay that included a breakdown of each paragraph and its outline according to the essay assignment guidelines. These outlines were then posted on the Blackboard for students to access and also bring with them to the writing workshop. All students were asked to print out their introductory paragraphs and bring it with them to the first workshop session. I informed students via blackboard the date of the first session and that there would be penalty if they failed to attend or complete the paragraph.

Several such "collaborative writing workshops" were held throughout the semester. Although two students missed out on one of the workshop sessions, all other students attended

the workshops, receiving and providing feedback on their essay paragraphs. At the end of semester students were asked to submit their final essay, a revised version of the paragraphs they had received feedback on to be graded. The workshops were carried out successfully and students seemed to participate actively in the sessions. I noticed that sometimes towards the end of the workshop's students would read out their paragraphs and immediately realized the areas that might need improvement even before receiving any feedback on it. It was obvious that self-realization and self-improvement were active components of these sessions.

4.5   Post Intervention Data Analysis.

As previously stated, a second set of survey questions were distributed to the students towards the end of the semester. These questions were on the similar topic of feedback as the pre-intervention survey, but were aimed at gaging how students felt about the collaborative feedback practices they engaged in throughout the semester. Follow up interviews were also carried out post-intervention.

4.6 Post-Intervention Survey Analysis

There were ten students who were unfortunately unable to participate in the second survey administered to students. This was due to 6 students across the three sections of WRI 102 who were absent and four students who had dropped out of the course. However, the results post-intervention was markedly different in relation to how students felt about collaborative feedback.

Table 4: Results from the post-intervention survey on the type of feedback students prefer to receive.

What type of essay feedback would you prefer to receive?	
Answer Options	**Response Percent**
Collaborative feedback	71.4%
Written feedback	28.6%

Table 5: Results from the post-intervention survey on the how students felt about the collaborative feedback sessions.

How do you feel about the collaborative feedback sessions? (Select the applicable)		
	Response Percent	
Answer Options	Yes	No
Useful	79.1%	20.9%
Improved writing	88.4%	18.6%
Enjoyable	80.5%	19.5%
Increased confidence	82.9%	17.1%
Motivated them to write	79.2%	19.8%
Empowering	65.12%	34.88%

Overall the survey analysis post intervention revealed that students seemed to prefer collaborative feedback in contrast to traditional written methods of feedback on their written work (Table 4). In general students seemed to find that the collaborative feedback they received on their written work was useful to their writing (79.1%), helped them improve their writing skills (88.4%), was enjoyable (80.5%), increased their confidence (82.9%) and motivated them to write more (79.2%). However, such positive results also made me consider that students may have felt that they need to provide a positive response in order to please their instructor. This is something that must be taken into consideration. I felt such weaknesses could be minimized by combining the survey data with the open-ended survey responses, as well as the unstructured interview sessions. This allowed for richer and thicker responses and also facilitated cross checking of data during analysis.

4.7 Post-Intervention Open-Ended Question and Unstructured Interview Analysis

Based on the survey data, the open-ended survey questions and the unstructured interview sessions, a total of six emerging themes were codified post intervention.

i.   Social

In the open-ended survey question many of the students stated that the collaborative feedback session made them feel "included" and as if they were a part of the class. When asked how they felt about the circular arrangement of the tables and chairs students stated that it made them feel like it was "a social gathering of friends rather than a class". Still others stated that they feel such a face-to- face arrangement in class made them feel less nervous when reading out their paragraphs and helped them have direct eye-contact when receiving feedback from their peers and instructors. In general students felt that there was a cooperative aspect in the feedback sessions as everyone in class participated and they were engaged in providing and receiving feedback actively. During the unstructured interview sessions the student Zara (pseudonym) stated that it makes them feel more "connected with the class. It was better than how teachers just talk at you, instead it was like we were talking together now…". Sayyed (pseudonym) explained that "the best part was we decided on it ourselves and that….ay…was the fun part …helped "break the ice"". Therefore the collaborative feedback sessions enabled the students to feel a sense of community in the class, it made students feel more socially included and kept them engaged in the writing class.

ii.   Confidence and Empowerment

Overall students felt that the collaborative feedback sessions were empowering, 65.12% of student stated that the sessions made them feel more empowered. One student explained that it made them feel as if they were in control of how they were being evaluated and "could decide things". Students also stated that participating in the sessions made them feel more confident about their writing and themselves and improved their self-confidence levels; "I feel more confident in myself". Another stated "It increased my level of confidence I felt good about my writing". Some students clarified that "At the beginning, the workshops were a little nerve wrecking because I'm not used to reading my essays out loud. But over time I have gotten used to it and I believe it is very helpful, especially as I feel more confidence in myself now". Students felt empowered as they were able to decide how they would receive feedback, were providing feedback for their peers and felt more confident

in themselves through the oral participation of reading out their paragraphs. Thus this collaborative activity made students feel more confident and empowered in the writing class.

iii.   Useful

A majority of students felt that the collaborative sessions were useful in improving their writing (88.4%). They stated that the collaborative feedback they received from their peers helped as, "My classmates can pick up on some of the things in my essay that even I was not aware of and that helps a lot with improving the essay". One student stated that "It helps one find a direction in which to write the essay". In the unstructured interview Zara stated that the feedback sessions were "Different from anything I've done before. The fact that you could talk to the person and question them made me really understand the feedback I was receiving". Sayyed stated that "It was good to share feedback on the essays to see what can be improved in my essay and even benefit from what others need to improve in theirs". I was surprised to see that students found their peers feedback useful and that they were able to improve their writing not just by the feedback they received but also through providing feedback to their peers. During the interview Sayyed mentions that; "I learned a lot because I needed to know what to correct and how to help out my friends, it made me like I have to listen to him now and like be responsible".

iv.   Motivating

79.2% of students (Table 5) found that the "collaborative feedback sessions" were motivating and made feel like they wanted to write more. One student said "I enjoy this class, especially the workshops. It has made me feel better about myself as a writer". Yet another student stated that "it really gets you motivated to search and write and express your opinion". In general students seemed to feel that the collaborative approach made them feel that the writing class was more enjoyable, interactive and made them participate actively in class. One student also talked about how having to present the paragraphs made sure that they completed the essay on time and it felt as if they were receiving guidance every step of the way.

v.   Boring

Despite the majority of positive results especially for the close ended questions, students also reported some negative aspects of the collaborative feedback sessions. Five students stated that they felt the feedback sessions were 'boring'. One student explained that they were forced to wait until all the students had read out their paragraphs and this was the boring part of the workshop. Yet another student mentioned that "It was boring and repeated. We had the same workshops a few times in the semester". However, the number of students who reported that the workshops were boring was only 11.6% of the students who participated in the workshops. A number of students explained how the workshops were interesting as "it helped give me ideas to write about listening to my friends" and that it was provided a range of perspectives on their written work; "I had many opinions on how I could fix up my essay".

vi.   Pressure to Perform

Another negative result was the fact that some students felt the workshops pressured them. One student stated that; "Well, as for me I wasn't usually prepared for them, it felt like a burden". Another student mentioned that; "The feedback sessions put a lot of pressure on me. I had to have the paragraphs ready and sometimes I didn't have enough time. It was bad because we had to read it out in front of other in class". Both of these students felt that the workshop sessions pressured them to have their paragraphs ready in order to share it with the lass. Despite some negative feedback, a majority of student seemed to benefit from and find the implementation of a participatory teaching methodology and the new approach to receiving feedback effective, as well as empowering.

5   Discussion

Based on the survey results, the intervention did make a quantitative difference. The results show a significant difference in the way students felt about collaborative feedback approaches, after the intervention. Furthermore, the results of the study indicate that students were able to utilize the feedback they received and found that they were more motivated to write. The real import of the intervention was that students felt they had more agency and participated not only in the collaborative workshop sessions but also in deciding the manner and method in which they would receive feedback on their written work.

In line with (Marzban 2014; Mack 2012; and Murphey and Falout 2010) such a participatory approach made the students feel more confident and empowered in the writing class. I can therefore conclude that students benefit from and are empowered by collaborative feedback approaches despite it being contrary to the more traditional teacher centered pedagogy they have previously received because such an approach; includes the socio-cultural experiences and knowledge of students rather than excluding it, is dialogic and collaborative; and enhances student voice. Thus the teacher's methodology does have an impact in empowering students and motivating them to write.

1 Socio-cultural experiences and knowledge of students

Auerbach (1995) argues that the traditional approach to pedagogy which is teacher centered, emphasizes the teacher as the one who is knowledgeable and that students are les knowledgeable. However, in order to empower and create participatory communities, teachers need to include the experiences and knowledge of students at the center of the pedagogical process. I feel that in changing the teaching methodology to include collaborative feedback sessions, the process was not only beneficial in making students reflect on each other's work critically, it also validated the existing knowledge and experiences they had (Murphey and Falout 2010).

2. Dialogic and Collaborative.

Students felt that they were a part of a community as the feedback sessions made them feel more 'socially included'. The exchange of ideas and sharing that took place during the feedback sessions was something students seemed to feel they enjoyed. In fact 80.5% of students stated that they felt the feedback sessions were enjoyable. So as stated by Auerbach (1999:148) the collective feedback sessions were able to "de-personalize problems, provide support and become a basis for action". Despite the decentralization of power that occurred through the collaborative feedback sessions and an attempt to practice the "everyone teaches, everyone learns" methodology (Auerbach 1999), students themselves agreed that there needs to be some mediating, monitoring and penalty associated to the collaborative feedback session which the instructor would need to implement during the sessions.

There was a need, despite the student centered teaching methodology adopted, for an active teacher who was central in reminding students of the deadline for the workshop, attaching a penalty for failure to participate, encouraging students to provide feedback, reminding students to be constructive and mediating the feedback sessions.

3. Enhances student voice

Classroom policies no matter how dialogic and leaner centered they are, cause feelings of power as well as powerlessness (Mack 2012). This was the case for a small number of students who felt that the collaborative feedback sessions pressured them to perform and receive evaluation or provide evaluation when they were unprepared for it. As shown through the responses, for the majority of students who were able to meet the deadlines and follow the previously negotiated policies, they were able to experience an increase in student agency and student voice in the classroom. They felt that the feedback sessions improved their critical thinking skills as well as their confidence. Through the implementation of a new feedback approach I engaged the

students in creating a more just and equal classroom. It was only during the intervention class where student realized the decisions they made would have a significant impact on the curriculum that they seemed to truly experience an increased sense of agency. By asking students to decide on how they would receive evaluation, I encouraged students to embrace a new methodology in teaching and learning that "redefined the traditional conception of traditional participation practices" (Mack 2012: 16). In this manner students were able to experience an enhanced sense of student voice and agency that contributed to effective learning pedagogies in the classroom.

6   Conclusion

In conclusion I feel that this critical action research study implemented participatory approaches to pedagogy that was successful in creating a new feedback approach on the written work of students that was more effective than traditional methods of feedback, more collaborative, communal and emancipatory. The collaborative feedback sessions allowed students to feel more power in the classroom and led to students becoming more confident, motivated and experience greater student agency. I also realized that despite classroom policies being more dialogic and discursive, the teacher played a central role in the mediation and facilitation of the feedback approaches.

While I feel a sense of achievement in developing feedback practices on written work that was able to be more effective for students, I also feel a sense of success that I was able to change the traditional classroom environment to one that was learner centered and more dynamic for the students. Students were able to realize a more confident, critical and improved self, based on the post-intervention results and this has made me feel a greater sense of accomplishment than I have felt in previous semesters of teaching. Some of the limitations of this research include an ambiguity in the relationship between the researcher and the

participant (doing research on your own students and then reporting the effects of it), a deliberate political agenda of wanting to empower students (whether they feel oppressed or not) and the extent to which participants of the research can actually be empowered (as they are still considered as being students and despite a greater agency in the decision of how they want to receive feedback on their written work, are dependent on the teacher for the outcomes and assessments of the course; the final grade they receive as well as their overall performance in the course).

Thus, an important criticism of critical action research is to question how empowering can it really be? However, this is where I feel that the students and how they feel at the end of the course can make a difference. Perhaps complete emancipation is ideological, however the fact that students were able to feel more empowerment, greater student agency and improve themselves show that the pedagogical practices were transformative and effective for leaners. I believe that the aim of pedagogy should be exactly this, the transformative nature of critical pedagogy allows the students to feel a greater sense of satisfaction with themselves, the classroom, as well as the knowledge they have acquired and thus motivates them to become better learners. Therefore, teachers need to practices such participatory, dialogical and empowering pedagogy that can successfully contribute to the knowledge of learners.

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