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Improving Peer Assessment and Student Learning

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Objectives

- Briefly describe the study
- Share findings
- Contextualize within the literature
- Offer practical suggestions for implementing a similar process
“Peer assessment requires students to provide either feedback or grades (or both) to their peers on a product or a performance, based on the criteria of excellence for that product or event which students may have been involved in determining” (Falchikov, 2007, p.132).
• Students must critically evaluate and “teach” their peers

• Successful peer groups are:
  • task oriented,
  • focus on global features,
  • provide specific feedback,
  • and engage in negotiation
Some just peer edit
Some complete interventions
Some include evaluating the peer edit
Many researchers have found that guided is most effective (Wilson & Gerber, 2008; Hacker, 1996; Barron, 1991; Zhu, 1995; Hillock, 1986)
• Allows professor an opportunity to review student writing in detail, model behavior, and clarify criteria and expectations.
A successful peer edit:

- Clarify purpose, rationale, expectations, and acceptability with all stakeholders
- Match participants and arrange contact.
- Provide training, examples, and practice.
- Provide guidelines, checklists, or other tangible scaffolding
- Specify activities and timescale
- Monitor and coach.
- Examine the quality of peer feedback
- Evaluate and give feedback

-- Topping (2009)
The Study

- NCA&T
- WAC
- English 100
- Pilot case study
- Two questions:
  - Can guided peer assessment help students learn to apply specific rhetorical strategies in their writing?
  - Can guided peer assessment help the instructor “save time”? 
Multiple ways to form and run these but for this example 7 groups of 3 students

3 essays over the semester

Each student has 1 essay draft work shopped one time (so for each essay instructor reads 7 drafts of essays instead of 21)
• Provide assignment sheet and rubric to all students
• Provide peer edit sheet based on expectations
• Writer should have draft complete at least 1 week prior to workshop
• Ask peer editors to complete rubric and edit sheet prior to workshop
• Peer editors aware they would be asked clarifying questions during the workshop
Consider what the items below ask a student to do:

• What do you think is the thesis of the paper (or speech)?
Paraphrase it below.

• List below the main points of the paper.

• What are the writer’s justifications (e.g., readings, logic, evidence) for taking the positions that he or she does?

• What do you think is the strongest evidence for the writer’s position? Why?

• What do you think is the weakest evidence for the writer’s position? Why?

• In each paragraph of this paper, underline the topic sentence.

• Highlight any passages that you had to read more than once to understand what the writer was saying.

• Bracket any sentences that you find particularly strong or effective.

• What do you find most compelling about this paper?

-Nilson (2002)
Instructor jots down notes concerning the editors comments – for example:

- What are they seeing as strengths and weaknesses?
- Any misunderstood concepts or reoccurring questions that should be addressed in class?
- Offer comments, questions, and suggestions to the writer noting the editor’s insights as appropriate
- Let the writer have last word in terms of questions or comments
We could all talk about our papers,… Our peers could tell us, "Oh, okay. You're missing a concept," not so much him (the teacher) just talking to us.

…he wanted it to be a collaboration of getting a paper to an A paper. If he was to say, "Change x, y and z," for some so and so reason, and I was like, "No! I don't like it this way," for so and so reason, we would just talk about it, and he would help me see where I could've changed it or maybe he would then in turn be like, "Oh, I didn't really think of that myself."

I remember this one time, one of my group members, we were discussing something, and Dr. X jumped in and he was like, "No, you're both wrong. Look at it like x, y and z." And we both had the "ohhh" moment like we were both missing the big picture.

It was never just him talking at us, it was everybody putting in their feedback, having something to contribute to the group, so that we could all have a better paper.
He (the professor) wasn't necessarily saying it like that, he was more so trying to get me to change the way I was thinking, about going about writing that paper and maybe exploring different ways to expand on my thoughts.

Right, and the meetings were always crazy.... Everybody was always talking ... it never went as smoothly as you would think it would.

I think it would work if it was facilitated by a professor. I think if you just leave it up to students to just help each other write papers on their own time, unless one of them is an English major, I don't think it's going to get very far.
A lot of times even one on one you never know if student is “getting” it or just trying to please you; this situation (workshop) created a sense of trust, one where students helped students, and they were less timid in asking each other questions.

Having the writer talk about her essay, she had to use rubric, and sometimes in the process of explaining it she’d realize where her weaknesses were.

It was a great process. It worked better than I thought it would.
Findings

- Even though students overwhelmingly had bad experiences with peer assessment before this class, they found this process engaging and empowering.
- The collaborative / negotiating process positively affected student self efficacy.
- Some students were uncomfortable with the “chaos” or lack of a “right way”.
- The faculty member found more time spent on the front end, but less in the semester.
We KNOW:

- **Student-Teacher Interaction and Assessment**
  - Assessment shapes students’ perceptions of learning
  - Interactively engaging in a task may evoke higher order thinking

- **Peer Teaching**
  - Students learn information by teaching it
  - It can facilitate deeper learning and enhance understanding
  - May enhance learner’s metacognitive understanding
• Less time but...
• More extensive response
• Writer receives multiple perspectives
• Models academic and disciplinary behavior / expectations
• Gives professor insight into student understanding
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