Charles C. Grimm

Dr. Angela Hall-Godsey

EH 8195 Composition Pedagogy

7 December 2015

Creation of Peers: Utopian Perspectives on Peer Review in the Composition Classroom

In a recent exchange via the WPA-L listserv, I stumbled across a sentiment about peer review that I encounter more frequently than I would like:

Some educators laud group work - in the "whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger" sense. In some places it's inevitable, like in Theater Arts. Some places it's contrived - like in FYC. The fact is - even our college staff taking graduate credits refer to group work as "the blind leading the blind" or "one group-member doing 99% of the cohort's work". At the moment, I can't think of any one teaching activity \*more despised\* by students at every level. (Pryor)

I can only hope that this is hyperbole, but from the conversations I have had with professors and colleagues I know that many do indeed feel this frustration from both sides of peer review. While I cannot speak for the graduate students at Pryor’s institution, I know that in my master’s program I voluntarily worked collaboratively with my peers on our own initiative through Google Drive folders to review each other’s work, and we got the attention of several professors by doing self-initiated peer review that they felt set our work apart from our peers who avoided peer interaction. Further, my Ph.D. cohort frequently uses Google Drive and private emails to perform the same review function.

Pryor is not alone in his comments about peer review, of course. Bedore and Brammer both give clear and realistic voices to instructors’ and students’ opposition to peer review, which is necessary to understand why many instructors and students express frustration so frequently with the peer review process. Students, many of whom see peer review as a simple exercise in proofreading, question the usefulness of suggestions from lower- or same-level writers. In mixed Native English Speaker (L1) and Non-Native English Speaker (L2) classes, both L1 and L2 students have doubts about their peers’ ability to understand them well enough to offer or receive useful criticism. Instructors may also misconstrue the function of peer review, assuming that students should be able to review at the same level as their academic peers for whom review is second nature. This may cause some instructors to fault the activity or the students for the negative feedback instructors receive about in-class peer review.

In my experience with peer review, I have noticed student and peer attitudes that approximate the opinions above: it is busy work or an excuse not to plan a lesson. I argue, however, that this stems from a misunderstanding of the practice and possibly also of the term “peer review” itself. This difficulty in nomenclature approximates the dissenting voices in another area of my academic interest: utopian studies. In the same way that critics of utopian studies state that utopia serves little or no useful purpose without properly understanding its process or implications, the people who cry out against peer review are ultimately unable to identify or appreciate the utopian project of identifying problems and working collaboratively towards their solutions. I wish to explore this connection of the composition classroom and utopian studies by proposing that the composition classroom be treated as a utopian space. While others have seen a similar connection before, I have not yet seen a properly utopian pedagogy to date, and I think peer interaction is the place to begin such a pedagogy. Perhaps this would be subsumed under “critical pedagogy,” but I think expanding a focus beyond the immediate political or geographical context and discourse communities to which we belong into the future towards which we must work together might be a point of entry for this proposed utopian pedagogy.

Similarly, peer work in praxis may be the point of entry for discussing this focus on future work. Perhaps “peer work” is a more fitting ideological title for this operation than "peer review": it is not the scheduled, infrequent exchange of papers ahead of a due date, but rather a commitment to what Bruffee refers to as collaborative learning. If an instructor includes a peer review day as the only element of peer interaction, then I agree that the results likely would be dissatisfying if not disastrous. From my experience, however, setting up a class that depends heavily on peer interaction at each phase of the research and composition process places the onus of learning composition on the students. This focus takes the form of discussions of assigned readings, collaboratively writing responses, group presentations, requiring feedback to individual presentations, and requiring peer review groups to annotate a few sources collaboratively. In discussing, writing, and collaborating they have access to more perspectives that allow for richer ideas going into the research process and more feedback to catch weaknesses in their papers before it ever gets to the instructor. This does require, however, that the instructor relinquish a fair amount of control of information flow to operate as a facilitator and resource when the group cannot find an alternative.

Herein lies one of the major difficulties of navigating effective peer review: controlling the instructor’s presence. I think merging Bedore’s peer review memo (“Writing Centers Go to Class”) with Shvidko’s Letter to the Editor would provides an effective way to remove some instructor presence while simultaneously increasing the writing load in a useful way. The letter to the editor would allow each individual student to request a specific focus from their peer reviewers. Rather than handing out a worksheet or writing or projecting questions on the board, all of which inserts the instructor’s interests into the peer review process, students would generate issues for which they would like answers. Similarly, instead of just writing terse answers to required questions, the review memo requires a thoughtful response from the peer reviewer, which would in turn respond closely to the letter to the editor. Both of these documents can be kept as part of a process grade, but they also contribute to a greater idea of writing for an audience and with a specific purpose.

One issue I cannot quite reconcile, however, is what Brammer points out about the origin of peer review. Elbow and Bruffee, among other well-known compositionists, used peer review as an innovation in their classrooms. Instead of the centralized professors imparting knowledge to all of the students through lecture and corrections, these instructors put students in the center by allowing them to have a voice beyond what they wrote in their papers. The effect of leaving a lecture-driven writing course for a peer-centered discursive approach revolutionized the composition classroom. In fact, in my own small, private education I experienced this newfound joy of a discussion-based and peer-review-driven course in college after years of grammar exercises and lectures about why “so” should not be used as a conjunction from elementary through high school. For many students, though, the novelty factor of peer review is irretrievable. The fact that Wang et al’s investigation was done among third grade students indicates the ubiquity of peer review in today’s classrooms at all levels, which puts peer review in the same place as the lecture from Elbow and other early peer review adapters’ time.

One way to attempt the same liberating effect of peer review might lie with technological advances. Wang et al’s investigation of mixed mode peer response argues that online spaces may provide a more organic writing space for students by relieving them of the emotional responses many students face in person, while also forcing students to rely on written explanations. For composition classes, this emphasis on writing provides a useful heuristic element to the peer review beyond the product of the paper in question. Without recourse to oral explanations, students must ask clear questions and provide clear feedback in a written form that would remain accessible to students anywhere they can get online. For a peer review format like the letter/memo mentioned above, or for a peer review exercise that seeks to establish a broader campus community in a manner similar to Sanchez et al’s work with online peer review, online spaces may serve as a fresher way to make the peer review process recover some of its uncanny properties. While we may never get to the level that Walker speculated concerning the use of chat “bots” as an instructor or peer’s voice in online settings, the simple ability to review the work not only of one’s classmate but also of students in other classes quickly and efficiently would at least expand students’ understanding of audience if not community.

Regardless of the form that it takes, I believe that peer work needs to become more than just the peer review for composition classrooms. Other classes may not be able to allow the necessary time to shift their paradigm to the same extent, but composition exists in a peculiar (I maintain utopian) space that takes all students coming into the university, regardless of ability, and can usefully label them all peers with an expectation that their interactions in composing will ultimately improve the experience of each student in the classroom. Thus peer work requires a commitment from the instructor to step back and allow students to control their education process; states by fiat that all students of all abilities are peers in the classroom, thereby asserting that the class is a type of community of equals; and points students towards the type of collaborative activity they should expect from their disciplines as they mature in their fields.

Annotated Bibliography

Bedore, Pamela and Brian O’Sullivan. “Addressing Instructor Ambivalence about Peer Review and Self-Assessment.” *WPA* 34.2 (2011): 11-36. Print.

Bedore and O’Sullivan analyze attitudes of grad student instructors, grad student administrators, and the WPA over the writing program concerning their views on peer review and self-assessment through a survey and subsequent focus groups. Their writing program claims to value peer review and self-assessment as symbiotic skills, but their results revealed that the further an instructor is from a permanent position in the writing program the less belief they hold in the value or ability to teach peer review and self-assessment skills.

Bedore and O’Sullivan break their respondents’ observations on peer review into nine themes from their observations from most to least commonly discussed: the difficulty of teaching collaborative assessment, attention to audience, democratic classrooms, transfer of skills, superficiality of comments, the grade, instructor effacement, instructor deception, and instructor experiences with collaborative assessment. The majority of comments (26%) dealt with the difficulty of teaching peer review, which the authors cede is a difficult task. Through the focus group portion of their research, though, Bedore and O’Sullivan highlight the way that individual instructors’ self-assessment and peer work within the focus group ultimately led to a deeper understanding of each participant’s position to and investment in these critical practices. The onus is then placed on WPAs to model for them in an administrative role how their department assessments expect instructors to treat their students with regard to peer and self-evaluations.

Bedore, Pamela and Brian O’Sullivan. “Writing Centers Go to Class: Peer Review (of Our) Workshops.” *Writing Lab Newsletter* 35.9-10 (2011): 1-6. Print.

Bedore and O’Sullivan reviewed each other’s in-class workshops by their peer tutors from their writing centers. Faculty at both institutions find peer review useful but difficult to teach and regulate. One fact that Bedore and O’Sullivan make sure their peer tutors relate to students, and one with which I fully agree, is that peer review is not just an assignment in writing, it is also a model of how the academic work works (peer reviewed journals, tenure comittees, etc) and how most jobs work with review between peers and colleagues before projects are submitted. Bedore’s program emphasizes how to craft a review memo for the writer, modeling this in class with a tutor-written paper before students move to peer papers. O’Sullivan’s program works more to model effective oral feedback in a conversational model, also with a model paper before moving to peer papers, but their writing center also offers mini-sessions that can continue the facilitation of peer review outside of the classroom. From reviewing each other’s practices, both have moved to incorporate strategies and features from each other’s workshops, which further emphasizes the heuristic nature of the peer review.

As part of their conversation, Bedore and O’Sullivan also mention the impact this has on the peer tutors as they lead these workshops. Through providing materials and thinking about presentations, tutors get a great opportunity for professional development, but they also become more committed to the peer tutor model when they realize that student discussions in the classes they are leading teach them about writing and audience. This was unintended for several tutors at first, but has come to be part of the experience when they introduce the assignment to peer tutors.

Bedore refers to the “rhetoric of peer review,” which is definitely something I hope to pursue further. Perhaps I am a sucker for a lost definition, but terms like utopia and peer review both intrigue me as useful for meanings they may have lost and that I hope to recover. Further, the menu system described here might be something GSU’s Writing Studio could consider for future projects. I think this article, while more of an overview due to the nature of the publication, offers a great way to think about peer review’s role in WAC and not just FYC.

Brammer, Charlotte and Mary Rees. “Peer Review from the Students’ Perspective: Invaluable or Invalid?” *Composition Studies* 35.2 (2007). 71-85. Print.

Brammer and Rees introduce their article with the problem of peer review: it is no longer an innovation that decenters the central teaching figure and students seem not to stay on task during the review. They also establish their article within the recent context of L2 considerations surrounding peer review, stating an intention to review L1 issues through student and faculty surveys to see what those who are not FYC instructors may think about this method (in part, though, they admit that this is due to the composition of their university campus being L1 homogeneous). Their results indicate that many students do not view peer review as collaborative learning, but instead see it primarily as proofreading or copy editing. As a corollary to this attitude, students expressed confusion about how peers, some of whom necessarily must be lower ability writers, could help them edit their papers. To close, they indicate that students also take cues from instructors: those who stress the usefulness and vibrancy of peer interaction will likely see better results than those who treat it as perfunctory and are disengaged.

The last point is especially difficult for me to balance. Knowing the popular view that peer review is a way to “get out of teaching” but also agreeing with Bruffee that collaborative learning takes place best with limited instructor presence causes me to wonder how to balance out my own presence in peer review. In the past, I have inserted myself a bit too much, to the point that peers stopped interacting and instead just wanted me to give answers. I do think this is a useful article, though, because it points out that one reason it may not work as dynamically as it did originally for Elbow and Bruffee is that the paradigm has shifted away from lecture halls in university curricula, so peer interaction is now taken for granted.

Bruffee, Kenneth. “The Art of Collaborative Learning: Making the Most of Knowledgeable Peers.” *Change* 19.2 (1994). Web.

Bruffee begins by explaining how he and a colleague worked together on his friend’s manuscript before it was sent for publication, setting this example as a template for how many fields use collaborative learning experiences. When he first wrote this article (reprinted in the citation above) in the 1980s, there was little research on the topic of collaborative learning, but he speculated that this would change as the academy began accepting a social-constructionist view of knowledge. He cites Abercrombie’s investigation of collaborative learning in medical schools as part of diagnosis on rounds for her conclusion that the success of social learning comes down to language and its intepretation. This focus on acquiring language along with interpretational paradigms leads to an idea of the discourse community, who houses those behaviors and languages, from whom the student must seek entrance. When this is brought into the classroom, Bruffee argues, it only mirrors real life interactions to the degree to which the instructor steps back and allows students to negotiate the terms of the assignment and its fulfillment without regulation. Without the teacher as the central source of authority, students have to grant authority to their group members to perform their various tasks, especially in stating that they have something to say as writers but also as proofreaders.

Bruffee, Kenneth. “Sharing Our Toys: Cooperative Learning Versus Collaborative Learning.” *Change* 27.1 (1995): 12-18. Print.

Bruffee works here to clarify between the cooperative learning done at lower levels and the collaborative learning done in high schools and universities. He states that both work towards similar aims of avoiding competitive classrooms that depend heavily on teachers, but that they differ largely in the degree to which the teacher can be absent. In cooperative learning, students work in groups to meet very specific tasks set and evaluated by the teacher, but collaboration is designed for adolescents and adults who need to have the freedom to encounter a task with fewer restrictions to learn the material in a meaningful context. Thus the maturity of a student population determines to a large extent which type is necessary, but also poses a danger of blurring the line. Immature students need more structure and oversight and may not benefit from lack of structure, while adolescents and adults will naturally push against the teacher-as-authority and may feel the teacher is being condescending if too present in the process. To prevent the animosity between mature students and teachers, Bruffee suggests using collaborative learning strategies that never set up the authority figure to be toppled, keeping the responsibility for learning on the participants and not on a teacher as a source of all knowledge.

I think that this adds a different element to an understanding of peer work in the classroom, and I think it could blend easily with the type of critical pedagogy that encourages the use of contract syllabi that take student feedback into account. I would like to try this type of experiment by choosing a broad class topic but allowing students to pick specific topics they would like to cover within the broad topic, possibly by dividing them into groups on the first day to have them make a list of topics that they will then be responsible to present in class as one of their assignments. This allows them to set an agenda and plan activity/ies that help highlight or emphasize their main points, and papers could be about both the content and the process of this selection and presentation.

Burgess, Olivia. “Get Happy: Play and the Utopian Imagination in Mark Osborne’s *More*.” *Rocky Mountain Review* 68.2 (2014): 130-141. Print.

Burgess argues that current trends in play studies mirror those in utopian studies, both opening up worlds for serious exploration within frameworks with low stakes. Both require a delicate balance of system and imagination, and as such allow the brain to work both sides creatively and analytically.

While this does not have direct impact on my topic of peer review, I do believe that the idea of “play” could easily join issues of peer review in a gamified environment. Rather than a sober/somber task of grading a peer’s paper it could be turned into a challenge or rule-based game, which may increase buy-in and motivation. From a utopian standpoint, this would open the classroom even further as a utopian space.

Harris, Joseph. *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1997. Print.

Chapter 1: Growth

Harris describes the Dartmouth Seminar of 1966 from which the idea of writing as process emerged. He stresses that while there was no agreement among participants, especially those across the Atlantic. The majority of British teachers wanted to focus on pedagogy, especially growth theories that stressed original writing, while the majority of American teachers wanted to focus on research of an academic discipline, to avoid stigmatization as a “content-less pandering” (10) within Academia. The fissures formed from this encounter endured, but from this meeting a focus on composition as personal growth became more popular, most importantly an academic branch dedicated to studying students’ texts and methods.

Chapter 2: Voice

Harris discusses the competing views of composition as a subject about the author’s interiority as opposed to the author in the text, both of which he states grow out of the growth ideas of Dartmouth. Harris first warns against an unnecessary focus on “authenticity” (a recurring theme in this book) that would distance teachers from teaching “skills or techniques” while “valu[ing writing] more as a form of self-discovery or self-expression than as a way of communicating with others” (29). In this discussion, Harris frequently interacts with both Elbo and Moffet in this conversation, privileging Elbo over Moffet for his “working through the ambiguities and tensions in his valuing of voice” (31). What I find most useful here is Harris’ insight that “if what counts is less what a writer has to say than how much she really means or feels it, then the measure of good writing becomes its genuineness or sincerity. And how do you tell *that*?” (32 italics original). In attempting to establish authenticity as a hallmark, teachers transform it to a genre with expectations mirroring other academic forms. Contrary to Elbo and Moffet, Harris discusses the 1930s Amherst school of thought embodied in Baird and Sale, who looked for evidence of voice in the mechanics of a writer’s text, which assumes a type of writing that should be subversive to the forms instead of complicit in them. Harris summarizes both dangers as “some teacher may have once avoided dealing with what their student had to say by turning the reading of their texts into a grueling hunt for errors and solecisms, so too a preoccupation with prewriting heuristics and revising strategies can serve as a way of deferring talk about what makes writing good and who gets to decide” (42-43).

Chapter 3: Process

Harris uses this chapter to do critique some of the seminal process studies such as Perl’s “The Composition Process of Unskilled College Writers,” Emig’s *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders*, and Flower’s investigation of cognitive process theory in composition. One of the major criticisms is that “while […] the process movement helped establish composition as a research field, [Harris is] not nearly so sure it ever transformed the actual teaching of writing as dramatically as its advocates have claimed” (55). Harris works to provide possible excluded middle readings of the writers analyzed in the works cited above, stating that a preoccupation with process may skew the observations of those teachers who took it as their mission to research their students and their processes. He goes most in-depth with Emig, drawing on the raw data she provides to offer readings of Lynn that Emig’s focus may have occluded. In discussing Flower, though, Harris does acknowledge the change in the type of work she published in the 90s, which focused on community literacies with assignments outside the classroom with highly discursive features, concluding that “If the idea of *process* is to continue to have an impact on the teaching of writing, it will need to be rethought along these more open lines” (68).

Chapter 4: Error

Harris here analyzes Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, focusing on how many proponents of the process method skip the fact that it is a book about grammar that focuses on very narrow types of writing for students, largely analyzing assigned texts in formulaic ways. While he does agree that her focus on reaching basic writers represented a pivotal shift that opened the doors of Academia to people who otherwise had no access, he moves on to discuss other rhet/comp figures who wrote similar books with a clearer focus on what students say rather than how they say it. Of particular significance, according to Harris, is Smitherman's *Talkin and Testifyin*, which includes case studies on focusing not on correcting forms of "black English" but instead of assisting students in communicating their ideas clearly. He also mentions Bartholomae and Petrosky's plans to teach BW in the same mode as a graduate seminar, centering discussions and readings on a central them around which students speak and write, encouraging a dialogic approach to composition. Their focus on using student texts applies especially to my interests of peer review and use of student texts in the classroom. HE also deals with the unclear term of "academic," reminding readers that most students will become professionals and not academics, which should shift the focus to reading "as critics and intellectuals" (89). Harris concludes this chapter by stating "Language is not only a means of communicating but a form of identification, a badge that seems to define its wearer and yet, paradoxically, can be changed. It is the fear and hope of such change that so powerfully charges the debate on error" (90).

Chapter 5: Community

Harris works to define “community” amid what he considers a popular usage as “an empty and sentimental word” that “mean[s] little more than a nicer, friendlier, fuzzier version of what came before” (99). What Harris sees in most popular usage of this term is, then, “quite literally utopias – nowheres, meta-communities—tied to no particular time or place, and thus oddly free of many of the tensions […] that go on every day in the classrooms and departments of an actual university” (100). He moves to state that “community” might be better suited to “specific and local groups” (107) such as specific departments within specific colleges. The alternative is to promote an idea that there is an “academic discourse community” separate from other forms of everyday conversation into which students must enter, essentially leaving behind their other forms of discourse. I take exception with the flippant use of “utopia” throughout this chapter, but ultimately I agree that there is an aspect of community that is local to our classrooms, where we as composition teachers create or at least encourage communities through shared projects and group work. His illustration of the pastorally “utopian” homoglottal discourse community needing to change to a more urban industrial heteroglottal discourse community works well (apart from problematic use of “utopian”).

Kirtley, Susan. "Considering the Alternative in Composition Pedagogy: Teaching Invitational Rhetoric with Lynda Barry's *What It Is*." *Women's Studies in Communication* 37 (2014): 339-359. Print.

Kirtley here argues (?) that invitational rhetoric presents an alternative to more agonistic forms of rhetoric that focus on persuasion and mastery, since invitational rhetoric presents a view for consideration while allowing for other views to exist alongside it. This desire to teach invitational alongside other forms of more traditional persuasive rhetorics would allow for greater access to non-alphabetic forms of expression. Further, Kirtley states that invitational rhetoric "can help foster a noncompetitive environment that strives to include al student voices in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance" (341). As an example of invitational rhetoric, Kirtley proposes using Lynda Barry's comic piece *What It Is* to show students how to write authentically without writing persuasively. She cites several specific sections and includes pictures of several pages to clarify how this invitational rhetoric runs throughout Barry's work.

I think this approach would work very well for visual rhetoric, as Kirtley mentions throughout the piece, but I also think that it would work well for explaining positionality in the 1101 classroom. Apart from these, I don't see that invitational rhetoric can be called rhetoric if it is not persuasive or that it would be useful if it does not prepare for the persuasive type of writing most students will need outside the composition classroom.

Middlebrook, Rebecca Helminen. “Degree of Hybridity: Peer Review in the Blended Composition Classroom.” *Journal of Educational Technology* 10.1 (2013): 1-9. Print.

This article purports to be about peer review in blended online classes, but the focus of the article is on the definition of a blended composition classroom, focusing specifically on the percentage of time spent online versus in brick and mortar classrooms. They found that the degree to which instructors in their study were comfortable depending on online instruction corresponded to the amount of time in brick and mortar and online classes: classes that met twice a week, once in person and once virtually, put 50% of their work online. The instructor who met three times a week, only once a week online, felt less comfortable using online instruction.

This article does not address peer review in any intensive way, but it does raise some questions about how peer review can be done in hybrid or online classes. I think that those media may actually provide more holistic and meaningful writing experiences since they may not have recourse to explain orally what they are saying in their papers; any explanations, then, would require the same writing that could replace or augment what is in the paper.

Sanchez, Fernando, Liz Lane, and Tyler Carter. “Engaging Writing about Writing Theory and Multimodal Praxis: Remediating WaW for English 106: First Year Composition.” *Composition Studies* 42.2 (2014): 118-146. Print.

Authors detail the Purdue 106 topics and the institution of WaW as a focus, arguing along with Downs and Wardle that “writing instructors prepare students to write across disciplines not by teaching various genres, but by teaching what we, as composition scholars and researchers, understand and accept about writing itself” (120). The individual instructors realize that this approach may disorient students, so they focused on multimodal online assignments to reach and discuss specific discourse communities. They aimed to “reinvigorate the broad FYC goals of inventing, composing, and arranging with timely foci such as web design and social media audiences” (121). They assign students to find a discourse community to represent in an online space, first through a literacy self study (charting their use of reading/writing in all forms/spaces), then through a multimedia Tumblr blog literacy narrative (with a focus on visual rhetoric), and finally through ethnographic study of a discourse community that resulted in a Wordpress page to engage and represent this group. All of this worked within the WaW framework but also featured online writing for online audiences that held a more meaningful connection than the typical research paper. The authors admit this was only available due to Purdue’s facilities having availability for weekly computer lab time, but theorize that it could establish a base for WaW that is service or community-oriented.

I believe that the WaW focus lends itself well to a classroom that would also focus on frequent peer review. Since all of the writing would be in a similar vein, each student could provide an educated opinion on any feature of a classmate’s site. The authors’ focus on peer review for the Wordpress sites was particularly enlightening as it gives common ways an online reader would encounter a text and provides that feedback to the creator/author. Requiring the blogs to be public, though, seems problematic for students who may not want their identities to be open and forces a type of openness that may inhibit creativity for those who would prefer a complete site before opening it up to criticism. That being said, the ability to provide asynchronous feedback and to connect students from various classes as peer reviewers does have potential for a larger sense of community building as a result.

Shvidko, Elena. “Beyond ‘Giver-Receiver’ Relationships: Facilitating an Interactive Revision Process.” *Journal of Response to Writing* 1.2 (2015): 55-74. Print.

Shvidko bases her article on the idea that requiring students to think metacognitively might be augmented by requiring students to write reflectively. She proposes that this be done through a student’s “letter to the editor” requesting specific feedback for assignments so that instructors can target their feedback in ways that make students aware of how to improve in specific areas. Shvidko mentions that this practice takes place most frequently in L2 intensive classes, including her own. The process was for draft 1 to have a letter to the editor for a peer reviewer, draft 2 has a letter for the reviewer ahead of a conference with the instructor, and the final draft has a letter to the editor that predicates some of the assessment. The peer letter has several overarching questions recommended as a focus for this new type of writing that will elicit the useful type of comments from the peer reviewer. As the instructor, she also made it a practice to read and familiarize herself with the areas of inquiry from the student before reading the paper so that all feedback would be tailored to that student’s needs.

I think that this would present a very good way to work with peer review. Having students ask specific questions would guide peer review in a manner that is self-initiated, which would help me further remove myself from the process.

Tsui, Amy B.M. and Maria Ng. “Do Secondary L2 Writers Benefit from Peer Comments?” *Journal of Second Language Writing* 9.2 (2000): 147-170. Print.

Tsui and Ng discuss the role of peer review among L2 learners, focusing on both the teacher and peer comments on papers as part of the revision process. They find that peer comments "enhance a sense of audience, raise learners' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, encourage collaborative learning, and foster the ownership of text" (147). The lit review demonstrates an awareness of L2 challenges regarding professor feedback. Tsui and Ng demonstrate a field-work-driven methodology that works through survey and interview along with coding peer reviewed work from classmates and the instructor to determine which feedback resulted in the most change. The authors then use a case study of one particular student's reflection to measure the extent and degree to which students prefer instructor feedback. From the case study of two interviewed students, the authors demonstrate that most L2 students prefer to use comments from instructors since they are authorities and generally have a clearer idea behind them. Peer review is only useful if the L2 student has a chance to discuss with the peers what their comments means and discuss possible revisions. L2 students did indicate that peer review did give them a deeper sense of “audience” than if only the instructor read the paper, and some recognized that they could benefit from interactions with both higher and lower level students.

This study supports much of what I have witnessed in my own classes, especially with L2 students. One major difference, however, is that this class in Hong Kong was entirely composed of L2 students, whereas GSU’s classes rarely have 100% L2 learners outside of classes flagged for the applied linguistics teachers to take. It would be interesting to repeat this in a class with a 50/50 composition of L1/L2 students to see if the preference for teacher comments changes for L2 writers when several peers are L1. From my experience, it can be halting for both sides; L1 students may come with a perceived communication gap (meaning a slight accent or other factor may psychologically cause them to see errors/miscommunications where there are none) or L2 students may be more shy about having peers discuss weaknesses in their papers.

Walker, Rob. “Case Study, Case Records and Multimedia.” *Cambridge Journal of Education* 32.1 (2002): 109-127. Print.

Walker discusses the shortcomings of using case studies, specifically focusing on the ability to extrapolate from case studies. He states the goal of the case study was to “break out of a methodological straitjacket inherited from empiricist psychology” (110). To balance this feature, he extends Stenhouse’s concept of the “case record” as a way to arrange and archive case studies within a specific focus, but Walker sees digital environments as a new tool to actualize the case record as an academic tool. By combining the idea of the case record with attempts at artificial intelligence in chat rooms, Walker speculates that the function of an English teacher in responding to specific types of writing could one day be imitated by a chat client program. He stipulates that “the purpose would not be to replicate ‘real life’ in digital form but to change it,” and further asks whether this would revolutionize the university system, offering “a place to be with peers, to make friends, to fantasise [sic], to wrestle with identity” as the future this type of research offers.

I believe the idea of a digital peer is fascinating. While the antiquated language of ‘chat rooms’ took me back to my early millennium intro to the internet, challenging the notion of what an instructor or peer could be is essential as I consider ways that my class can become more digitally-friendly. I am not aware of any “bots” that work in the way speculated in this article, but searching for something similar could be constructive. For an online class, having something like this and asking sts to identify the bot would be a fascinating way to discuss community and voice in online spaces, as well.

Wang, Jen-Hang, Shih-Hsun Hsu, Sherry Y. Chen, Hwa-Wei Ko, Yu-Min Ku, and Tak-Wai Chan. “Effects of a Mixed-Mode Peer Response on Student Response Behavior and Writing Performance.” *Educational Computing Research* 51.2 (2014): 233-256. Print.

Wang et al’s article focuses on the peer interactions of third grade Taiwanese students, analyzing how students may differ in both the participation in and results of peer review face to face and online. They used one class with only face to face peer review, while the other included a mixed mode combining online spaces with face to face interactions. They found that students in the experimental group with the mixed mode peer review outperformed students with only the face to face peer review by the end of the semester at a significant level of difference.

Since this research was done with elementary school students, I think adapting it for the college composition classroom in an American university would be an interesting experiment. However, I don’t know that I could ethically do a control group on my own, knowing that the experimental group was more likely to benefit from the set-up. This is one of those ethical issues that makes teacher research so difficult to me as a methodology. I do agree, though, that online spaces make for better, more organic spaces for writing peer review since they are essentially written word spaces. Much like language learning through immersion, peer review online requires a close focus on the language being used with less recourse to other modalities of explanation. Perhaps a multimodal online space would provide an amalgamation, but I would be curious how it might work in terms of the online classroom allowing back some of the benefits of face to face interaction in addition to the heavy writing focus.

Other Works Cited

Pryor, Chester. “Re: Righting the sinking ship.” *WPA-L*. Writing Program Administration Listserv (WPA-L), 13 November 2015. Web. 20 November 2015.