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Peer feedback processes in Distance Education: The giver-receiver experience

Διεργασίες ανατροφοδότησης μεταξύ ομοτίμων στην εξ Αποστάσεως Εκπαίδευση: Ανατροφοδότες και ανατροφοδοτούμενοι

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The present study engages distance learning students in providing feedback on their peers' written assignment and subsequently gauges learners' response to this feedback. Four groups of Hellenic Open University M.Ed. TESOL learners, a total of 78 students, were divided into feedback givers and receivers and, once the feedback provision process had been completed, were presented with a questionnaire on giver or receiver perceptions respectively. More specifically, givers were asked to evaluate one written assignment produced by receivers along the lines of the criteria postulated for assignment evaluation by the tutor and to provide both in-text and end-of-text comments while both givers and receivers subsequently commented on the process. The main purpose was to see how peer feedback is perceived on both sides as well as to find out how dialogue and multiple voices resonate in peer feedback provision, possibly underpinning power relations. Students' choices with regard to variables such as directness, form as against content, specificity and selectivity were also explored. Generally, peer feedback tended to be rather judgmental, more so than tutor feedback. The dialogic element was given prominence in students' responses but the broader social implications of the peer feedback provision process were generally neglected.

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Η παρούσα μελέτη πραγματεύεται την ανατροφοδότηση γραπτών εργασιών μεταξύ ομοτίμων, φοιτητών στο εξ αποστάσεως Μεταπτυχιακό πρόγραμμα ειδίκευσης καθηγητών Αγγλικής του Ελληνικού Ανοικτού Πανεπιστημίου, και ανιχνεύει τις αντιλήψεις των φοιτητών αυτών σχετικά με τη διαδικασία της γραπτής ανατροφοδότησης. 78 φοιτητές του προγράμματος, από τέσσερα τμήματα, χωρίστηκαν σε δύο ομάδες, ως ανατροφοδότες και ως αποδέκτες γραπτής ανατροφοδότησης. Μετά την ολοκλήρωση της διαδικασίας της γραπτής ανατροφοδότησης, οι δύο ομάδες συμπλήρωσαν ένα γραπτό ερωτηματολόγιο σχετικά με τις εντυπώσεις τους. Συγκεκριμένα, ζητήθηκε από τους ανατροφοδότες να

αξιολογήσουν μία γραπτή εργασία των ανατροφοδοτούμενων, σύμφωνα με τα κριτήρια γραπτής αξιολόγησης που είχαν καθοριστεί από τον καθηγητή-σύμβουλο, και να παράσχουν ενδοκειμενικά και εξωκειμενικά σχόλια και, στη συνέχεια, και οι δύο πλευρές αξιολόγησαν τη διαδικασία. Κύριος στόχος ήταν η διερεύνηση της πρόσληψης της ανατροφοδότησης και από τις δύο πλευρές καθώς επίσης και του διαλογικού στοιχείου αλλά και των πολλαπλών φωνών στη διαδικασία ανατροφοδότησης μεταξύ ομοτίμων και των σχέσεων εξουσίας που εμπλέκονται ενδεχόμενα στη διαδικασία αυτή. Διερευνήθηκαν επίσης οι επιλογές των ανατροφοδοτών ως προς την αμεσότητα, την εστίαση στη μορφή έναντι του περιεχομένου, τη σαφήνεια και την επιλεκτικότητα των σχολίων. Η ανατροφοδότηση των ομοτίμων ήταν γενικά επικριτική σε σχέση με εκείνη του καθηγητή-συμβούλου. Το διαλογικό στοιχείο υπογραμμίστηκε αλλά οι ευρύτερες κοινωνικές προεκτάσεις της ανατροφοδότησης μεταξύ ομοτίμων φαίνεται ότι αγνοήθηκαν.

Keywords: open/distance learning, peer feedback, feedback givers/receivers, academic assignments, dialogue

1. Introduction

Feedback, the provision of different types of commentary, or else, what is widely known as reacting to any visual, oral or written stimulus, is vital in any interaction. In the context of language teaching in particular, the educational process is considered to be incomplete without teachers' effective feedback on their students' oral or written performance (Chokwe, 2015). While in teaching practice feedback provision has generally been associated with an all-powerful teacher voice, learner autonomy perspectives (e.g. Tsagari, present volume) have sought alternative ways of providing feedback, dominant among which has been that of collaborative, peer feedback (see Ferris, 2003; Lee, 2017; Yu & Lee, 2016 for a review of the literature). In Higher Education contexts, peer feedback has been viewed as one of the three ingredients of an effective mix, along with teacher feedback and guided self-evaluation (Ferris, 2003, p. 176) and has been associated with awareness-heightening and self-management (Liu & Carless, 2006) as well as with "encouraging students' sharing of judgements" (Carless & Boud, 2018, p. 3) while the evaluation and judgement higher order thinking element that forms part of such feedback is also underscored in Nicol, Thomson & Breslin (2014). The need to dissociate it from grading and peer assessment has also been pointed to (Kaufman & Schunn, 2011; Liu & Carless, 2006; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicol, 2013). In Distance Learning (henceforth DL), in particular, research has explored peer feedback as related to scaffolding learning through peer support (McLoughlin, 2002), the use of social media and self-regulation (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012), the online learning and feedback provision mode and the corresponding cognitive processes employed (van Popta *et al.*, 2017). The benefits accruing to givers as against receivers have been rather marginally considered (see also Narciss, 2013), however, and, in the not many studies available, it is mostly one of the two sides that has been explored (see discussion in van Popta *et al.*, 2017).

In this article, we explore peer feedback giver-receiver perceptions and practices further by looking closely at Hellenic Open University (HOU) TESOL post-graduate DL students' response to it, when half of them assume the role of feedback givers and the other half that

of receivers (Triantafyllopoulou, 2015).¹ In doing so, we wish to identify similarities and/or differences between the two sides as well as collect further evidence in favour of such alternative forms of feedback provision in Distance Education (henceforth DE) as, among other things, a means of strengthening student bonds, much needed in the solitary process of DL, by promoting feedback as a dialogue and helping develop an active peer network.

The article is organised as follows: We first discuss peer feedback in the context of Higher Education and DL in more general terms and, then, we go on to discuss specific aspects of feedback we will be focussing on in our peer feedback research. Our third section presents our methodological choices while in section 4 we present and analyse our data and in the final section we raise some more general issues for discussion.

2. The theoretical background

2.1. Peer feedback in DL: The ‘macro’ image

If, following Carless & Boud (2018), we define feedback as “a process through which learners make sense of information from various sources and use it to enhance their work or learning strategies” (p.1), it appears that the main or only source available to distance learners to date is the teacher/tutor, a source of experienced ‘reader-based prose’ (Flower, 1979). Building on prior definitions (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Carless, 2015), however, this delimitation of feedback “goes beyond notions that feedback is principally about teachers informing students about strengths, weaknesses and how to improve, and highlights the centrality of the student role in sense-making and using comments to improve subsequent work” (Carless & Boud, 2018, p.1). If feedback provision is a polyphonic process, also drawing on fellow-learners’ less experienced prose, peer feedback may well form a vibrant alternative to teacher-driven comments and further highlight “the centrality of the student role”.

The concept of peer feedback, also known as ‘peer response’, ‘peer editing’, ‘peer critiquing’ and ‘peer evaluation’ (Keh, 1990), is theoretically driven by the Vygotskian (1978) idea of learning through social interaction. As argued in Villamil & Guerrero (1998, p. 495), peer feedback is “a favourable instructional environment for readers and writers to work within their respective (. . .) ZPD²”, that is the area in-between what they can do individually and what they can accomplish when scaffolded by others, be they adults or peers.³ In other words, a collaborative setting can help resolve a number of problems that could not be resolved otherwise. Within a similar perspective, Activity Theory (see, among others, Yu & Lee, 2014, 2015), which views learning as a mediated, goal-oriented activity, also underlies the peer feedback philosophy (see Yu & Lee, 2016 for a comprehensive discussion). Moreover, if writing is socially underpinned (see, e.g., Lillis, 2013), feedback, as a key component of the writing process, may need to follow suit and thus be constructed collaboratively. In this way, the teacher-learner dyad can be varied through the introduction of the peer-peer one.

Rooted in the concept of peer feedback is the idea of dialogue. Referring to the critical role of feedback generally in the chain of learning, Shale and Garrison (1990, p.29) point out that,

¹ It should be noted that both of these sources refer to a non-DL context.

² Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978).

³ Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) actually refers to “more capable peers” but, though we are advised to prepare “pairs or groups thoughtfully” (Ferris, 2003, p. 170), research has also pointed to benefits gained through randomness and alternating patterns.

in its absence, instruction may be like “passing on content as if it were dogmatic truth, and the cycle of knowledge acquisition, critical evaluation and knowledge validation that is important for the development of higher order thinking skills is nonexistent”. The dialogue established through peer interaction may thus be treated as one more step towards battling dogmatic truth. Besides the cognitive aspect, however, we also need to underline the emotional one, that of making up for the feeling of isolation particularly pertinent to DL studies. Talking about feedback generally, Vrasidas & Glass (2002, p.43) suggest that it “is more important than just a mechanism for informing the student on how well he or she did in an assignment” and invoke studies indicating that “the lack of immediate feedback in online classes contributed to the feeling of isolation among students”. This means that we need to seek ways of palliating the sense of isolation which so distinctly characterizes distance learners in particular and peer feedback is one of them (Ertmer *et al.*, 2007).

The role of dialogic feedback is highlighted in several studies. Blair & McGinty (2012), for instance, speak of the significance of a collaborative discussion between the instructor and the student over the feedback provided (see also Macklin, 2016), Malliotaki (present volume) underscores the importance of teacher-student dialogic feedback as a means of battling ‘transactional distance’ in DL (Moore, 1991, 1993),⁴ Calfoglou (2010) refers to written feedback – again in DL -- as an interpersonal act, negotiating and redesigning the meaning designed by the student-writer, while Steen-Utheim & Wittek (2017) operationalize dialogic feedback practices and propose four student potentialities as arising from such feedback, of which we retain ‘emotional and relational support’ as well as ‘the other’s contribution to individual growth’ as most relevant to our present research. We have therefore witnessed a growing interest in the multiple voices acting as co-determinants of the feedback process and this has also led to questioning the power relations at work as well as to proposing ways of minimizing their presence or, in other words, of doing away with the so-called ‘asymmetries of power’ (Sutton, 2011, p. 48; see also Yang & Carless, 2013).⁵ In the next subsection we go over peer feedback studies, focusing on peer feedback efficacy and the giver-receiver pair.

2.2. The effectiveness of peer feedback

The effectiveness of peer feedback has been explored in a number of studies. Ferris (2003) provides a comprehensive taxonomy of related studies (see references therein) and sums up the gains suggested by referring to a number of benefits, among which “confidence, perspective and critical thinking skills”, the “diverse audience” and “build(ing) a sense of () community” (p. 70; see also Ferris, 2010, 2011, 2012; Bitchener & Ferris, 2013). Liu & Carless (2006) emphasise its importance as an academic and professional skill, while Flower *et al.* (1986) argue that peer review in academic writing stimulates a problem solving situation and triggers action to be taken by the peer-evaluator, who becomes more experienced and reflective (see also van Popta *et al.*, 2017). In their review of the effectiveness of peer feedback practices in their state-of-the-art article, Yu & Lee (2016) point to the emerging significance of combining peer feedback with teacher and self-feedback (Matsuno, 2007; Suzuki, 2008; Birjandi & Tamjid, 2012; Lam, 2013).

⁴ Moore (1991) defines transactional distance as “a space of potential misunderstanding between the inputs of the instructor and those of the learner” (p. 3).

⁵ The power dimension of feedback as a component of writing practices falls within the framework of writing as a sociolinguistic act (see Lillis, 2013).

On the whole, however, despite the several instances of positive reception, peer feedback is not free of problems. Ferris (2003) refers to learners' mistrust of their fellow-learners in the sense of their not being competent, "either in their grasp of the language or their writing skills, to give them useful feedback. () "Students", she adds, "are also concerned that peers might be unkind or harsh in their criticism and worry both about having their feelings hurt or about losing face" (p.165; see also, *i.a.*, Bijami *et al.*, 2013; Davies, 2007; de Guerrero de & Villamil, 1994; Liu & Carless, 2006; Nelson & Murphy, 1992; Pishghadam & Kermanshahi, 2011; Saito & Fujita, 2004). In proposing peer feedback training, Ferris (2003) talks about "potential problems with social roles and cross-cultural dynamics within pairs or groups of peer reviewers" (p. 164). So, despite the potential gains in relation to power asymmetries referred to in the previous section, it appears that there might be power forces at work between feedback givers and receivers, for instance, even, we would suggest, within a single culture, in the sense of the individual 'cultural dynamics' each learner possesses. In discussing learner-friendly teacher feedback, Calfoglou (2010) argues that "written feedback and the corresponding rhetoric (see Straub, 1996) can act as a power booster, minimising interaction between learners and teachers, or, alternatively, question power relations through interaction maximisation" (p. 196). Yet could peer feedback be viewed as an implementation of 'interaction maximisation'*par excellence*? This may be related to peers' motives and stances (see, e.g., Yu & Lee, 2015). Yu's (2014) study, for instance, "showed that EFL university students with motives focusing on feedback giving or the learning process of peer feedback tend to take a collaborative stance during peer feedback" (in Yu & Lee, 2016, p. 474).

It has also been suggested that peers tend to focus more on local issues, like grammar and mechanics, for instance, than global ones, involving content or organization (see, among others, Alnasser, 2013; Hyland, 2016, Keh, 1990). In other words, there are both pink and gray areas in peer feedback. Zhao (2015), for instance, demonstrates that "learners provided significantly smaller amount of and less varied feedback than their tutor and they used significantly less peer than teacher feedback in their revised drafts", while, on the other hand, they "valued peer assessment in terms of its complementary role to teacher assessment and its distinguishable role from teacher assessment" (p. 231). The losses in one respect are counterbalanced by the gains in another, so further researching of peer feedback related parameters seems imperative. This need gains further support from the belief that, as Triantafyllopoulou (2015, p. 26) puts it, 'feedback should be viewed as a mediating tool, promoting change in learners' cognition and not aiming at a specific result, as its purpose is to "map the transformation of understanding" (Mustafa, 2012, p. 4)'.

With regard to the relative gains earned by each of the two members of the giver-receiver pair, focal in the present study, givers are generally treated as favoured more than receivers but there has also been some controversy. On the one hand, peer reviewers have been found to have become more competent writers (Cho & Mac Arthur, 2011; Greenberg, 2015). Lundstrom & Baker (2009) attempted a direct comparison between feedback givers' (*i.e.*, evaluators) and feedback receivers' writing performance and found that givers outperformed receivers' writing competence. Other studies have revealed that peer graders consider offering feedback more beneficial than receiving feedback (Ludemann & McMakin, 2014; McConlogue, 2015). Triantafyllopoulou (2015), by contrast, adduces evidence in favour of receiver benefits in writing,⁶ especially on the organizational level, and connects gains with student level (cf. Nelson & Murphy, 1992). On the other hand, however, Huisman

⁶ Triantafyllopoulou's (2015) study involves secondary education schoolers.

et al. (2018) revealed that givers' and receivers' writing performance was similar in the context of an authentic process writing task while perceived peer feedback effects on aspects of content, structure and style were also found to be equally adequate. Interestingly, the same study also pointed to the salient role of explanatory comments during the peer evaluation process, a point we will also be considering in the present study.

As already noted in the previous section, peer feedback may be even more potent in online learning (Lynch, 2002; Palloff & Pratt, 2001), making up for the lack of constant face-to-face interaction among students and the tutor. Online peer feedback has also been found to improve the quality of discourse (Ertmer *et al.*, 2007), and, eventually, distance learners' quality of learning. Sorensen & Takle (2005) and Vonderwell *et al.* (2007) consider formative peer feedback to be one of the main contributors of interactivity and collaboration in DL, as online peers are engaged in dynamic interactions during the giving and receiving feedback process. Moreover, Preece (2000) singles out important collaborative qualities in online communities such as the idea of 'sharing' (goals, resources, and policies). With regard to the gains differential for givers and receivers, however, contrary to the views above favouring feedback givers in conventional education, most studies on peer feedback in DL (e.g., Guardado & Shi, 2007; Smits *et al.*, 2008) stress receivers' benefits (but see Narciss, 2013). Considering the complexity of online written peer feedback provision (Dochy, Segers & Sluismans, 1999; Topping *et al.*, 2000), due to the advanced cognitive and metacognitive academic skills required – but also, interestingly, progressively improved through peer feedback practice – as well as the fact that it is an under-researched component of DL, it becomes evident that further exploration would be more than welcome.

2.3. Feedback-related issues involved in providing peer feedback: The 'micro' image

The constructiveness of feedback referred to in the previous section may partly be determined by its form. Thus, as suggested in Straub (1997), college student writers were appreciative of comments that praised the strengths of their work but resented uncouthly judgemental and authoritarian teacher comments. It appears, then, that phrasing one's response to student writing in a way that demonstrates overt control is particularly unwelcome. We have already referred to studies underlining learners' negative stance towards judgemental peer comments. One aspect of feedback which we would see as connected with a judgemental and overbearing attitude is directness. Unlike covert correction, indicating the problem in the student's text and guiding them to corrective action, overt teacher correction with no mitigators, that is downtoners, lexical items alleviating the effect of correction (see Hyland, 1998), seems to be dispreferred in DL (Calfoglou, 2010). The issue of mitigation – and praise – has been discussed extensively in the literature and research findings have been inconclusive, some studies recommending its use (see, e.g., Cho *et al.*, 2006; Nilson, 2003; Saddler & Adrade, 2004) and some others drawing attention to its confusing, misinterpretation impact (Ferris, 1997, 2003, present volume; Hayes & Daiker, 1984; Mantello, 1997; Zamel, 1985; see also discussion in Hattie & Timperley, 2007). It has also been argued (Hyland, 1998; Hyland & Hyland, 2001), that such feedback misinterpretation may be even more intense in the absence of face- to-face contact in DL. On the whole, however, indirect feedback has been hailed as producing more lasting effects (Ferris, 2011; Hendrickson, 1980; Jamalinesari *et al.*, 2015; Lalande, 1982; see also Kung & Scholer, 2018; Lee, 2004, 2008; Triantafyllopoulou, 2015), encouraging the development of learners' self-correction strategies (Noroozizadeh, 2009). It would thus be interesting to see if peers opt for the overt or the covert end of the directness-indirectness continuum in providing feedback as well as how this is perceived by feedback receivers. We would assume that, if learners view themselves as 'involved readers' in the feedback

provision process, this might be yet another sign of indirectness and point to the affective, empathising element in 'motivational (peer) feedback' (Pyke & Sherlock, 2010, p. 111).

Yet another parameter that might hinge on the impact of feedback generally and peer feedback in particular is the degree to which learners focus on content or form in their peers' writing as well as the specificity of the comments provided. In the previous section we referred to the increased incidence of local error correction in peer feedback studies. By contrast, Yu & Lee (2016) review several other studies (e.g. Chen, 2010; Xu & Liu, 2010) demonstrating that peers tended to focus on more global, content, higher-order issues in their feedback than teachers. Moreover, specificity in feedback provision, namely identifying the problem and its location and providing clear improvement suggestions, has been found to make feedback easier to implement (Ferris, 1997, Matsumura *et al.*, 2002; Nelson & Schunn, 2008; see also, Huisman *et al.*, 2018). Peer use of specific comments could also therefore be hypothesized to be welcomed by feedback receivers.

Finally, a key consideration especially in DL written feedback provision is the degree to which deviance is dealt with comprehensively or selectively. The importance of selective correction has been pointed to in a number of studies (see, among others, Ferris, 2003, present volume; Hargreaves, 2013; Lee, 2003, 2004; Tsagari, present volume; on selective as against exhaustive tutor correction practices in DL see Karagianni, present volume). According to Ferris (2002), error feedback may be most effective "when it focuses on patterns of error, allowing teachers and students to attend to, say, two or three major error types at a time, rather than dozens of disparate errors" (p. 50). In a DL context, however, where feedback opportunities are scarce, the choice between selectivity and comprehensiveness may be even harder. It is therefore interesting to see in favour of which peer feedback givers decide and whether they follow their tutor's pattern in doing so.

The overall assumption with regard to the above variables is that the specific value assigned to them in peer feedback may contribute to receivers' positive response and, consequently, to their active engagement with it.

3. The Study

3.1. The context

Drawing on research exploring peer feedback givers and receivers (see 2.2. above), the present study deals with DL HOU M.Ed. TESOL students acting as either feedback providers or as feedback receivers in relation to a written assignment composed within the framework of their first course module.⁷ The specific assignment had been preceded by another two, on which the tutors had provided extensive written feedback, of both the in-text and the end-of-text type, the latter in the form of an evaluation report involving specific content- and form-focussed criteria, namely 'rationale and analysis', 'use of literature', 'application of principles to practice', 'organisation and structure' and 'presentation and language'. The evaluation sheet also included a grade for each of these criteria as well as a grade total. The selection of an assignment following another two was made on the basis of the fact that students would no longer be 'novices' and would have experienced tutor feedback provision, which, it was expected, would help them feel more self-sufficient in providing

⁷ The specific module involved the teaching of Oracy and Literacy in the English as an International Language class and the specific assignment chosen for the purposes of the present study was the third in a row and focussed on literacy and, more specifically, reading instruction.

feedback and probably allow them to develop their own profile in providing feedback on their peers' written assignments as well as to see the benefits or drawbacks of peer in relation to tutor feedback. Peer feedback preceded tutor evaluation of the specific assignment.

3.2. The research objectives

Our overall aim in setting up the specific research was to see how feedback is provided by peers in the DL context and how it is received. More specifically, we wanted to explore the quality of the 'voice' uttered by peers in the feedback provision process, the degree to which it may differ from or conflict with that of the tutor, as well as how this voice is perceived by feedback givers themselves as well as by feedback receivers. Thus, the questions we postulated were as follows:

- What are peer feedback givers' and receivers' perceptions with regard to the peer feedback provision process generally? Do these perceptions converge? What are the roles assumed by feedback providers?
- What is the mode of peer feedback in terms of directness, form vs content focus, specificity and selectivity?

3.3. The Method

3.3.1 The Participants

A total of 78 students from two different groups in the same module over two consecutive years were divided into feedback and receivers, 39 each. The role of feedback giver or receiver was assigned on the basis of random probability sampling (Cohen *et al.*, 2011) to avoid student performance bias. Participants had been informed about the process and had consented to their participation in the study. The process was performed anonymously.

3.3.2. Tools and procedure

The tools employed in the study were the actual assignment in-text evaluation, the evaluation report also completed by the tutor for each assignment, two questionnaires, one addressed to the feedback givers and one to the feedback receivers. Clarifications with regard to the evaluation criteria were also provided. Students had their peer's assignment e-mailed to them and were asked to e-mail it back to the tutors-researchers, after having provided in-text comments and completed the evaluation report, also giving a grade for each criterion as well as a mean total. Marking ranged from 1 to 10. Both the in-text feedback and the evaluation sheet were subsequently forwarded to the receiver involved. On completion of the first part of the process, both givers and receivers were sent a questionnaire, adapted to the giver or receiver role of each group of participants,⁸ which recorded their perception of the process and of the feedback given or received. The whole process was pilot tested and any fine-tuning needed in the form of further clarifications of the evaluation criteria or the clarity with which some questions were phrased was done. Besides addressing our research questions, the joint use of assignment comments and evaluation on the one hand and questionnaire data on the other aimed at triangulating the study findings (Smith & Kleine, 1986; Taber, 2008), checking for instances where peers'

⁸ Wherever this was applicable, the questions were identical.

articulation of their role in the process, for example, might be belied by the actual correction practices they adopted.

More specifically, the giver questionnaire consisted of 16 questions, all of which were closed-ended, except 2, which involved further comments and improvement perspectives, and another 4, which aimed at further elaboration of the preceding question.⁹ 7 of the closed-ended items were multiple response sets, 1 was a 5-point Likert scale and the remaining 8 were multiple-choice ones. As regards question content, 12 items explored providers' attitude and perceptions about the process while another 4 focused on the feedback micro-issues researched in our second question.¹⁰

The questionnaire addressed to receivers was composed of 18 questions, all of which were closed-ended, except the last two, which requested further comments on the process as well as ways of improving it, and another four items accompanying closed-ended questions and involving further elaboration of the corresponding closed-ended response preceding each of them.¹¹ Of the closed-ended questions, 7 were multiple response sets, 5 were 5-point Likert scale items and the remaining 4 were multiple choice ones. With regard to question content, 11 items addressed receivers' perceptions with regard to the peer feedback process and the role they felt their peer adopted while another 7 items referred to the micro-level issues addressed in our second research question. Perceptions involved how interesting or helpful and so on they found the feedback received, the anonymity issue, their reaction to the feedback, the role they believed their peer adopted, the potential benefits of the feedback received, whether they would like to repeat the process and in which capacity, that is, as givers or receivers, their perception of peer feedback in DL, further comments and proposals.

The quantitative questionnaire data was entered on SPSS and descriptive analysis was performed. Peer comments were also codified in terms of directness, form or content focus, specificity and selectivity. The discussion that follows thus combines quantitative and qualitative question findings with peers' actual in-text comments and evaluation report.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Perception data: The 'macro'-image

4.1.1. Feedback receivers

Questionnaire data gave us valuable insight into both givers' and receivers' perceptions with regard to the peer feedback process they went through in the present study. In the case of receivers, their choices in relation to whether they found their colleague's feedback helpful, interesting and so on varied along the spectrum, with 40% opting for 'interesting', 20% for 'helpful', 18,2% for straightforward, 7.3% for demanding and, most interestingly, a 10.9% opting for 'unhelpful'. This suggests that some of the peer feedback receivers felt they did

⁹ These four items were not included in the number of questions provided and were coded as 9a, 10a and so on. If they are counted in, the question total goes up to 20.

¹⁰ Items 3 and 6 were mistakenly treated by participants as multiple response sets, so they have been excluded from the discussion that follows.

¹¹ As in the case of the giver questionnaire, these four items were not included in the number of questions provided and were coded as 3a, 5a and so on. If they are counted in, the question total goes up to 23.

not benefit from the process. Their response to the second, Likert scale, question, as we can see in Table 1 below, corroborates this negativity, since the median is 3, namely 'quite'. Besides the 48.7% who chose 'quite', there was a robust 25.6% of responses favouring 'not much'. Receivers therefore appear to be quite reserved about the effectiveness of the process:

N	Valid	39
	Missing	0
Median		3,0000

Table 1. "Will the feedback I received from my colleague help me see which areas I need to study more?"

What could be responsible for receivers' moderate response to peer feedback? Their stance on the anonymity of the peer feedback provider is generally favourable, though there is a total of 34.6% who would either like the process not to have been anonymous or, mostly, who appear to be rather sceptical about the benefits of anonymity. Interestingly, when asked to account for their answer, one of the respondents came up with "being anonymous does not necessarily promote careful and responsible evaluation of an assignment. Knowledge of the names could establish a higher level of responsibility and trust among colleagues and allow more space for feedback and exchange of ideas", which echoed other respondents' views, too.

Further light could be shed on receivers' reserves by considering their first reaction to their colleague's feedback. As we can see in Table 2 below, their responses are quite revealing, since there was both a 22,5% total of negativity and an opaque 37.5% of 'Other' answers left unexplained.

We can therefore see that, once again, receivers' enthusiasm was tempered. To explore this negativity further, we asked them an open-ended question about how their reaction to their colleague's feedback compares with the one to their tutor's. Though the differences reported upon were not so substantial, there was a dominant feeling that peer feedback could have been more encouraging as well as that it might not be as trustworthy as the tutor's. One respondent reported: "Tutor comments include some positive feedback as well, which totally boosts my confidence. Sometimes, the negative comments on my performance are written in a motivating way, encouraging self-reflection." So, it appears that peer feedback might not have been so favourably received largely because of its lack of encouragement. In section 4.2 below, we will go into this point in some more detail.

Perhaps the most apocalyptic element in receivers' attitude towards the process is their perception of their colleague's role in providing feedback on their work. As we can see in Table 3 below, the percentage of receivers perceiving the provider's role as one of 'an involved reader' or 'a sympathetic peer' was almost counterbalanced by that of receivers interpreting the giver's role as one of a 'distanced' or an 'all-powerful' feedback provider – 50% and 45.8% respectively. And, while the role of a sympathetic peer might add a touch of untrustworthiness to the process, opting for the distanced or the all-powerful provider characterization underlines the negativity.

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
What was your reaction? ^a	I was satisfied	16	40,0%	41,0%
	I was overwhelmed and panicky	5	12,5%	12,8%
	I was angry	2	5,0%	5,1%
	I was hurt and felt useless	2	5,0%	5,1%
	other	15	37,5%	38,5%
Total		40	100,0%	102,6%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 2. “Which of the following best represent the way you reacted when reading your colleague’s feedback?”

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
My colleague acted ... ^a	as an involved reader	15	31,2%	38,5%
	as a distanced feedback provider	11	22,9%	28,2%
	as a sympathetic peer	9	18,8%	23,1%
	as an all-powerful feedback provider	11	22,9%	28,2%
	Other	2	4,2%	5,1%
Total		48	100,0%	123,1%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 3. “Which of the following do you think best represent(s) the way your colleague acted when providing feedback on your assignment?”

Receivers’ attitude towards their colleague’s feedback is also reflected in their responses to the question on how they believe obtaining peer feedback will benefit them. Table 4 below records these responses. We can see that the second option, “it will help me in my next assignment writing”, along with the third, namely “it will make me develop a better understanding of problem areas in assignment writing”, which would have demonstrated a strong impact of peer feedback on the immediate goal of writing better assignments receives moderate support. This further validates students’ reply to the question of whether the feedback received will help them see which areas they need to study more, which we talked about earlier in this section. Also, though the answers are more or less evenly distributed over the options provided, it appears that the benefits perceived are mostly in relation to the self rather than to the interaction of the self with the ‘other’, as indicated in “it will help me become a better editor of my own work”. The cultural dimension of these findings is discussed in the next section.

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
How will peer feedback benefit you? ^a	It will make me more reflective	16	13,6%	41,0%
	It will help me in my next assignment writing	8	6,8%	20,5%
	It will help me develop a better understanding of problem areas in assignment writing	13	11,0%	33,3%
	It will make me more understanding with regard to my tutor's demanding task of evaluation	13	11,0%	33,3%
	It will make me read my tutor's comments more attentively	12	10,2%	30,8%
	It will make me think of my audience more when I write	16	13,6%	41,0%
	It will help me become a better editor of my own work	20	16,9%	51,3%
	It will help me reflect on the process of providing feedback on my students' writing	17	14,4%	43,6%
	Other	3	2,5%	7,7%
Total	118	100,0%	302,6%	

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 4. How do you think obtaining feedback from your colleague will benefit you?

Further evidence concerning receivers' stance with regard to the peer feedback provision process can be derived from their reply to the question of whether they would like to repeat the process as well as whether they would then select the giving or the receiving end. As can be seen in Table 5 below, the median for the 5-point Likert scale question was, once again, 3 (quite), which indicates no particular zest. Besides the 53.8% of the respondents, who opted for 'quite', none chose 'absolutely', while 'a lot' and 'not much' were equally represented by 23.1%. Interestingly, if they were to repeat the process, most would like to be either givers or receivers:

N	Valid	39
	Missing	0
Median		3,0000

Table 5. "Would you like to repeat the process?"

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid on the feedback giving end	8	20,5	20,5	20,5
on the feedback receiving end	11	28,2	28,2	48,7
on either the giving or the receiving end	19	48,7	48,7	97,4
Other	1	2,6	2,6	100,0
Total	39	100,0	100,0	

Table 6. "If the process was to be repeated, I would like to be ..."

As noted by one of the respondents opting for either role, "receiving feedback helps gain better understanding of the reader's expectations while giving feedback gives me the chance to read my colleague's assignments and compare them to mine and help me get an understanding of the application of marking criteria." On the other hand, those favouring the receiving over the giving role accounted for their choice to this effect: "I chose the receiver end because, when I provide feedback, I'm really concerned about not hurting the receiver's feelings and this is stressful." We therefore see that learners are aware of the emotional implications of feedback provision.

Finally, in describing how they see the peer feedback process in DL generally, receivers highlight the dialogic relationship benefits of the experience, though this preference does not seem to correlate with more solid social bonding, in the form of networking or a tighter community of practice. The dialogic relationship idea was followed by that of a larger audience and multiplicity of voices in the writing process as well as by that of improving participants' reading and writing skills. We could therefore argue that DL peer feedback receivers – and, perhaps, distance learners generally – are mostly oriented towards narrower focus benefits rather than showing concern over the broadening of the social aspect of the DL experience generally. It might also have been expected that peer feedback would be treated as a means of battling isolation in DL (cf. Malliotaki, present volume) but this does not seem to be the case.

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
How do you see peer feedback in DL? ^a	as an opportunity to enhance networking among students, strengthening the bonds among them	3	3,0%	7,7%
	as a means of creating a tighter community of practice, with its own goals and routine	11	11,0%	28,2%
	as a way of enlarging distance learning students' audience and creating a multiplicity of voices in the writing process	19	19,0%	48,7%
	as a dialogic relationship enriching students' experience	31	31,0%	79,5%
	as a way of fighting the distance learner's loneliness and creating a stronger sense of belonging	4	4,0%	10,3%
	as a means of error defocusing, that is, of treating errors as less 'sacrosanct'	4	4,0%	10,3%
	as an enhancement of the tutor's feedback	8	8,0%	20,5%
	as a means of improving participants' reading and writing skills	18	18,0%	46,2%
	as a means of tutor defocusing, that is of treating the tutor's feedback as less 'unique' and, therefore, as less intimidating	1	1,0%	2,6%
	Other	1	1,0%	2,6%
	Total	100	100,0%	256,4%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 7. "How do you see the peer feedback process in distance learning?" Receivers

As for the additional comments respondents made in relation to their experience, some said it was interesting and helpful while some others thought it was not particularly helpful, as "they could see the effort behind it" or they felt demotivated by the feedback provided. These comments, when available, lent further support to the points raised in the rest of the data concerning peer feedback as some kind of a mixed blessing. Finally, in their improvement suggestions, receivers pointed to the need for training. Here is the proposal made by a particular student, which also reflects the general attitude, however: "Perhaps those with a greater academic background and teaching experience should be playing the

role of the evaluator first so that the others can become better acquainted with the procedure and then they can swap roles.”¹²

4.1.2. *Feedback givers*

In the case of feedback givers, responses to whether they found the feedback providing process helpful, interesting and so on were somewhat less varied than those of their receiver counterparts. 36% of the feedback providers found the feedback giving process ‘interesting’, 29.9% found it ‘helpful’ and 28.1% thought it was ‘demanding’ while only 5.6% found it ‘straightforward’. What most of them seem to have enjoyed in the process is “hearing a voice other than theirs and seeing a somewhat different viewpoint”, though “reading a colleague’s assignment and comparing it with theirs” along with “becoming a colleague’s audience” also emerged as potent options:

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
What I enjoyed was ... ^a	reading a colleague's assignment and comparing it with mine	22	23,2%	56,4%
	hearing a 'voice' other than mine and seeing a somewhat different viewpoint	34	35,8%	87,2%
	becoming a colleague's audience and imagining the effect my assignment would have on a peer	19	20,0%	48,7%
	deciding what and how to correct	17	17,9%	43,6%
	other	3	3,2%	7,7%
Total		95	100,0%	243,6%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 8. *What did you enjoy in the feedback providing process?*

It therefore appears that the polyphonic element in the peer provision process is tempting and that its mediation in the learning process is welcome. To check on respondents’ consistency in their responses as well as to see whether further support for this attitude is available, it would be interesting to compare these findings with those obtained on how givers think the feedback providing process might benefit them. The results can be seen in Table 9 below:

¹² Time constraints were also referred to while another suggestion involved the same assignment being corrected by several peers.

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
How will providing feedback benefit you? ^a	It will make me more reflective	25	18,1%	64,1%
	It will help me in my next assignment writing	15	10,9%	38,5%
	It will help me develop a better understanding of problem areas in assignment writing	21	15,2%	53,8%
	It will make me more understanding with regard to my tutor's demanding task of evaluation	16	11,6%	41,0%
	It will make me read my tutor's comments more attentively	8	5,8%	20,5%
	It will make me think of my audience more when I write	16	11,6%	41,0%
	It will help me become a better editor of my own work	27	19,6%	69,2%
	It will help me reflect on the process of providing feedback on my students' writing	10	7,2%	25,6%
Total	138	100,0%	353,8%	

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 9. How do you think the feedback providing process might benefit you?

Though, as in the case of receivers, the relevance of peer feedback provision on assignment writing may not be respondents' prime concern, developing an understanding of problem areas in assignment writing exhibits a relatively high frequency. This may suggest that the metacognitive element in the feedback giving process helps them clarify dark areas in compiling an assignment. What may be most noteworthy, however, is that, like receivers, and even more so, givers opt for benefits related to the self, as in 'it will help me become a better editor of my own work' or 'it will make me more reflective', rather than to the 'other', their tutor or their students. This would seem to curb the polyphonic process attitude referred to above.

On the other hand, however, their overall perception of peer feedback in DL once again primes the dialogic element underlined in receivers' view while the multiplicity of voices idea along with literacy development follow. Thus, though the tighter community of practice option appears more frequently than in the case of receivers, we could once again argue that, generally, the broader social liaison idea is dispreferred:

	Responses		Percent of Cases	
	N	Percent		
How do you see peer feedback in DL? ^a	as an opportunity to enhance networking among students, strengthening the bonds among them	8	7,8%	20,5%
	as a means of creating a tighter community of practice, with its own goals and routine	12	11,8%	30,8%
	as a way of enlarging distance learning students' audience and creating a multiplicity of voices in the writing process	15	14,7%	38,5%
	as a dialogic relationship enriching students' experience	25	24,5%	64,1%
	as a way of fighting the distance learner's loneliness and creating a stronger sense of belonging	8	7,8%	20,5%
	as a means of error defocusing, that is, of treating errors as less 'sacrosanct'	7	6,9%	17,9%
	as an enhancement of the tutor's feedback	2	2,0%	5,1%
	as a means of improving participants' reading and writing skills	16	15,7%	41,0%
	as a means of tutor defocusing, that is of treating the tutor's feedback as less 'unique' and, therefore, as less intimidating	9	8,8%	23,1%
Total	102	100,0%	261,5%	

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 10. How do you see the peer feedback process in distance learning? Givers.

Givers' attitude towards the feedback provision process is further demonstrated through their response to whether they would like to repeat the process, the median being 3, as in the case of receivers, namely the 'quite' option on the 5-point Likert scale. Moreover, if they were to repeat the process, they would rather be on either the giving or the receiving end (53.8%) or on the receiving end alone (35.9%). Very few chose the feedback giving end alone. As the respondents themselves explained, "being on both ends would give them a full understanding of the process. Being a feedback giver puts you in the place of the reader and helps you understand how important it is for one to get their message across to their

readers. On the other hand, being a feedback receiver would mean being evaluated on how successful you are in doing what you expect others to do. Being evaluated by another colleague has to be interesting, because they can relate to assignment writing/reading and provide accurate feedback.”

Further comments on the process pointed to its being interesting, though stressful and demanding, as well as to the need for further preparation, systematicity and replication of the process: “I would have felt more comfortable if it was a routine process and not a once-in-a-while experience”. The suggestion concerning more experienced students becoming givers, which was also made by receivers, was repeated while a number of respondents expressed the need for feedback on their feedback, as this would give them a sense of certainty. Overall, it appears that feedback givers are more positive about the experience than receivers.

Finally, as regards the role they believe they assumed when providing feedback, givers see themselves mostly as ‘involved readers’ and, then, as ‘sympathetic peers’ and much less as ‘distanced feedback providers’, as can be seen in Table 11:

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
How did you act when providing feedback? ^a	as an involved reader	29	44,6%	74,4%
	as a distanced feedback provider	11	16,9%	28,2%
	as a sympathetic peer	17	26,2%	43,6%
	as an all-powerful feedback provider	4	6,2%	10,3%
	other	4	6,2%	10,3%
Total		65	100,0%	166,7%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 11. Which of the following best represent(s) the way you acted when providing feedback on your colleague’s assignment?

These findings conflict quite strongly with those obtained from receivers, who, as illustrated in the previous subsection, view their feedback providers as ‘all-powerful’ and ‘distanced’ with greater frequency. This difference in the two groups’ perception of givers’ role underlines the presence of power forces at work in peer feedback processes.

4.2. Perception data: The ‘micro’-image

In the subsections that follow we will present our findings with regard to the actual mode of peer correction. As we will be addressing our second research question, our discussion will focus on directness, form as against content focus, specificity and selectivity.

4.2.1. Directness and specificity

As regards directness, the majority of our feedback receivers felt their colleague performed either covert (46.2%) or both overt and covert (41.0%) correction. Further probing of giver reports and in-text comments in particular done by the researchers revealed that, though the overall image was quite varied, form-related errors were mostly corrected directly and that covertness was mostly reserved for content-related errors. In commenting on the specific mode of correction employed by their colleague, receivers generally treated the covert form of correction as more helpful and constructive as well as less threatening: “Crossing out the mistakes would be a rather aggressive form of evaluation. On the other hand, suggesting ways of improving is more realistic than writing down all the right points for each mistake. It’s helpful to explain why something is wrong and guide somebody to look for the correct answers in the right ‘place’”.

This, however, does not seem to fully portray what happens with peer feedback directness properties. Going back to Table 3, we can see that the giver’s role was often perceived by receivers as not that of ‘an involved reader’ but as that of a ‘distanced’ or ‘all-powerful’ feedback provider, which, as suggested in section 2.3, means that they felt somehow ‘threatened’. Indeed, close inspection of the language used by feedback providers in their comments indicates both the presence of mitigation and tentativeness in a number of instances – e.g. ‘a bit awkward’, ‘I would say’, ‘maybe you should’, ‘it would be better if’ – and complete absence of mitigation and harsh evaluative phrases, such as ‘very conventional’, ‘crammed introduction’. ‘too simple’, along with a number of imperatives. This could account for the reserves and dissatisfaction voiced by some of the receivers.¹³

Let us now see how givers themselves perceived their correction mode in terms of directness. Though their responses did not differ much from those of receivers, it is interesting to note that they treated their feedback as overt even less often as well as that they thought they had engaged in a combined mode of correction more often (48,7%). This may point to the need for further awareness-raising. On the other hand, however, some giver comments on their correction mode suggest striking awareness of the implications of overt or covert correction: “I think covert correction is more helpful and challenging, since it encourages critical thinking without discouraging the receiver”, “My intention was to encourage deeper reflection upon mistakes, so I avoided judgmental comments”.

The use of constructive comments inviting peers to reflect on what they have written also raises the issue of specificity. As we saw in section 2.3, specific comments are generally very welcome. According to receivers, their peers addressed specific features of their work ‘quite often’ (Median=3 on a 5-point Likert scale) while they included specific suggestions on how to improve problem areas in their work, that is forward-looking feedback, also ‘quite often’ (Median=3 on a 5-point Likert scale). These findings are also generally borne out by closer inspection of the actual feedback provided and might be an indication, among all else, of feedback providers imitating their tutor’s correction mode, as we will see below.

¹³ The issue of grading may be seminal at this point. Though it is beyond the scope of the present study to discuss the specific component of the research, it is worth noting that, in a number of cases, the grade given by feedback providers was lower than that of the tutor.

4.2.2. *Form as against content*

The second feature of peer feedback to be explored was the focus on content or form. As noted by receivers, their colleagues focussed on both equally (64.1%) and much less on form (17.9%) or content (17.9%) alone. Givers' responses lend further support to these findings, since they also stated their eye was attracted to both types of error (64.1%) mostly and much less to content (20.5%) or form (15.4%). Looking into givers' actual comments, however, reveals that, while givers may have generally dealt with both types of error, there were several instances where form was their exclusive concern, unlike what is supported by some of the findings in section 2.3 earlier, perhaps because of the training focus on content might require. Yet, further research would be needed to establish this point more firmly.

Also connected to the issue of content vs form is respondents' perception of each of the analytic criteria in the report compiled. Thus, givers reported finding content-related criteria, namely 'rationale and analysis', 'use of the literature' and 'application of theory to practice' harder to deal with than form-related criteria, such as 'structure and organisation' or 'language and style'. These three criteria actually collected a total of 85.8% of their answers and the reason they gave was either that they 'had difficulty with them when compiling their own assignments' or that 'addressing these criteria meant reading their colleague's work very carefully'. This might explain why no clear advantage of content over form correction emerged in the feedback provided. Receivers, by contrast, seemed to have no particular trouble dealing with any of these specific criteria in their colleague's feedback but, interestingly, when they had trouble, it was mostly because they 'were worried in case their colleague had misinterpreted the specific criteria and mis-evaluated their paper'. This further adds to the traces of mistrust discussed earlier.

4.2.3. *Selectivity*

Finally, givers were asked whether they corrected selectively or exhaustively and why. A robust percentage (59.0%) chose 'selectively', 33.3% exhaustively and 7.7% said they did neither of the two. When asked to justify their decision, a student supported exhaustive correction by stating that she "tried to find and correct all crucial mistakes that were part of the marking criteria, just as she would wish to be corrected herself" while another student opted for selective correction because "some did not affect the image or the content of the assignment and it is too difficult to correct everything; moreover, there may be things I did not realize needed correcting" and several suggested this was due to lack of time. It appears, therefore, that the choice between selective and comprehensive feedback was not made on the basis of allowing receivers to work on one thing at a time but, mostly, either along idiosyncratic lines or for time and lack of experience reasons.

A final question which sheds some more light on the micro-elements of feedback discussed in this section required receivers to compare their colleague's feedback with that of their tutor in terms of being less or more detailed, less or more direct and less or more tentative. The only marked answer was about peer feedback being less detailed than the tutor's (49.1%), with 'other' coming next (17.0%) and including comments like 'overwhelming and harsh', 'stricter but also more superficial', 'too judgemental'. This could be interpreted as yet another complaint regarding the quality of the peer feedback provided. In any case, the tutor's example apparently looms large, as is also demonstrated in respondents' view of their peer's correction style generally. Thus, 35.9% of the receivers felt that their peer 'followed the tutor's correction style' while 53.8% thought they 'had tried to combine his/her way of marking with the tutor's style'. Quite interestingly, givers felt they followed

their tutor's style in 71.8% and their own style in 17.9% of the cases. We can therefore see that the tutor's correction style is a determinant of the peer correction process. Providing learners with further training might encourage them to develop a more personal mode of correction.

5. Further discussion and concluding remarks

Our findings add up to peer feedback in the DL tertiary education context being perceived as a mixed blessing. Providers are apparently more enthusiastic than receivers, who need to handle the emotional cost of being judged by a peer, often less competent than them (see also Robinson, Pope & Holyoak, 2013). This, however, could change if students became more feedback-literate, which, as argued in Carless & Boud (2018), would involve "appreciating feedback, making judgements, managing affect, taking action" (p. 1). Carless & Boud view peer feedback as one of the means of developing this literacy but we would argue that peer feedback literacy may also benefit from learners' feedback literacy development generally. Developing self-evaluation skills may also help develop judgement skills (Boud, Lawson & Thompson, 2013, 2015) and, as a result, peer evaluation skills, too. Moreover, if students learn how to manage affect, the emotions which appear to lead receivers to respond to peer feedback defensively or givers to show little empathy and be judgemental would be regulated and peer feedback might be perceived as more beneficial.

What seems important with regard to affect is regulating 'the tone in which feedback is shared' (Lipnevich, Berg & Smith; 2016, in Carless & Boud, 2018, p. 4). If students are made aware of the negative impact of excessive directness in the phrasing of their comments and complete lack of mitigation, their feedback will most probably become less threatening for their peers' ego and will also be perceived as more helpful, as the feeling of mistrust would be eliminated. Konbhi & Sandeghi (2013) argue that "giving positive feedback first might reduce assessee anxiety and improve acceptance of negative feedback" (p. 90). On the other hand, however, receiver resistance to peer feedback in the Greek DL context may also be a cultural issue. The relevance of culture in feedback reception was pointed to in de Luque & Sommer (2000), who found a correlation between the type of culture and preferred form of feedback. If culture "provides the categories by which we understand the world, and the scripts and schemes we use to guide behavior" (Mezias, Chen & Murphy, 1999, p. 326, in de Luque & Sommer, 2000, p. 830), then it is more or less to be expected that feedback and feedback-related behaviour will also be interpreted along these categories. Feedback-seeking behaviour (Ashford & Cummins, 1983) may thus also be affected (see discussion in de Luque & Sommer, 2000). Further research determining the culture-specificity of DL learners' choices, as in the present work, is in order.

Closely related to the cultural determinant is the power game idea. An important finding is that peer feedback, which might have been expected to counterbalance 'power asymmetries' by shifting the feedback provision role away from the tutor, allowed asymmetries in peer relationships to emerge; givers provided overbearing feedback in some cases while receivers felt their peers were being more 'distanced' and 'all-powerful' than 'sympathetic'. This, however, might not have been so if givers and receivers had swapped roles, if the process was repeated and/or if both groups had undergone some training in feedback provision and reception (see Carless & Boud, 2018; Ferris, 2003; Hansen & Liu, 2005; van Zundert, Sluijsmans & van Merriënboer, 2010; Yu & Lee, 2016 and references therein). After all, the students participating in the present study also pointed to the need to be educated on peer feedback processes. Research carried out so far has revealed positive

effects (see Yu & Lee, 2016 and references therein; Hojeij & Baroudi, 2018) but a concrete way to organise such training in DE is still to be worked out (cf. Filius *et al.*, 2018).

As regards the social underpinnings of peer feedback provision, participants seem to have appreciated the dialogic element as well as, though less so, the idea of more than a single voice being heard but the broader implications of peer feedback scaffolding paving the way to networking and creating a tighter community of practice appear to be neglected. Moreover, as we saw in the presentation of our findings, the perceived benefits of peer feedback were mostly in relation to the self, not the others. Culture-related resistance may need to be calculated while the contribution of time constraints also needs to be gauged, especially in a DL programme. Time problems were raised in the open-ended questions by several respondents. The specific benefits of 'dialogue' may also need to be measured. Filius *et al.* (2018; see also references therein) argue that deep learning may result from the dialogue triggered by peer feedback because learners question it and therefore think more about it. Mistrust may therefore not always be totally negative.

The thorny issue of peer feedback being combined with peer assessment in the form of grading and the washback effect the latter might have on the former (see, *i.a.*, Kaufman & Schunn, 2011) also need to be considered. In the present work this issue was dealt with only in passing. However, informal analysis of our data revealed that students who expressed negative feelings about the feedback they received from their peers were the ones who had been given a lower grade than the one they were given by the tutor. We would therefore suggest that peers' role as graders may also impact their role as feedback providers generally. On the other hand, peer-tutor differences in assessment may underline the importance of the role of peer feedback, as argued in 2.1, as a way of undermining dogmatic truth, a benefit which should not go unnoticed. Generally, the information derived from the peer feedback giver and receiver experience has been quite enlightening and further comparison with tutor-driven feedback might give us further insight into the complex issue of written feedback, especially in DE.

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