How did students feel about their audience(s) in an online peer-assessed writing task?

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Overview

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2. Audience in PA writing tasks
3. My (previous) context
4. Example of online PA usage
5. Student perceptions of their peer audience
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Why (online) PA?

What is PA?

- "…an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality, or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status" (Topping, 1998, p. 250)

Why was I interested in PA?

- Desire to provide students with more feedback, and opportunities to assess others' work

- Staff workload constraints – massification of higher education (Altbach, 2007)

Why was I interested in online peer PA?

- More flexible and convenient than paper-based approach (Mostert & Snowball, 2013)

- Can engage students outside of class time, and can be monitored easily

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Audience in PA writing tasks

- Who are the audiences?
  - Fellow students
  - A teacher/lecturer?
  - Academic discourse community?
  - An imagined audience?

- Students may be writing for multiple audiences

- How students feel about their peer audience likely to be significant for engagement in PA tasks

- Therefore 2 (context-specific) questions:
  - How do students feel about their peers as an audience?
  - What can data tell me about the characteristics of peers as an audience?

My (previous) context

- Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) – an English-medium international university in mainland China

- Language Centre (LC) – most resources committed to enhancing English language and study skills of undergraduate students

- Embedded English language support provided through "Joint Delivery" modules with departments

- Moodle-based VLE

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Example of online PA usage

- Undergraduate Y1 Joint Delivery module "Key skills for life sciences" (KSL102)
- 133 students
- Assignment to write a CV and cover letter applying for a research project
- Students had to:
  - Submit assignment
  - Complete a marking standardisation task
  - Self-assess their own assignment
  - Anonymously peer-assess 4 other students' assignments and leave feedback comments

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Student perceptions of their peer audience

https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/think-act-be/201808/does-technology-in-the-classroom-help-or-harm-students

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Student perceptions of their peer audience

Receiving marks from other students

Comfortable	5.38
Useful	5.35
Important	5.37
Fair	5.57

Receiving feedback comments from other students

Comfortable	5.57
Useful	5.55
Important	5.68
Fair	5.52

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Table 17: Themes from open-ended questionnaire item responses from KSL102 items 48-51 (N = 61)

Item/theme	Count of instances
What did you like about the online peer assessment activity?	
Related to seeing/assessing other students' work	15
Helped understand marking criteria/task	11
Related to receiving feedback from others	9
Helped with self-assessment of work	9
Ease of use/convenience	7
Anonymity	3
What did you dislike about the online peer assessment activity?	
No dislikes (explicitly stated)	13
Concerns about own/others' ability to mark accurately	13
Too much workload/time	10
Open to misuse by students	6
Issues with marking criteria	3
How could the online peer assessment activity we used be changed to improve your learning about writing CV's and cover letters?	
More examples/explanation	4
What help do you think you need to become a better peer assessor?	
More practice/training	6
More work on the assessment criteria	6
Taking the assessment more seriously	2

Student perceptions of peer audience (interview data)

Perceptions of peers' assessments

Believed that peers would take PA seriously	3
Concerned about possible impact of <u>low quality</u> peer feedback	1
Concerned peers may award wrong grades	2
Concerned that peers might not take PA seriously	4
Confident in students' ability to assess	1
Not much critical feedback	1
Peer comments received were useful	2
Peer feedback was not good quality	1
Received higher grades than expected	1
Some students may not be serious but it's not a problem	2
Students don't want to give low grades	1

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Student perceptions of their peer audience

- *"Yes, I worry about. Because, maybe some people do it not serious. It's waste the teacher's time, our students' time, and like our assessment just four people do for one person. If some people do like this, they're not serious, it's a waste of one blank for me. So I get a useless information. If only one people are OK, I have three useful. But if just one useful information for me, and three useless informations, I think I'm very worried for it. And it makes me very angry I think, if like that."*

- Student concerns about ability of peers to:
  - Mark accurately
  - Provide meaningful feedback
  - Take PA activities seriously

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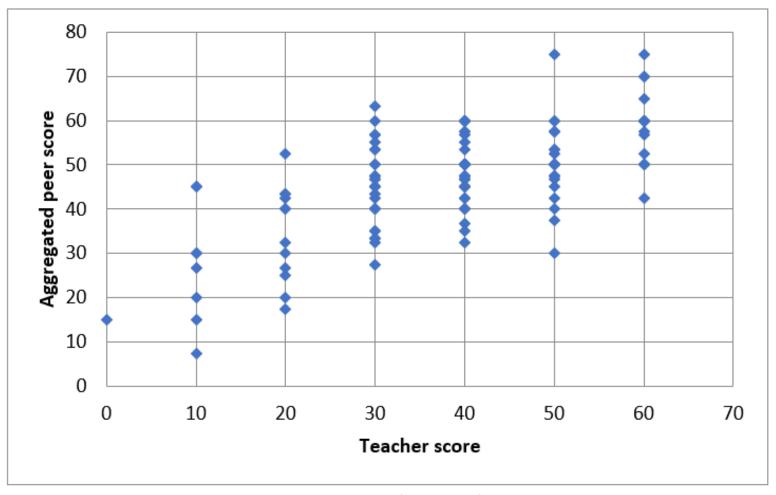
Data on the peer audience

Table 4: KSL102 PA activity participation rates

Status	Number of students	% of students on module	% of students who submitted assignment on time
Registered on module	133	100.00%	-
Submitted assignment for PA activity on time	124	93.23%	100.00%
Completed some of assigned PA/self-assessment work	107	80.45%	86.29%
Completed all assigned PA/self-assessment work	104	78.20%	83.87%

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Characteristics of the peer audience

Table 5: Descriptive performance statistics for students who completed all components of the PA task (N=124)

Item	M (/80)	SD
Teacher score	38.06	14.07
Peer score (aggregated)	46.56	12.07
Self score	55.00	12.98
Peer and self score (aggregated)	47.80	11.32

Figure 6: Scatterplot showing aggregated peer scores compared to teacher scores on KSL102 PA task (N=124)

$r = .66$ (p < .01)

Characteristics of the peer audience

Table 12: Quality ratings for peer feedback comments provided by KSL102 students

Item	Count	% of total expected instances
Total expected instances	496	100.00%
Instances rated 4 (relevant and specific)	199	40.12%
Instances rated 3 (relevant but not specific)	163	32.86%
Instances rated 2 (irrelevant)	51	10.28%
Instances rated 1 (minimal and unspecific)	12	2.42%
Instances rated 0 (no comment given)	71	14.31%

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Characteristics of the peer audience

Table 13: KSL102 students who received at least one 4-rated (relevant and specific) feedback comment, analysed by teacher score

Teacher score	N	n received at least one 4-rated feedback content	% of total
0	1	1	100.00%
10	8	8	100.00%
20	12	12	100.00%
30	27	23	85.19%
40	37	32	86.49%
50	23	18	78.26%
60	16	11	68.75%
All	124	105	84.68%

Characteristics of the peer audience

Table 16: Questionnaire responses from KSL102 for items 8-47

(Higher score = positive response)

Dimension	*M* (*N*=61; scale 1-8)
Giving marks for other students' work	
Comfortable	5.28
Useful	5.58
Important	5.27
Fair	5.58
Writing feedback comments about other students' work	
Comfortable	4.78
Useful	5.62
Important	5.32
Fair	5.65

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Characteristics of the peer audience (summary)

- High level of engagement with PA activity
- Peer assessments less generous than self-assessments, but more generous than teacher assessments
- Moderately strong correlation between peer and teacher marks
- Grades for high-scoring assignments more similar to teacher scores/grades for low-scoring assignments less similar to teacher scores
- Most feedback comments were relevant
- More relevant and specific feedback to low-scoring assignments/less relevant and specific feedback to high-scoring assignments
- Writing feedback comments more challenging/uncomfortable than awarding grades

Comparison of perceptions and characteristics

- Students had concerns about their peers' level of seriousness and ability…

- But data suggested:
  - Overall good engagement
  - Ability to provide meaningful feedback comments to low-scoring students (in particular)
  - Ability to grade high-scoring assignments in a similar manner to the teacher

- Challenge is to provide evidence to students about what their peers are capable of?

Takeaway

- Similar issues in other contexts?
- Need to build students' confidence in the assessment capability of their peer audience (and themselves!)
- **Use research literature** to make a case for peers being an assessment-capable audience:
  - Correlations with "expert" scores
  - Evidence of ability to provide meaningful feedback
- **Highlight the positive outcomes** of PA activities (e.g. most comments were relevant vs some comments were not; differences between self-assessment and PA scores)
- **Highlight the importance of peer audiences** and PA processes in academia (e.g. peer-reviewed journals; institutional reviews; external examining)

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Q&A

References

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