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Peer Editing

I chose to focus on peer editing and evaluation in my classroom as a forum for experimentation and growth. I tried a few different ideas last semester and got mixed feedback, so I decided to try a different style of peer evaluation for each paper this semester and get my student's feedback to find out what they believe works best. Overall, there were mixed feelings about the ways we handled peer evaluation since different students work better under different circumstances. I had them follow a guideline of questions to look for in their paper, I had them switch with more than 1 person, I had them only meet with me for feedback on their papers, and I had them read their papers aloud to a partner and have that partner edit and correct anything he/she found after the student read it aloud. Each of these strategies varied in success rate; however, it seems that all students found something that they liked. I forced them all to try the different ways of peer editing so they would have the chance to find out what works best for them as individuals rather than doing things one certain way and never trying anything that might work better.

For our first paper this semester, I had my students switch papers with a partner that I picked for him/her. I put up a Peer Evaluation Guideline (see Appendix A) for them to follow and answer the questions on a separate sheet of paper. Each student would hand his/her completed questions received from the peer editor in with his/ her

paper and would get credit for both the validity of his/her answers to another student's paper and how he/she changed the paper or improved it if necessary. This portion of the grading was included in the final grade for the paper and equaled about ten points total.

The feedback I got about following the guideline was positive. One student said: "I think there should be certain criteria that the person revising the papers should need to look at. A list of things to go through and it should be mandatory to follow" (Alyssa). She went on to say that we had that in this class but many students no longer followed it because that was only required for the first assignment. Many students did not comment on the list of guidelines, I think part of that may have been because I asked for their feedback after we completed all of the different forms of peer evaluation rather than after each exercise (which is something I would do differently next time). I think the list of guidelines helped the students in that they knew exactly what to look for even if it was more extensive and took a bit more time than regular peer evaluation, which is why a few students seemed to dislike it. However, I think the effectiveness of the exercise compensates for the time consumption.

The next form of evaluation we did as a class was exchanging papers with more than one person. This time they were not required to follow the guideline but must exchange papers with at least two people and three if they had the time. The students who finished with their evaluations sooner ended up switching even three to four times during the class period. Each student must read the other's to him/herself and edit it either on the paper itself or on another sheet of paper if that paper was already edited and a bit messy. This way I could tell who made what comments on each paper, as I had them sign their names so I knew who did the editing.

The feedback I got about this exercise was mixed. Students thought it was effective, but only if one or two students did it because: “it gets dragged on and if the first two people did not catch anymore mistakes it is pointless” (Chelsey). I could tell that some students were getting sick of having so much time to spend on their evaluations, but it was difficult because some students spent more time on each paper than others. I think I would like to try giving them ten minutes per paper and having a buzzer so they must work until that time is up. That would eliminate students exchanging with too many people and would help them to do more thorough jobs in their evaluations of other’s papers.

The third form of evaluation I tried with my students was simply meeting with them one on one for conferences and cutting out the time I usually set aside for peer evaluation. I only have 25 students so it was possible for me to use my office hours and some class time to meet with each student one-on-one. I do not think it would work if someone had 100 plus students. Students were required to bring in a rough draft of their paper and three questions they had about the assignment or the paper itself, and I would look it over and give them any feedback they needed.

The feedback I got from students was mainly positive; however, they did not like not having time left for peer evaluation because I did not take the time to make sure their papers were grammatically correct but simply stylistically and conceptually correct. Students appreciated being able to meet with me one-on-one because they felt more sure about where they were going with their papers since they got feedback from the person grading them. One student said she liked meeting with me because “it gave [her] a

chance to really ask questions that [she] never would of thought of asking before”

(Chelsey). Also, another student said:

Coming in for the conferences with the teacher has helped as well because she can sit one on one with the students to help them on their rough draft to know as well what to do which the student might have missed while writing the paper. And with the help of the teacher ... it really helps to better the students abilities. (Emily)

This seemed to be the overall response to meeting with me for conferences. However, not having time to do peer revisions was a negative to them, so I tried doing both and that seemed to work well. However, it cut out some time for other important things and can be a lot of work for someone with more students. Overall, students enjoy meeting with me to discuss their work. Although very few students actually come in to meet with me on their own. I believe that requiring students to meet with me gives them the chance to see how beneficial it can actually be so they will be more apt to use professor office hours in the future for help.

The final way I had my students do peer evaluation is with a partner. Each student picked another student he/she had not worked with very often this semester and did not know very well and read his/her own paper aloud to that partner. The partner would listen then read his own aloud while the other listened. After both were finished reading aloud, they switch papers and write down different revisions needed or read through it again and write down any corrections. This way, students were able to read aloud any mistakes they had and hear them rather than having their brains fix them while

reading silently. Also, it helps them practice their public speaking skills, even if it is to only one other person.

The feedback I got from the students on this exercise was mixed. A couple of students thought that reading their papers aloud helped them find any mistakes and hear how their thoughts sound out loud. One student said: “It also helps to read them out loud because saying it in your head doesn't sound as good as it would out loud and [then] it is easier to edit” (Chelsey). Other students thought reading aloud was pointless and a waste of time. One student said on this point: “I am very picky about grammar issues in my works and when we read each others out loud i could not really look for that. Although it did help in the way that when you read out loud you can see if the flow of the paper is ok or if words sound funny or awkward” (Leigha). However, I think if they would think about the usefulness of reading their papers aloud they would change their minds, which is a bit like what this student said about the exercise. This exercise proved to be more work for me since many of my students did not want to read their papers aloud right away. I ended up having to tell them a few times that they needed to read their papers aloud. Even though they did not want to do it, I think it helped those concerned with making small mistakes realize that they can read their papers aloud to come across mistakes much easier.

The peer evaluation exercises that I did throughout this semester varied in their success and the feedback from students was very helpful in that it made me realize how differently students learn from each other. Something that works for one student may not work for another; which is why I will continue to incorporate peer evaluation and different ways of doing it in my classroom because I think it is beneficial for students to

experience a few different ways of doing things so they can find what works best for them. One student suggested that I try more than one peer evaluation opportunity per assignment. I think I will definitely try this in my next class, so students can have revision opportunities more than once on a particular paper.

Overall, my students seemed to appreciate the peer evaluation process. One student said: “Peer editing has given me a chance to get other ideas for my papers and to help others with theirs. It opens my mind to new ideas and concepts, along with help on my punctuation and grammar. I hope we continue doing peer editing in the future for this class” (Jessica). I think that gaining insight from other students and practicing editing skills is very valuable for students to improve their own writing and it seems that students appreciate this aspect of peer evaluation. The evaluation of their editing for each other’s papers seems to be a way to encourage students to do a good job on their evaluations, although one can never force all students to effectively practice evaluation and revision. My experience with peer evaluation throughout this semester and last has been positive in that I have learned a lot about the way which students learn and how to incorporate effective learning activities into the classroom. Through simple trial and error with peer evaluation, I have been able to provide students with the tools they need to evaluate their own writing along with others’ and improve their writing at the same time.

Appendix A

Peer Editing Guidelines: Explanatory Synthesis Assignment

Discuss ALL of the following questions for each of your peers' papers. Be as thorough and specific as possible. Mark issues you see on the papers themselves (in the text, as margin comments, and as end comments). In your end comments, make sure to address any major content issues and explain your general reflections.

1. What is the writer's thesis statement? How could he/she refine it to be more clear and concise? Does it include or make reference to the main points of the paper (in other words, how the thesis will be "proven")?
2. How is the essay introduced? Does it clearly set the tone for the paper and accurately reflect what is discussed therein? Could it be improved?
3. What are the main points of the paper? How do you recognize them? Are they clearly recognizable?
4. How is the essay organized? ***By main points, not by source!* Is it a synthesis of information or does it seem disconnected?
5. Is there "signposting" (topic sentences, guide words, etc.) that proves direction for the essay, letting the reader know what the writer is doing and what to expect? What transitions does he/she use to bridge paragraphs? What transitions does he/she use within paragraphs? Suggest some additional possibilities for more logical organization.
6. Are there any confusing passages where you as the reader were lost or where the logic fell apart? Does it lapse into any personal reaction, opinion, persuasion, or argument? Clue: Any 1st person pronouns (I, me, my, we, us, our, etc.) should not be used and would reveal those issues. Use of 2nd person pronouns (you, your, or the understood "you" in command form) should also be avoided.
7. After your reading, can you say the thesis statement accurately reflects the topic, focus, and main points of the essay? How is the essay concluded? What technique does the writer employ in the conclusion? How is that effective or not?
8. What suggestions can you make to fix any major grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors? Make sure to circle/mark specific issues on the paper itself.
9. Is the sentence structure varied and interesting? Does the writer have any weak, overly wordy, awkward, or confusing sentences? (Look for examples such as "It is/are..."; "There is/are"; "It seems as though there is..." that can be cut down for conciseness, as well as any weak pronoun references that leave you asking, "Who does this refer to?") Does the essay strive to use active, direct, present tense verbs?
10. Does the writer make use of information from at least three sources? Is his/her use of quoting/paraphrasing appropriate and effective within the paper? Are the quotes properly introduced and/or explained? Are the citations correct? Would you suggest any places to add source material or, perhaps, to subtract a quote?