Articles

An Investigation of ESL Teachers' Experience of Peer Consultation

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Abstract

Peer evaluation has been criticized as a threat to academic freedom and has been used, usually erroneously, as a justification for academic reappointment, tenure promotion, and merit pay. In recent years, scholars have recommended that peer consultation, which is primarily designed to improve teaching, be honored, but apart from evaluation.

In this study, peer consultation consists of three components: in-class peer observation, peer-to-peer discussion, and student input. This study explores how teachers and teaching assistants perceived their experience with peer consultation. Methods of data collection reflected a qualitative case study approach

Résumé

On a critiqué l'évaluation par les pairs comme étant une menace à la liberté universitaire, et on l'a utilisé, en général et à tort, comme justification pour le renouvellement académique, la promotion à la permanence et l'augmentation du salaire au mérite. De nos jours, les chercheurs recommandent que la consultation des pairs, conçue pour l'amélioration de l'enseignement, soit respectée séparément de l'évaluation.

Dans cette étude, la consultation des pairs se divise en trois éléments : une observation des pairs en classe, des discussions entre pairs, et la participation des étudiants. Aussi y étudie-t-on la

and included participant observations, audio-recorded interviews, student questionnaires, and focus groups. Data showed that peer consultation provided an opportunity for teachers to learn teaching strategies from each other, build upon each other's teaching, reflect on their own teaching experience, and augment their understanding of their teaching beliefs. Despite these benefits, teachers reported feeling uncomfortable because of the power relationship between the observer and the observed, and new teachers were apprehensive about their perceived lack of experience. Non-native English speaking teachers also felt anxious when they were observed by native English speaking teachers. Analysis shed useful light on implementation of peer consultation as a powerful professional development force for academic staff in universities.

perception des enseignants et de leurs assistants envers leurs expériences en consultation des pairs. Les méthodes utilisées pour la collection des données ont démontré une approche qualitative d'étude de cas, et elles comprenaient des observations de participants, des entrevues enregistrées, des questionnaires-étudiants et des groupes de consultation. D'après les données, la consultation des pairs offrait aux enseignants une occasion de se partager et de s'enseigner des stratégies d'enseignement, de renforcer réciproquement leur enseignement, de réfléchir à leur propre expérience d'enseignement, et d'augmenter la compréhension de leurs croyances pédagogiques. Malgré ces bénéfices, les enseignants se disaient peu confortables, et cela était causé par la relation de pouvoir entre l'obervateur et la personne observée. Quant aux nouveaux enseignants, ils se sentaient appréhensifs à cause de leur manque perçu d'expérience. Les enseignants, dont l'anglais n'est pas leur langue maternelle, se sont aussi sentis anxieux lorsqu'ils furent observés par des enseignants d'anglais langue maternelle. Par l'analyse, on a vu comment l'exécution d'un programme de consultation des pairs pouvait être une puissante force de développement professionnel pour le personnel académique universitaire.

Introduction

Peer evaluation, especially in teaching, has been criticized as a threat to academic freedom and has been used, usually erroneously, as a justification for academic reappointment, tenure, promotion, and merit pay (Magin, 1998; Seldin, 1998; Yon, Burnap, & Kohut, 2002). In recent years, scholars have recommended that peer consultation, which is primarily designed to improve teaching, be honoured, but apart from evaluation (Gibbs, 1995; Mento & Giampetro-Meyer, 2000; Weimer, 1990). Peer consultation differs from peer evaluation of teaching. In general, peer consultation is a method of professional development that improves academics' teaching abilities and increases collegiality. In this study, peer consultation consisted of three components: in-class peer observation, peer-to-peer discussion, and student input. (The role of students is explained in the section on data collection.) Peer consultation involves an observation focus, classroom observation, provision of feedback, and a post-observation meeting. Often, this type of peer consultation is non-evaluative and non-judgmental (Valencia & Killion, 1988), as well as being a powerful professional development force for academic staff in universities (Jenkins, 1996; Morss & Donaghy, 1998), not only for the continuous learning that takes place within the workplace (departments or faculties) (Boud, 1999; Brookfield, 1987; Candy, 1996) but also for the lifelong learning of adults (Mezirow, 1985, 1991; Shor, 1980).

Peer consultation as a professional development method has been recognized in general education for some time. However, in the field of English as a Second Language (ESL), it is used mainly for initial teacher preparation and rarely for continuous teacher professional development. Only a few research articles have examined peer consultation for ESL teachers. Most of the available literature consists of anecdotal reports of how language teachers organized peer consultation to teach English (e.g., Galbraith & Anstrom, 1995). Moreover, the peer consultation process rarely involves students. If students are involved, their ratings are used to evaluate teaching (Chism, 1999; Hendry & Dean, 2002), but their opinions about what constitutes good teaching and learning are rarely elicited. Consequently, this study attempted to address what appears to be a gap in the literature, namely, using peer consultation for continuous ESL teacher professional development.

Peer Consultation as a Reflective Practice

There is a consensus among scholars that teachers can benefit greatly from peer consultation (Bell, 2001; Blackwell & McLean, 1996; Brookfield, 1995; Cosh, 1998; Cox, 1999; Galbraith & Anstrom, 1995; Hendry & Dean, 2002; Jarzabkowski & Bone, 1998). Bell (2001) suggested that peer consultation

offers teachers an avenue for sharing critical reflection on their teaching experiences. The concept of reflection has been recognized in education for some time and, over the past few years, has gained some currency in ESL research and practice. John Dewey (1933) defined "reflection" as the "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it" (p. 9). Dewey also acknowledged the importance of translating beliefs into action. Along the same line, Schön (1983) regarded action as an essential aspect of the reflective process. In his view, reflective practitioners are those who engage in reflection-in-action, both as an interior observation and a criticism of personal actions. Calderhead and Gates (1993) extended this concept to include not only reflection-in-action but also reflection-on-action. This encourages teachers to reflect on their teaching theories and procedures both before and after teaching (Cosh, 1998). This third notion of reflection was addressed through the present study, in which instructors and teaching assistants reflected upon their teaching by observing one another's teaching practices and considering other people's teaching as a mirror. By being exposed to different teaching approaches, they hoped eventually to improve their own teaching methods (Fanselow, 1990).

University teaching is most often an isolated activity. Hutchings (1994) identified the low level of faculty conversations about teaching on most campuses. Most university teachers are not trained teachers and are often left on their own to develop their teaching skills (Chism, 1999). Such a strong norm of privacy inhibits the growth of the scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 1990). In response to this isolation, Shulman (1993) called on universities to make teaching a "community property." He suggested that faculty share syllabi and course materials and conduct team teaching, and he also argued for a prominent role for peer consultation in teaching. Other scholars have concluded that peer consultation promotes collegiality (Bell, 2001; Galbraith & Anstrom, 1995; Martin & Double, 1998; Weimer, 1990). Instead of being evaluators and reviewers, colleagues act as helpers in reciprocal instruction observations (Weimer, 1990). They can model teaching skills and act as a support person for colleagues (Bell, 2001) or they can share their expertise and provide one another with feedback to refine teaching skills and solve classroom-related problems (Galbraith & Anstrom, 1995). In short, peer consultation helps colleagues build a community of reflective practice or what McKeachie (1997) described as a community of learners about teaching. In such a community, new teachers can trust their peers and mentors and seek feedback and help without evaluative threat.

Yet, despite these benefits, many teachers still feel threatened or uncomfortable when they are observed, no matter how supportive peer consultation might be (Bell, 2001; Cosh, 1998; Hutchings, 1996; Millis, 1992). Bell

(2001) reported that regardless of their inexperience or expertise, many teachers felt stressful when observed by their colleagues. There are good reasons for such reactions; for example, generally, younger and less-experienced teachers feel nervous when observed by a senior colleague because implicit judgments might be made about their teaching (Weimer, 1990). Some teachers, particularly those with temporary contracts, are concerned that peer consultation will be used as justification for reappointment (Magin, 1998; Seldin, 1998; Yon et al., 2002). Moreover, the issue of non-native speakers being observed by native speakers is not listed in the literature as one of the factors that influence peer consultation.

This study examined the peer-consultation process of a content-based ESL program for Japanese exchange students, in a large Canadian research university, in which faculty and teaching assistants work collaboratively to improve one another's teaching. The purpose was to explore how teachers and teaching assistants perceived their experience of peer consultation. Three questions guided the study:

1. How do teachers perceive their experience of peer consultation?
2. What are teachers' and students' recommendations for the ESL program?
3. What are teachers' recommendations for peer consultation?

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted in an academic exchange program between Taishou[1] University, a private university in Japan, and Western Province University (WPU), a large research university in Canada. The joint program, founded in 1991, brings about 100 Japanese students to WPU every year to live and study in an integrated academic and social environment. Most of these students live in two major on-campus buildings, sharing rooms with Canadian students. The students must attend a series of orientation meetings in Japan from mid-April to early July, where they learn about academic and residence life from the preceding group of students, the director of the program, and some WPU student representatives. At WPU, the Japanese students are expected to develop their English linguistic skills (including listening, reading, speaking, writing, grammar, and vocabulary) while they take relevant content courses. They usually take three courses in their first semester and four or five in their second semester, and they receive transfer credits for academic work completed at WPU. The exchange program focuses on the development of their academic, socio-cultural, and linguistic skills.

A purposeful sampling procedure (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993) was adopted for the study. The procedure was purposeful because WPU's aca-

demic exchange program was able to supply adequate and suitable information for investigation. The program's mandate is to encourage peer support and promote the development of a sense of community (Cox, 1999), and peer consultation, one of its critical features, was used as a pilot project for the rest of the programs in the department. Thus, the peer consultation process and the participants chosen for the study could provide significant insights into the questions under investigation.

The study involved four teachers, two teaching assistants, and the students in WPU's academic exchange program. The teachers (all male) each held a Master's degree in education or linguistics, and three were pursuing a doctoral degree in education, one in educational leadership and two in teaching English as a second language. The two female teaching assistants were doctoral students who specialized in teaching English as a second language. One of the teachers had been teaching in the program since 1991, two were in their second year of teaching, and another was in his first year. The majority of the students in this academic exchange program were in their second or third year (20 or 21 years of age) in their home university. Most of them, with a TOEFL mean of 506, had come to Canada just before the program started in September, but about 30 had come in August to study in a three-week intensive university preparation program at the English Language Institute of WPU. Their major fields of study varied from literature to sociology to international relations to law to engineering.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected from participant observations, interviews, student questionnaires, and a student focus group within one academic year (September 2002 to April 2003). At the beginning of the project, teachers and teaching assistants were told the goal was to understand their experience of peer consultation. Rather than taking a technical view of peer consultation, the researcher sought a better understanding and interpretation of the meanings that teachers and teaching assistants bring to the activity of peer consultation. To this end, a qualitative case study was conducted, using ethnographic observation and interview techniques (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000; Wolcott, 1992).

Spradley (1980) described participant observation as a way to investigate the practical aspect of an activity, and this method was adopted in the study to find out how instructors and teaching assistants conducted and perceived their peer consultation. As mentioned above, peer consultation included in-class peer observation, peer-to-peer discussion, and student input. Specifically, four instructors and two teaching assistants carried out one to three observations of their colleagues' classroom teaching in the first semester. The purpose was not to judge and evaluate their teaching, but to

help improve the teaching of those observed, as well as their own teaching. Each observation varied from one to two hours, at the end of which the participants provided oral or written confidential feedback to their colleagues. Participants also provided feedback in an online discussion forum, which focused on what the observer had learned or decided to think about, as well as using it for immediate clarifications and articulations of insights. This part of the feedback was used for data analysis, with the consent of the participants. The teachers and teaching assistants also held two meetings, during which they reflected on their experiences of peer observation, discussed their feelings about observing and being observed, and made suggestions for future observation. The researcher observed all of these activities, except the private feedback session at the end of the peer observation, and participated in the online discussions and the teachers' meetings. In addition, she kept a fieldwork journal (Spradley, 1980), in which she made detailed descriptions of the observed sessions, major topics covered, dynamics in the classroom, teachers' and students' questions, and students' activities. She also recorded her interpretations of the events she observed. This reflection not only helped the researcher become aware of recurring patterns but also challenged her assumptions.

The limitation of observation lies in its subjective interpretations of situations due to its exclusive dependence on researchers' personal perceptions (Adler & Adler, 1994). To overcome the risk of bias, the researcher also used interviews to get a better understanding of insiders' views (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) of the participants' perspectives on their peer-consultation experience. Interviewing is a fundamental method of qualitative inquiry because it helps the researcher gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon observed. In the second semester, the four instructors and two teaching assistants were interviewed individually. All of the interviews were audio recorded, with their permission, and then transcribed. Each interview lasted one to one and a half hours, during which the interviewees were asked to comment on their experience of peer consultation, on what worked well in their period of observation, and on teaching techniques they learned from their observation (Appendix 1).

In addition, in contrast to current peer-consultation practice, students were involved in the process. Students were told the goals of the study were to improve teaching and learning in their specific class, with a secondary interest in investigating peer consultation as a tool. Questionnaires were distributed to 80 students, through their instructors, in February 2003 (Appendix 2) because it was not feasible to interview all 80 students. The response rate was disappointedly low: only 19% (15 out of 80) of the students responded. Some students explained that they had no time to respond as they were taking four to five courses in the second semester and were

occupied with their assignments. As an alternative, a student focus group was conducted, and it generated a heated two-hour discussion about their learning experience in Canada. Data analysis was accomplished by searching for categories, patterns, or "domains" (Spradley, 1980) that emerged from the data, rather than being imposed prior to data collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). The domain analysis was combined with the coding system of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to conceptualize the relationships between emergent categories.

Findings and Discussions

Four major themes emerged from the data, which were categorized as: benefits of peer consultation; adverse effects of peer consultation; students' and teachers' recommendations for the ESL program; and teachers' recommendations for peer consultation. These themes are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Benefits of Peer Consultation

The instructors and teaching assistants reported four main benefits of peer consultation.

First, peer consultation offered an opportunity for instructors and teaching assistants to learn teaching strategies from one another. For instance, one instructor stated:

> Andy asked students in the audience to observe and comment on different aspects of the presentation. This helped students to listen more attentively. I haven't done it before. I will perhaps try it in my class. (Interview, November 26, 2002)

This instructor was searching for strategies to help students be more attentive in class when their peers were doing oral presentations. By observing his colleague's class, he learned it was effective to provide a list of specific things for them to observe. Similarly, one teaching assistant said: "Ben's way of identifying and probing questions was quite effective. I found the students were really in the discussion mood" (Interview, December 6, 2002). This teaching assistant reported that she had difficulty motivating students to participate in classroom discussions and learned several effective questioning techniques from observing other teachers' classes. She asserted that "the most valuable part of the project was seeing other teachers teach" (Interview, December 6, 2002). Participants reported that watching others teach was one of the most effective approaches for their professional development (Bell, 2001; Galbraith & Anstrom, 1995). This finding was consistent with Fanselow's (1990) and Sparks' (1986) studies about teacher preparation

programs. By sharing instructional strategies and techniques, instructors and teaching assistants pool their intellectual resources and teaching becomes a "community property" (Shulman, 1993).

Second, peer consultation allowed instructors to build on one another's teaching because they taught many of the same students. One instructor reported:

> It's nice to be in the classroom to see what other teachers were doing. Brandon was modeling a presentation for his students and he went through the evaluation criteria. I will be able to build on this in my class. (Interview, January 27, 2003)

The instructor stated that Brandon's modeling of a presentation was very effective. In his own class, he invited three doctoral students in language education to present their dissertation research projects so his students could witness an academic presentation. He then gave his students a detailed list of suggestions for effective oral presentations and reminded them of the evaluation criteria, a technique that students had practised in Brandon's class. Building on each other's teaching reduces the fragmentation of teaching in higher education and helps to build a faculty learning community (Cox, 2001; Shulman & Cox, 2004).

Third, peer consultation acted as a mirror for instructors and teaching assistants to reflect on their own teaching practice. They learned about themselves and their teaching by seeing others teach (Brookfield, 1995; Fanselow, 1990; Munson, 1998). Sometimes, a strategy that worked for one instructor did not necessarily work for another. For example, one instructor noted:

> David writes a lesson outline on the front board, a tactic that I have tried without much success because I am prone to switching things around and tweaking activities mid-stream if they are not working as well as I had imagined they would. It is a good idea if you can pull it off. (Online reflection, October 22, 2002)

This is a good example of a reflective professional's self-awareness. Writing a lesson outline on the front board helped David to organize his class, but it was not an effective method for this instructor because of his personality. This example demonstrated that instructors and teaching assistants learned teaching techniques from each other and, at the same time, showed respect for diverse approaches to the teaching process (Shulman & Cox, 2004). They recognized that there is no one "right way" in the teaching environment (Deming, 1994).

Finally, peer consultation helped teachers and students augment their understanding of their teaching and learning beliefs. For Hutchings (1994), "teaching must be seen as more than technique . . . teaching is a scholarly

activity, rooted in ways of thinking about one's own field" (p. 3). As Hendry and Dean (2002) suggested, in order to identify and clearly articulate one's teaching practice goal, a teacher must "have ideas about what good teaching is and make these ideas explicit" (p. 79). In this study, peer consultation and follow-up dialogues enabled instructors, teaching assistants, and students to openly share their assumptions about what constitutes effective teaching and what promotes responsible student learning (Cavanagh, 1996). Teachers and students seemed to feel similarly about what constitutes good teaching; both groups reported that empathy, love, respect, and good relationships with students were essential to good teaching. At the same time, teachers seemed to highlight modeling and a higher level of thinking as aspects of effective teaching, whereas students seemed to desire effective educational strategies, constructive feedback, a willingness to find students' interests, and teachers being available to assist students when needed.

However, teachers and students were divided on what constitutes good learning. Teachers focused on learning by doing (Kilpatrick, 1918) and being responsible; students emphasized learning by listening to others and working hard. According to Leki and Carson (1994), instructors need to take into account students' views on learning because their views affect their learning. In this study, the instructors were aware that most students regarded learning as the absorption of knowledge, and thus they insisted that students be responsible for their own learning and that they be educational leaders. Assuming a leadership role was a challenge for these students, who expected a more hierarchical relationship between teachers and students, and they took a long time to accept the idea that they were the drivers of their own learning. Learning by doing was another concept that challenged these students' approach to learning because they preferred to listen carefully to the opinions of others. For example, one instructor introduced an action-research project in his course by having three groups of students look at three different feedback methods online: one holistic and qualitative (error correction but no explanation), another discrete and quantitative (error explanation but no error correction), and the third providing no feedback and no correction. This project allowed students to practise data collection and analysis in class, using themselves as subjects, prior to applying what they learned from the experience to do research in the real world (Teachers' meeting, April 24, 2003). Such a teaching practice was driven by a strong educational belief that was evident from a comment made by a teacher: "The direct involvement in action research would help students to understand that they are educators and that learning is a practice rather than an assignment" (Online discussion, October 30, 2002). By the end of the second semester, many students had successfully completed their research projects and expanded their understanding of active learning. The data suggested that peer consultation enabled teachers and students to openly share their beliefs about teaching

and learning, which enhanced the learning process for students. However, not all of the students achieved this goal. Indeed, some students returned to Japan with the notion that doing research projects was a waste of their time and they could learn more from their teachers.

Adverse Effects of Peer Consultation

Despite the benefits of peer consultation, the instructors and teaching assistants reported they felt "nervous," "uncomfortable," and sometimes "inadequate" (see Millis, 1992, for a similar finding). They reported three major reasons that contributed to these feelings: teaching experience; native speakers versus non-native speakers; and the power relationship between the observer and the observed. Most teachers felt peer consultation, particularly the in-class observation, was intrusive. Nevertheless, it did not seem to interfere with the performance of experienced teachers. For example, two experienced teachers commented:

> I didn't even notice you guys were there. (Interview, November 26, 2002)

> At the beginning of my teaching career, I was nervous. I spent many hours preparing for the show. Now, after 19 years, it doesn't bother me any more. (Interview, December 2, 2002)

In contrast, some instructors, particularly younger and less-experienced teachers, reported feelings of mild apprehension when they were observed by their experienced colleagues because an implicit judgment might be made about their teaching ability. For example, one new teacher stated: "When I was observed, I wasn't 100 percent comfortable. It changed what I did and how I did it" (Interview, January 27, 2003). The presence of an experienced colleague appeared to hinder this new teacher from displaying his normal level of performance.

Another factor that affected peer consultation was the power relationship between the observer and the observed. For instance, when the head instructor observed his junior colleagues, it appeared to create a stress factor in their teaching. One instructor stated:

> An authority figure makes a bigger difference, even if there is a good relationship. I wasn't me, 100 percent. I was self-conscious. This part of me was taking some of my energy. (Interview, November 26, 2002)

Similarly, one teaching assistant said she was so nervous when the head instructor observed her teaching that she made spelling errors on the board. Because the observed peers appeared to suffer high anxiety, it is important for observers to be sensitive to the self-esteem and feelings of the instructors and teaching assistants being observed.

Furthermore, non-native English speaking teachers also reported stronger feelings of stress or inadequacy when they were observed by native English speaking colleagues, despite the high levels of trust between them and the observers. For example, one non-native English teacher noted:

> It also depends on who is observing. I had more pressure when a native English speaker observed me. I was more relaxed when a non-native English speaker observed me. I can't help it.(Interview, November 26, 2002)

The findings about the anxiety created by the inexperience of new teachers and the power relationship between the observer and the observed are consistent with the studies by Bell (2001) and Weimer (1990). However, previous literature seems to overlook the effect on non-native English speaking teachers observed by native English speaking colleagues. The non-native English speaking teachers in this study felt nervous when they were observed by a native English speaking colleague because an implicit judgment might be made about their use of English.

Students' Recommendations for the ESL Program

Peer consultation allowed teachers and students to reflect on their teaching and learning experiences and to make suggestions for improving the content-based ESL program. In the first semester, students mainly took courses in the ESL program, whereas in their second semester, their choice of courses was determined by their TOEFL scores. Students stated that they would have liked more control of their course selection; some students wanted to take courses that were more related to their fields of study. Students also wanted more detailed feedback on their writing. Finally, students would have liked a lighter reading load because they were not used to reading so much in such a short time. They suggested that instructors increase reading materials gradually.

Teachers' Recommendations for the ESL Program

The teaching assistants suggested that reading materials should be matched to students' reading abilities. A better collaboration between lectures and lab seminars should be made because teaching assistants in the lab seminars wished to contribute to the seminar design. The teaching assistants suggested that students needed more opportunities to speak English in a less-threatening situation. Only one academic skills course was available for students, but the students complained that the course content "largely duplicates what is taught in orientation sessions in Japan" (Teachers' meeting, April 24, 2003). Thus, it was important either to "dedicate a course specifically to academic writing, with a strong emphasis on detailed feedback on

writing assignments based on modeled formats" (Teachers' meeting, April 24, 2003) or to offer individual writing tutoring sessions to provide detailed feedback. Teaching assistants and computer lab monitors could also be used to provide feedback on students' writing. Although teachers believed there was a strong integration of language and content instruction in the program, there may have been too much content. More weight should be given to language instruction (Interview, February 7, 2003).

Teachers' Recommendations for Peer Consultation

This study indicated that the greatest difficulty with peer consultation was the time factor. Although the instructors and teaching assistants wanted to do more observations, finding free time to do so was difficult. They were teaching on two campuses or pursuing doctoral studies, and the schedules of lectures and lab seminars were conflicting; thus, the paired instructors and teaching assistants were unable to observe one another's classes. One teacher mentioned that peer consultation placed extra demands on an already heavy workload (Martin, 1997). Release time for instructors and teaching assistants needed to be provided (Galbraith & Anstrom, 1995; Munson, 1998). Peer observers appeared to include only positive data in their feedback (Yon et al., 2002). Given that the long-range goal of peer consultation is the self-development of academic staff, participants made several recommendations for improvement, including a stricter timetable for peer consultation, training of teachers who would conduct classroom observations, providing observers with a lesson plan before the observation, and clearer guidelines for giving and receiving feedback (Mento & Giampetro-Meyer, 2000). It is helpful for the observed to give the observer some direction. For instance, the teacher or teaching assistant being observed could ask the observer to focus on two or three specific areas of teaching/classroom behaviour during the session.

Conclusion

The present study examined how a group of teachers and teaching assistants perceived their experience with peer consultation. Data showed that peer consultation provided an opportunity for teachers to learn teaching strategies from each other, build upon each other's teaching, reflect on their own teaching experience, and augment their understanding of their teaching beliefs. It is hoped that this will lead to further professional development, such as action research (Gibbs, 1995). Despite these benefits, teachers reported feeling uncomfortable because of the power relationship between the observer and the observed, and new teachers were apprehensive about their perceived lack of experience. Non-native English speaking teachers also

felt anxious when they were observed by native English speaking teachers. Cosh (1998) suggested that the observed should take ownership of the process of peer observation in order to reduce their anxiety. For example, participants should be consulted on who will be observing them, what the focus will be, and what form the feedback will take. The observer also needs to be sensitive to the observed peers and recognize their good, rather than their bad, practice. Weimer (1990) suggested that the observed can reduce the anxiety provoked by classroom observations by considering their colleagues as helpers, not as evaluators.

Despite the small number of participants involved and the unique nature of the research context (i.e., a content-based ESL program for Japanese exchange students), the present study has contributed meaningfully to our understanding of the notion of peer consultation as a way to improve teaching ability. Data suggested that peer consultation encourages sharing of teaching ideas and successes, develops a sense of community among instructors (Cox, 1999), and improves teaching and learning in the classroom. Based on the present investigation, further research should be conducted with a large number of participants in a wider community to examine how peer consultation improves a teacher's teaching skills and assists the self-development of academic staff.

Endnote

1. All the university and people's names in the paper are pseudonyms.

Appendix 1

Guided Interview Questions

1. Please tell me your experience of observing teaching/peer consultation.
2. What worked well in the period of your observation?
3. What was the atmosphere the teacher created in the classroom? What did the teacher do to create this climate?
4. What kind of questioning techniques were used effectively? How were they used effectively?
5. What instructional aids were being used? How were they used?
6. What teaching techniques did you observe and how would you apply them in your own teaching?
7. How did the teacher facilitate students' learning?
8. In your opinion, what are the qualities of a good teacher/learner? Why?

9. How did you feel being observed?
10. If we do peer consultation in the future, what suggestions could you offer?

APPENDIX 2

Questionnaire for Students

1. In your opinion, what are the qualities of a good learner? State the reasons for your opinion and give examples to support it.
2. Do you consider yourself a good learner? Why or why not?
3. What has helped you the most to learn English since you came to Canada?
4. Please name three new ideas that you have learned from all your courses.
5. In your opinion, what is a good teacher? Give reasons and examples.
6. Do you agree that "only a native English speaker can be a good English teacher"? Please give reasons to support your argument.
7. Why do you think many of your teachers use online discussions? How do you feel about it?
8. How do you feel about having others read what you write online?
9. Did you do any volunteering in Japan? If yes, could you describe your experience?
10. What do you think of the volunteering experience at the Rits program? What did you think you had to do? What did you learn from your volunteering experience?
11. In your journals, you identified many cultural differences of learning between Japan and Canada. Can you describe a story of your own learning experience that revealed cultural differences?
12. How did you feel when the guest teachers observed your classes? Why? Give examples.

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