Series Foreword

In the fields of language teaching and the teaching of writing there has been much discussion over the last two to three decades of the value of group work. The learner-centered methodology of the communicative language teaching approach and the privileging of peer collaboration by writing process advocates, both as a means of expanding the audience beyond the teacher and providing a supportive, facilitative environment, have helped make peer response activities commonplace in the second language (L2) writing classroom. Yet the research findings in this area, L2 peer responding, have not conclusively pointed to its usefulness; and a number of experienced L2 writing teachers, perhaps because of their own students’ resistance to peer responding activities, have wondered aloud at conferences and other forums about the wisdom of adopting this particular process writing tool. For all these reasons—the pervasiveness of peer response in L2 writing classes as well as the continuing controversy over its appropriateness and uncertainty about its effectiveness for L2 writers—Jun Liu and Jette Hansen’s volume on peer response is an extremely welcome addition to the Michigan Series on Teaching Multilingual Writers, a series committed to addressing key topics in the teaching of L2 writing.

Readers of this volume will no doubt be struck by how well acquainted Liu and Hansen are with the research and how straightforwardly they communicate its many findings. Obvious too will be the fact that both have utilized peer response in their own writing classes, are aware of the challenges it poses, and have developed successful problem-solving strategies. Liu and Hansen’s dual perspective as both scholars
and practitioners clearly has enabled them to produce a volume that is not only informed by a careful, comprehensive review of research but also highly accessible and applicable for teachers and teacher-trainees. Classroom practitioners will likely be especially pleased to see the wealth of ancillary materials provided in this volume, including guiding questions for a wide variety of writing tasks. Perhaps more noteworthy, though, is the sensitivity that the authors demonstrate and encourage to the impact of various educational and cultural backgrounds on reaction to peer work. Because of their own experiences as students and as teachers, the authors are very conscious of the need for thoughtful, well-planned preparation of students for collaborative work and the benefits of a sensitive, supportive teacher throughout the peer responding process.

It is probably quite safe to say that no prior work has attempted to offer so extensive and intensive a look at the issues and strategies of peer response in linguistically diverse settings. Experienced and inexperienced writing teachers alike should find much of value here: a single volume that provides access to the most relevant research on peer response, applies it to the L2 writing context, and hence can inform decisions on when, how, and why to use (or not to use) peer responding activities with multilingual writers.

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