



LANGUAGE AND CULTURE BULLETIN

Information and Tips from the Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Programs

Donald L. Bouchard

Portland Public Schools
150 Ocean Ave., Portland, Maine 04103

Tel. (207) 874-8135
Fax (207) 756-8421 Vol. 9, No. 6

EFFECTIVE PEER REVIEW OF WRITING

Results are mixed on the benefits of English Language Learners (ELLs) receiving feedback from their peers on their writing. On the one hand, peer review results in active learner participation; it is an authentic communicative activity; it can be accomplished in a nonjudgmental environment; it leads to the development of more critical reading skills; and it reduces the teacher's workload. On the other hand, peer review has the tendency to focus on surface writing issues; it has the potential of resulting in an overly critical environment; there may be a cultural reluctance on the part of readers to criticize and judge; the writer may remain unconvinced of the value of the comments; and ELLs may prefer teacher feedback. This *Bulletin* explores appropriate ways to conduct a peer review of writing and offers two suggestions for varying this activity.

IMPLEMENTING A PEER REVIEW

Eliciting feedback from an audience of readers is an important step in developing competence as a communicator in writing. The social, political, and personal contexts for writing involve the language domains of reading, listening, and speaking as inte-

grated components to writing which enable both the writer and the reader to test hypotheses and to acquire the language cues to express intentions.

How to structure a peer review:

1. *Make it an ongoing routine of schooling.* As opposed to only occasionally implementing a peer review, make it clear to students that peer review is a classroom routine. Determine the schedule for it whenever possible, and hold students accountable through grades and feedback for their peer review.
2. *Model the process.* Explicitly showing how it is done is important. Provide guidelines for acceptable responses, both for substance and tone; have students practice the process through role playing, even providing transcripts of appropriate language; and discuss sample essays *not* written by the students.
3. *Build peer response skills progressively.* Building students' competence as peer reviewers takes time and practice. Ask students to detail why they found a writing passage effective or how they would suggest a revision to improve the writing.
4. *Structure the review task.* Although

there are a variety of opinions on the degree of structure, guidelines are important. Teacher-guided questions can provide direction and focus for interaction and provide the emphasis desired in the peer review. For this purpose, peer review worksheets can be very useful.

5. *Vary peer review activities.* Students can engage in idea-generation and prewriting; collaborate before writing a draft; help edit, especially for grammar and mechanical errors; and assist with the publication of the final draft.

6. *Hold students accountable.* The writer can summarize the reaction to the feedback or explain how the feedback was incorporated; the reader(s) can be graded on the basis of the quality of the feedback from the review worksheets.

7. *Consider individual needs.* Research suggests that weaker writers benefit more than stronger writers from peer review. Prior experience with collaborative groups is another variable. Peer response activities may vary greatly on the basis of cultural background. Some students may feel strongly that only the teacher is the legitimate critiquer of their writing.

8. *Attend to group size.* Between two and four is best; assign learners to specific groups; vary the writing strengths of students in a group; consider first language background, gender, personality, and speed of individual group working time in forming groups.

TWO PEER REVIEW ACTIVITIES

1. *Buddy Journaling.* The opportunity to practice writing and communicating in a low anxiety setting is the purpose of this elementary level interactive and collaborative peer activity. Buddy journaling can develop audience awareness, responding in writing to a variety of prompts suggested by content.

Here are some guidelines for buddy journaling:

-Buddies can be volunteer pairs or se-

lected randomly. Commitment to the buddy is approximately 3 weeks.

-Writing is done during the last fifteen minutes of class.

-Each entry should include date, greeting, body, closing, and signature.

-Teacher reviews but does not provide any corrections.

Students can share knowledge by summarizing, reflecting on, processing, or answering a question prompt.

2. *Collaborative Reading-Writing.* This secondary level activity involves two or more students working together over time to produce a written text for which they take responsibility as a group. Each group reads, interprets, and writes about something different they have read. The group can respond to a short story or to a unit chapter, interpreting various chunks of text in appropriate segments, or the group can respond to something shorter in one session.

The following are guidelines for collaborative reading-writing:

-Students are provided with guidelines for collaborating on how to proceed with the activity.

-Members of the group read a chosen or assigned text and discuss their *written* interpretations.

-After reading/interpreting, students jointly compose drafts of their papers and participate in a peer review *by other groups* before submitting a final draft.

SOURCES

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