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 integrated 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 impor-
tant. 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 feed-
back 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 activi-
ties 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 lan-
guage 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 collabora-
tive 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, greet-
ing, body, closing, and signature.
   -Teacher reviews but does not provide
any corrections.
   Students can share knowledge by summa-
rizing, reflecting on, processing, or an-
swering 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 some-
thing 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 collabora-
tive 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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Native English Speaking Students." TESOL
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and Communities of Readers and Writers." TESOL
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