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Paragraphing

(see Form in Composition, Coherence and Cohesion, Modes of Discourse)

Partner Reading

Partner reading assumes two students working collaboratively in the construction of meaning. It occurs within a classroom or can be used across grade levels. Partner reading involves one person reading and the other following along. While partner reading can serve a remedial purpose, it also serves as a pleasurable way for two students to share their enjoyment while reading a text.

Students who are unable to comprehend a text when asked to read on their own can often productively participate in a discussion of the text if they are given the opportunity to hear the text being read or are offered support as they read. A chance for aural listening comprehension is not precluded as a result of struggles with decoding. In such a situation, a buddy, or more able reader, will read the text aloud or will offer support as the text is being read by the less-able reader. Heterogeneous groups such as these enable all the students in a class to participate as texts are being discussed.

Such partner reading also occurs across grade levels, with a more-experienced reader being paired with a less-experienced younger student. In such nonthreatening situations, the older student will support the younger student's emerging efforts by reading the text, modeling appropriate reading strategies, or reinforcing the younger student's

beginning attempts at reading. The older student receives a chance to practice important skills and the younger benefits from the individual attention.

Partner reading also provides enjoyment for two students who wish to read together and share the same text. In this case, the reading buddies take turns reading the text, each supporting the other when and if necessary. The goal can be the completion of an assignment or merely the enjoyment of the reading process. The students are actively involved in the joint construction of meaning.

Laura E. Desai

See also: Collaborative Learning, Cooperative Learning, Remedial Reading, Tutoring.

Peer Evaluation

(see Cooperative Learning, Marking and Grading, Performance Assessment, Staff Development in Assessment)

Peer Response Groups

Peers can be helpful readers of one another's writing at all levels, from preschool through adulthood. Providing perspectives that are often unlike those of teachers, peers respond in varied settings and in varied ways, both inside and outside schools and universities.

In the classroom, peer response has become a staple of writing process pedagogy, whether teachers gather students into small groups, called "peer response groups," or encourage students to talk informally about their writing. Some schools and universities have created campus writing centers to help students with course assignments, providing extra support from peer tutors who function as small-group leaders. Outside formal school settings, writers often seek out peer response on their own—from friends and family members, and also from members of formally organized community-based writing groups. A look inside these contrasting settings reveals multiple ways peers can help one another with their writing as well as the complexities attending each.

In the Classroom

Over the last two decades, endorsements of formal peer response groups inside classrooms have become commonplace among teachers and researchers alike (e.g., Bruffee, "The Brooklyn Plan"; Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*; Healy, *Using Student Writing Response Groups*; Moffett and Wagner, *Student-Centered Language Arts*). Believing that writers benefit from ongoing response, these advocates call for restructuring classrooms so that writers meet regularly in small groups to discuss their writing, most usually to talk over drafts of works in progress but also to generate ideas or to work on mechanics and final editing.

Despite their growing ubiquity, response groups have seldom been studied to illuminate what processes they support, or how. National surveys of highly successful teachers (see Freedman, *Response to Student Writing*) and the few available studies of formal peer response groups have yielded mixed findings as to their success (for negative results, see Newkirk, "Directions and misdirection"; for positive results, see Nystrand, *The Structure of Written Communication*; for mixed results, see Freedman, "Outside-in and inside-out"). The "peer response group" designation is ambiguous, and the research quite possibly reflects the varied ways in which peer groups are integrated into particular classrooms.

Response groups can be set up in many ways, but since learning to write demands an ever-shifting, complex negotiation between writers and their audiences, they are often difficult to organize in ways that effectively support this negotiation. Ironically, while a belief in the efficacy of peer feedback has prompted practitioners to introduce response groups into their classrooms, the tendency has been to undermine their potential by channeling peer dynamics toward teacher-mandated

guidelines, thereby subtracting from the process the crucial element of student empowerment and denying group members authority to become decision-making writers and readers.

Freedman's research in two ninth-grade classrooms suggests that while classroom groups can be effective, their dynamics tend to be complicated by such issues of power and authority. The student writers Freedman studied resisted group tasks that asked them directly to evaluate one another's writing (what they saw as an appropriate role for a teacher but not for a peer), but they chatted productively about their evolving ideas as a prelude to writing. These writers also used group time productively when they read their work aloud to peers, spontaneously identifying problems and anticipating readers' understandings.

Rather than meeting in response groups on a schedule mandated by the teacher, some of the most effective peer response occurs in classrooms where students learn to take control of their writing, enjoying opportunities to talk at will as they write (see Greenleaf, "Technological indeterminacy").

In the Writing Center

Writing-center response groups are also intended to provide opportunities for conversation about emerging ideas and drafts of student work. Such groups are often led by student tutors and are removed from teacher control, since writing centers serve as an adjunct to the regular classroom.

Even though groups in writing centers are typically led by student tutors, there still are dilemmas around issues of power. Asked to be both quasi-teachers and quasi-peers, group leaders often experience confusion as they grapple with the complexities of guiding discussions in productive, nonintrusive ways. Given their relative lack of experience and the ubiquity of the teacher-controlled model of classroom discussion, student leaders may move rather readily into the traditional "teacher talk" register—that is, tightly controlling the conversation by asking questions to which they already know the answers and then evaluating students' responses. Facilitating democratic peer participation requires skill. Without extensive training and practice, student leaders are likely to configure discussions as a series of one-on-one encounters between themselves and individual students rather than as group discussions featuring multiple voices.

For better or worse, student leaders play an important role in determining what gets talked about. While a concern with students' ownership of their writing has long informed writing-center pedagogy, student leaders—typically chosen

because they are comparatively skilled, fluent writers—may legitimately wish to nudge the other group members away from agendas that seem narrow or unproductive. For instance, where students wish to work primarily on surface features, student leaders must exercise their own judgment in deciding whether to move the discussion towards ideas or whole-text concerns. When and how to enact such nudging is a delicate decision, always situated within the multifaceted dynamics of particular response groups.

Especially where students are assigned to a given group over an extended period of time, leaders may find themselves confronting a range of interpersonal issues that inform both group dynamics and students' writing. If particular students regularly dominate discussions, group leaders must find ways to open opportunities for the quieter members to participate more fully. If students seem poorly motivated and often come to the group unprepared, group leaders must decide whether to intervene or take a hands-off approach. And as DiPardo's study (*A Kind of Passport*) indicates, where such groups are composed of students from varied backgrounds—in terms of gender, social class, and/or ethnicity—they can become sites of politically charged discussion around issues of equity. How to handle these issues, like everything else in the student leader's task, requires both interpersonal skill and keen insight into the teaching-learning process.

In the Community

As writing groups become an increasingly popular feature of English classrooms and writing centers, it is easy to forget that peer response occurred long before the boom in "writing process" pedagogy over the last two decades. Writing groups have a long history outside of classrooms, a history that can be traced back to colonial literary societies in the U.S., and conceivably back to the first writers who long ago sought commentary from peers (Gere, *Writing Groups*). Organized by writers with a strong interest in sharing their work and receiving response, these community-based groups hold powerful implications for classroom teachers or writing-center directors wishing to move students towards more vital engagement in the process of giving and receiving feedback.

Freely chosen by their participants, writing groups continue to flourish in communities today, sponsored by continuing education programs, universities, recreation centers, libraries, women's networks, churches, senior citizens' centers, and other community-based organizations. One compelling portrait is painted by Carol Heller (*The Multiple*

Functions of the Tenderloin Women Writers Workshop), who examines a women's writing collective in San Francisco's Tenderloin district. Ranging from recovering alcoholics to street pedlars to published poets, the women in Heller's study gathered together to provide one another sustenance as they wrote poems, plays, and stories about their lives, and as they wrote to officials to effect changes in their community.

Peer response groups have also become a central component in the National Writing Project (NWP) model of in-service education for writing teachers. In NWP workshops around the country, peer support networks encourage teachers to write and serve as a stimulus in promoting conversation about teachers' own writing processes (Gray, *NWP: Model and Program Design*).

Whatever their age, writers naturally seek advice from trusted peers. Inside classrooms, structures can be built which take advantage of this natural impulse. In successful British classrooms peer interaction is organized differently than in many of the U.S. schools (Freedman, *Exchanging Writing, Exchanging Cultures*). The British students sat with their friends around small tables, not at desks, and did much of their writing in class, even at the secondary level. As they wrote, they talked, asking one another questions and sharing what they had produced. These naturally occurring table groups seemed to work better than groups in which teachers or even peer tutors decide who will work together, when the groups will meet, and what will be discussed. In many respects, such table groups mirror the dynamics of voluntary community-based groups, where members maintain control over their texts by answering for themselves the questions of whom to ask for help, and when.

Peer response remains a crucial part of much writing. The major challenge is to harness the energy of peers effectively in school settings.

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Further Reading

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See also: Collaborative Writing, Composing Processes, National Writing Project, Reader Responses to Student Texts, Writing Process Pedagogies.

Peer Tutoring

The goal of school tutoring programs is to ensure that all children participate and receive the guidance they require. Based on the dictum that individuals who teach also learn, the services of peers and older students are used, on a one-to-one basis or in small groups, to replace or supplement regular classroom instruction. Tutors are also used in university, vocational, workplace and detention settings, as well as in community and home-based ESL and adult literacy programs.

The use of adult, professional tutors is, of course, an ancient and effective practice. Peer tutoring was also practiced in Roman times and common in ancient Hindu schools, but the origin of modern programs may be traced to Andrew Bell, the superintendent of an understaffed and overcrowded orphan school in Madras, India, in the 1790s who, out of seeming desperation, devised an instructional delivery system in which older students became responsible for teaching younger ones. It was also a frequent practice in the rural one-room schools of the nineteenth century.

In the 1960s, tutoring programs were hailed as a way of reducing cross-cultural and cross-generational communication barriers and providing for disadvantaged children. While these programs were essentially school-based, with homework assistance projects and older elementary, junior high, and high school students assisting younger children, programs in teacher education were also documented.

With increasingly diverse learners presently being mainstreamed into regular classrooms, same and cross-grade tutoring programs have become an integral part of the school system as are those that involve paraprofessionals, parents, seniors, and others as volunteers. Tutoring innovations include organizing partner reading, cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching, problem-solving, and writing conference groups. Reverse role tutoring, in which students with learning and behavior problems tutor students in regular classrooms, is also practiced. Specialists may serve as tutors in "reading

recovery" programs, and because it provides individualized instruction at a controlled pace, the computer is also viewed as a tutoring agent. Across jurisdictions, university athletes tutor at-risk school children.

For those tutored, research conducted in the 1970s suggests that mathematics tutoring at both elementary and secondary levels is advantageous, compared to providing individualized learning packets and computer and programmed learning. Meta-analyses indicate: more beneficial effects for those tutored in lower-level skills tested by examinations, not by standardized tests; positive effects for attitude toward the subject matter; and minimal effects for self-concept. Findings for reading are inconclusive, perhaps because the former instructional focus was on skills rather than on meaning.

For the tutor, achievement gains depend on the subject being taught. Only moderate effects are described for attitude enhancement and little or no effects for increased self-esteem, despite role theory, which suggests that when tutors assume a teaching role with its associated prestige and authority, their behavior changes accordingly. Heightening role awareness is recommended: treating the tutor as a responsible adult; scheduling regular times for consultation; and providing outward trappings, such as portfolios for lesson plans and logs.

Stronger effects for the efficacy of tutoring programs have been reported in journals than in dissertations. If publication is based on the quality of the research design, then more credence should be given to journal findings. If publication is based on the strength of findings, then dissertation results are more credible.

Variables that may account for the differential results of research on tutoring include whether the tutoring pairs are of the same sex and age, whether the program is structured or unstructured, whether the program is a supplement to or substitute for the regular program, and other factors such as program duration, the sequencing of success experiences, the instructional context, and the degree of tutor support. In spite of the controversial findings of experimental research, anecdotal findings intimate that tutoring works because of increased task engagement, direct reinforcement, and new insight into how to manage learning.

B. Zakaluck

Further Reading

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