AFTERWORD.

ACCEPTING, SHARING, AND SURRENDERING CONTROL: COMBINING THE BEST OF OLD AND NEW IN PEER REVIEW AND RESPONSE

Steven J. Corbett

Texas A&M University, Kingsville

Student peer review and response is a microcosm of writing studies theory and practice. It incorporates collaborative learning, process, writing-to-learn, reader-response, performance, and motivation theories and practices. It asks us to question and seek to map the boundaries of our authority and control as teachers of writing. It raises questions about student diversity and identity, and concerns about technology and digital innovations and constraints. And it is advocated for by WPAs and WAC/WID leaders in workshops and in print nationally and internationally. Yet, strikingly, over the past few decades, there have been relatively few book-length treatments of peer review and response, the last being Steven Corbett, Teagan Decker, and Michelle LaFrance's collection *Peer Pressure, Peer Power: Theory and Practice in Peer Review and Response for the Writing Classroom* in 2014. It is high time for the next substantial work on this extremely important subject—and the editors and contributors to *Rethinking Peer Review* have delivered just that.

In their Introduction, editors Phoebe Jackson and Christopher Weaver lay out the narrative and drama of peer review, emphasizing the shifts and re-assessment of important concepts from individual to collaborative, from autonomy to authority. The editors describe how—despite long-standing issues like student apathy or even resentment, and teacher concerns about the quality of feedback students can give each other—peer review and response remains widely utilized in writing courses.

The contributors to Part One elaborate on the challenges involved in peer review. Ian Anson, Chris Anson, and Kendra Andrews, in Chapter 1, analyze an enormous amount of data, situated within the context of feedback to student

writing in general. The authors posit ways to make peer review and response more successful, including offering students clear guidelines and asking for meta-commentaries of sessions, and striving to advocate for and support it at the departmental and institutional levels. The authors also offer valuable suggestions for how their study could be replicated for different purposes. In Chapter 2, Bob Mayberry explores learning theory vs literary theory as an explanation for why creative writing workshops seem more in-line with process pedagogies, and why writing studies as a field began to drift away from the "big dreams" of the 1960s and '70s process movement. Along the way, Mayberry stylistically makes several compelling points including (echoing a long-held writing center sentiment) why grades have no place in a workshop classroom and why portfolios are a boon to composition in general and the practice of peer review specifically. And in Chapter 3, Christopher Weaver, who dances an attitude toward peer review and response as a problem they have tried hard to work out, ends up suggesting a move more toward a workshop-style class described by Mayberry in Chapter 2. Weaver also offers an interesting point of view on how they are coming to terms with authority issues by differentiating between two feedback-spaces in their class: their own instructional expectations and values space, and the students' peer review group-space that is relatively free of teacherly prescriptions.

The chapters in Part Two continue offering case studies and theoretical musings that balance rhetorically-situated issues of authority and control. Kay Halasek, in Chapter 4, takes an ecological and dialogic look at why and how to make peer response a practice connected intimately with the content and other writing tasks of the course. Like Chapter 1, this chapter also covers a huge amount of research data in very succinct and smart ways and offers readers paths for future research. Halasek makes a nice connection to the previous chapter (and a few others in this collection) in terms of the problem of students as teacher "proxy." In answer to this problem, Halasek offers Five Critical Questions that could be used as a heuristic of sorts for making peer response integrated, rhetorical, situated, reflective, and cumulative—in short, as the prime pedagogical mover of a writing course. Courtney Stanton, in Chapter 5, while meditating on Burkean identification in relation to peer review and response, also offers practical strategies that can work toward mindful use of terminology that can be shared by instructors and students during response. Nora McCook, in Chapter 6, examines peer review and response in relation to the important topic of transfer. The author makes a good point about how peer response is used in high school and first-year writing classes, but then not used as much in upper-division college courses. McCook makes an important point about the transferability of soft skills for the workplace. They provide compelling workplace examples of peer review in relation to forward-reaching transfer, reflection,

and working toward student buy-in with peer review. McCook makes it clear why peer review is especially important and timely now as we get back to pre-COVID instructional forms (and current practices that may be informed by what we learned during COVID).

Contributors to Part Three illustrate ways peer review and response can be designed to cultivate inclusiveness and meet the needs of ELL students. Ellen Turner, in Chapter 7, offers a thoughtful qualitative study that relies heavily on substantial reflective quotes from students' experience with peer response. The author's findings on student anxiety and emotions in giving and receiving feedback from their peers and its implications, gives us much to think about in terms of scaffolding and reflective journaling in the service of helping students cope with response anxiety. Beth Kramer, in Chapter 8, sets up the exigence for and the problem of peer response for ELL. The author expresses the important idea of multiple models and choices in peer response methods and strategies, which is often (curiously) overlooked in the peer response scholarship. The two strategies of frequent low-stakes peer review and podcasts combines older methods with a more innovative approach that brings together the best of old and new.

Finally, the chapters in Part Four bring the promise of peer review and response fully into our digital age. Vicki Pallo, in Chapter 9, raises the issue of how sufficient time (which can be realized in online environments) is important for *all* students and points to the importance of an entire writing curriculum sensitive to this fact. To make the most of time and space in online environments for ELL students, the author offers useful recommendations involving starting perhaps in the classroom with training and then moving response online and, for completely-online courses, utilizing asynchronous methods of peer response. In Chapter 10, Phoebe Jackson echoes several other chapters on students acting as proxy for the instructor in peer review, the value of reflection and, especially, the idea of engaging students in the process and not necessarily the improvement of the written product. Jackson goes the extra step of how these concepts apply to the shift to an online environment, including scaffolding and reflection with illustrative examples from student writing. And Nick Carbone, in Chapter 11, rounds out Part Four with concrete examples and choices for ways to design and implement very nuanced and—due to the comprehensive, sophisticated online platforms he reports on—very *visible and accessible* peer review as the most useful teaching and learning activity in a writing class.

As contributors to this collection demonstrate, when designed thoughtfully and executed strategically, peer response pedagogies can push student agency, authority, and ownership of a course to its fullest potential. Yet, as with anything complex and multifaceted, peer response can throw off the most well-intentioned of practitioners. We've all heard the concerns, complaints, and cautionary

tales from colleagues who have tried various peer response activities and either given up on peer review pedagogy or downplayed its role in their curriculums. The chapters in this collection offer all teachers of writing fresh perspectives on the importance of how and why—*if* as teachers and scholars we stay open, curious, persistent, and response-able—we might embrace and embark on further synergistic inquiry and experimentation into peer review and response.

For my part, I'd like to briefly touch on two often-overlooked yet highly relevant topics. First, I'll take us back to the ancient rhetorical tradition of peer critique, especially as described and evaluated by Quintilian, and some strategies influenced by that ancient rhetorical tradition I've developed for contemporary practice. Second, I'll discuss peer tutoring research and practice, to emphasize the increasing value of writing center and peer tutoring theory and practice for peer review and response.

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE . . . PEER-TO-PEER COMPETITION VERSUS COOPERATION FROM QUINTILIAN TO THE PRESENT

> It is a good thing therefore that a boy should have companions whom he will desire first to imitate and then to surpass: thus he will be led to aspire to higher achievement.
>
> – Quintilian, ca. 95

In the Introduction, the editors write that "the time is ripe for a collection of essays that assesses where peer review stands a half century after its emergence and that challenges us to rethink and reframe the practice going forward." But the uptake of peer review a half a century ago was really a pedagogical *re*emergence of an ancient practice. Quintilian's quote above hints at the long-understood notion of imitation in the service of learning. Further, for Quintilian and the Romans, the power of peer pressure was something to be utilized to its full potential. James Murphy explains that the systematic efforts to instill in Roman (male) students the habits of mind fostering effective expression were strengthened by instructors' use of peer critique: "What today would be called peer criticism is an integral part of the scheme; in the Roman interactive classroom the student-critic shapes his own critical judgment by assessing publicly what he hears and reads" (55). In working toward becoming habitually rhetorical in mind and action, students were encouraged to scrutinize both strong and weaker models of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Yet, in his essay, Murphy downplays an idea that Quintilian emphasizes implicitly and explicitly throughout the first two books of his *Institutio Oratoria*—peer-to-peer

competition. Quintilian called for an interactive rhetoric classroom where students were explicitly called upon to showcase their communicative strengths while coming to terms with their weaknesses, both their own and their peers.' Quintilian strongly believed that in order to do justice in preparing his students for the ups and downs of an often brutally competitive world, he needed to socialize them accordingly. Quintilian presages Lev Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) when he relates how both stronger and weaker students received more benefit from the following peer-to-peer activity than from their instructors or parents alone:

> Having distributed the boys in classes, they made the order in which they were to speak depend on their ability, so that the boy who had made most progress in his studies had the privilege of declaiming first. The performances on these occasions were criticised. To win commendation was a tremendous honour, but the prize most eagerly coveted was to be the leader of the class. Such a position was not permanent. Once a month the defeated competitors were given a fresh opportunity of competing for the prize. Consequently success did not lead the victor to relax his efforts, while the vexation caused by defeat served as an incentive to wipe out the disgrace. (I.1.23-25)

For Quintilian and his contemporaries, there was great benefit in putting students on the spot, in providing them with rigorous rhetorical practice giving and taking criticism in their speaking and writing performances. Quintilian goes one step further, to comment on the recursive benefits this sort of systematic training also has for the instructor who, in handing over responsibility to the students, learns as time goes on how to better negotiate sharing pedagogical authority and control. And lest we think Quintilian an overly harsh taskmaster, I should note that in several spots in his book he offers some sage advice for loosening up and letting the young be young, as it were (II.4.5-8, II.4.10-11, II.4.14-15).

We can reevaluate what appears to be the contemporary distaste for student competition in writing courses in ways that blend teaching with student texts (Harris et al.) with peer review and response. The following activity can awake students' passion for competitive play: First, while students work in their response groups ask the group for a referral essay, one that doesn't have to be perfect, just worthy of continued conversation. Then ask the referred student if it would be okay to share that paper with the rest of the class (via email or shared files) for possible further discussion later. It's important to try to get

a good sense if the student is hesitant or eager to share. If they seem hesitant or reluctant, probably best not to coerce obligation. Next, share the agreed-upon referrals with the entire class (the number depending on how long the papers are) with instructions to read each one, taking notes on the strengths and weaknesses and ranking each one. Then in the next class meeting ask students to state their top choice, while you write them on the board. Rank the papers, and—depending on how much time you have—discuss the top-ranking papers in order. Since students themselves voted on the top choices and the authors agreed to act as models, they can be held responsible for leading the discussion, and all other students can be invited to join in as they see fit. The ancient art of peer criticism in the writing and rhetoric classroom, so highly valued by Quintilian, can take on a fresh, contemporary feel if conscientiously orchestrated.

While most peer review and response activities might more subtly percolate students' natural competitive instincts, there's nothing like a good old-fashioned debate to bring their energy and passion to full boil (see Corbett "Great"). In short, exemplary student papers from previous courses can be pitted against each other, avoiding the potential for student anxiety. (It's probably better not to use texts from students from the same course in this situation due to the fact that students can get pretty emotionally intense.) Students read and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of these two strong papers—crucially, models of the same assignments they are working hard to revise. In essence, the former students who wrote these exemplary papers are acting as virtual models, extending their peer response presence and influence for the benefit of current students. For each of their major papers, then, students come to class prepared with evidence and, as they strategize with their team, build a progressively stronger case for why their respective model paper has better-met the expectations of the assignment. As I illustrate in the webtext "Great Debating," students take to this activity enthusiastically, and with much engagement, focus, and passion in their efforts to perform and enact all they've learned about rhetorical analyses, peer review and response, and argumentation throughout the term. With the stark memory of these debates fresh in their minds, students can face revising their major papers at the height of their rhetorical powers. The role of the instructor becomes that of the coach, encouraging rhetorical acumen win or lose, as described by Quintilian: "if he speaks well, he has lived up to the ideals of his art, even if he is defeated" (II.17.23). All in all, students can dance an attitude, and we can enthusiastically coach this dance (gradually, thoughtfully, and strategically ceding authority and control), that moves them in thought and action closer to responsible, authoritative, and confident team co-teachers. Perhaps these memorable rhetorical performances

might enable students to successfully internalize salutary habits of mind and writing strategies and moves that they can carry with them into other communicative situations. One of these situations could be interactions and involvement with writing centers and peer tutoring.

WRITING CENTER AND PEER TUTORING THEORY AND PRACTICE CONTINUES TO ADD MUCH TO THE CONVERSATION

> . . . traditional teaching assumes and maintains a negative competitive relationship among students. They are officially anonymous to one another, and isolated. Classroom learning is an almost entirely individual process.
>
> – Kenneth Bruffee, 1999

As several contributors to this collection have described, teacher-scholars throughout the 1980s were building peer response theories and practices for writing classrooms—often first-year composition courses. Concurrently, others explored peer-to-peer learning across the disciplines in writing centers and other peer tutoring programs. Suppose we gaze awhile at writing center and peer tutoring theory and practice. In that case, we will come upon much research that can inform and complement our work in peer critique in the writing classroom, including replicable, aggregate, and data-driven (RAD) research—like the kind presented by Anson, Anson, and Andrews in Chapter 1 and Halasek, in Chapter 4 of this volume—that has only proliferated since the 1980s.

Some wonderfully useful work on peer-to-peer teaching and learning applicable to writing classrooms was well underway by the late 1970s and early 1980s. The early work of Kenneth Bruffee, described in the 1978 "Brooklyn Plan" and the 1980 "Two Related Issues in Peer Tutoring," provided (anti)foundational theoretical rationales for the value of peer-to-peer collaborative tutoring and learning. Like Peter Elbow, Bruffee (and soon after, writing center practitioners like Muriel Harris) believed there was substantial, game-changing value inherent in surrendering and sharing pedagogical authority with students. Soon the promising bridges between peer review and response and peer tutoring would also emerge, including detailed, empirical study. For example, the often-overlooked five-year study of developmental and multicultural writers and teachers by Marie Nelson in her 1991 *At the Point of Need* supported the claims of Bruffee, Elbow, Anne Ruggles Gere, and Karen Spear with multi-method empirical data. Nelson's study of over 300 response groups (90 receiving intense focus), meeting in the writing center and facilitated by a graduate

instructor, found a pedagogical pattern. Nelson found an inverse relationship between teacher control and student agency. When group facilitators acted in more directive and controlling ways at first, but gradually ceded control and direction of the group over to the students themselves, the students responded by accepting the responsibility of reciprocal tutoring/teaching, which they then internalized into their own self-regulating writing performances and products. Students would continue to reciprocally externalize this peer-to-peer pedagogy within their group.

This quest for synergy between writing classrooms, writing groups, and writing centers enables us to move beyond while still staying true to the best ideals in "The Idea of a Writing Center" (North; Boquet and Lerner). Harris's essay on peer response groups versus writing center tutorials concluded by suggesting we should continue practicing both, but left readers with few explicit connections. In a reconsideration of that 1992 essay, in her 2014 essay "A Non-Coda: Including Writing Centered Student Perspectives for Peer Review," Harris offers some explicit connections. Like several other authors in the same volume, Harris draws on writing center theory and practice combined with classroom peer response practice to speculate on how we just might be making some strides in working toward viable writing-center-inspired strategies for successful peer-to-peer reciprocal teaching and learning in writing classrooms. Harris's thoughtful reconsiderations and suggestions join the retrospect chorus of those like Robert Brooke, Ruth Mirtz, and Rick Evans, the other contributors to *Peer Pressure, Peer Power*, as well as the contributors to this collection, in admonishing a huge amount of preparation, practice, and follow-up when trying to make peer response groups work well. Harris suggests, like others in the same volume (see, for example, Reid), that perhaps successful peer review and response is the most promising goal we can strive toward in the writing classroom. Harris realizes there are multiple ways of reaching this goal: "Whatever the path to getting students to recognize on their own that they are going to have the opportunity to become more skilled writers, the goal—to help students see the value of peer review before they begin and then to actively engage in it—is the same" (281). Harris makes it clear that she believes a true team effort is involved in this process of getting students to collaboratively internalize (and externalize) the value of peer response, an effort that must actively involve student writers, instructors, and—as often as possible—peer tutors.

The current trajectory of writing center work increasingly includes empirical, RAD research that holds the sorts of implications for peer review and response Harris alludes to. Multimethod empirical studies like the ones reported on and advocated for in the extant work of those like Rebecca Babcock, Terese Thonus, Dana Driscoll, Isabelle Thompson, and Jo Mackiewicz, among increasingly

others, can help us inquire more deeply into questions of student motivation, authority negotiation, trust building, and balancing when and how to accept, share, and surrender control. Writing center research like the kind gathered in Janine Morris and Kelly Concannon's 2022 collection *Emotions and Affect in Writing Centers* can also inform the type of important affective concerns in peer response reported on by Ellen Turner in Chapter 7 of this volume.

Research and practice involving writing fellows and course-based tutors (peer tutors attached to writing courses) offers further insights into how peer tutors act when they are more or less expected to possess some sort of authority, some kind of hybrid teacher-student aptitude (Moss et al.; Spigelman and Grobman; Hall and Hughes; Zawacki; Corbett "Using," *Beyond*). An understanding of the strategies that can encourage students to negotiate when and how to do more talking, questioning, or listening can add the complimentary "soft" collaborative touch to the perhaps harsher competitive instincts we can utilize via debates— uniting in many ways the pedagogically old with the new. Corbett's case study work is especially applicable to peer response because in several of his studies, the peer tutors—including developmental writers—were students who just finished the same course in which they were subsequently placed as tutors. This closer alignment with students' ZPD offers a look into how diverse students a bit closer to true "peer" status negotiate feedback strategies.

And Bradley Hughes, Paula Gilliespie, and Harvey Kail's analyses of the reflections of 126 former tutors from three institutions suggests some promising soft skills and habits of mind students immersed in peer-to-peer learning can take with them from those experiences including stronger listening and analytical abilities; values, skills, and abilities vital to family and professional relationships; and increased confidence in their writing and communication abilities. What if we extended that type of realization of skills and values, those (often privileged) experiences of peer tutors, to as many students as possible? If students were to experience systematic, iterated peer response activities in all of their writing courses (or courses that included some writing) vertically in their curriculum from the time they were freshman to their senior year, and then on to those continuing in graduate and professional schools and programs, they could get their share of stronger communicative skills and values.

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If as compositionists and teachers of writing we turn our sights inward a bit— toward what we continue to theorize, research, and practice in the classroom and in writing centers and peer tutoring programs—we can better stabilize our pedagogical bridges between the past and the present. Then we can share what

we've learned with colleagues across the disciplines. How we teach (and learn) peer response, including our habits of mind and attitude toward it, likely go a long way in determining whether or not newer writing instructors adopt peer response activities with their own students, not to mention, sustain the interests and commitments of our more experienced colleagues to experiment with it in their classrooms. We can look back at the history of peer response for starting points, even as we look forward to new experiments. We can gaze closer within our own field, even as we stare across boundaries toward what other fields and disciplines have to offer. And we can look and listen to the transitional journeys of less-experienced students and teachers, even as we look and listen to the authority of landmark researchers. For students and teachers at all levels and abilities, whose memories of peer response may not be glowing, it becomes important that we proceed in facilitating some of the unlearning that might need to happen to overcome lingering ambivalence. Peer response activities can certainly activate and encourage student writers' sense of community, and help students learn to trust more than just the teacher's point of view—but only if instructors can successfully nudge them toward understanding and appreciating the value so many of us see in this collaborative practice. This lofty goal will probably hinge on instructors' willingness to learn to let go of some of our pedagogical control, to gently surrender (and thereby share) some of our teacherly authority.

The study of peer review and response can help us answer age-old and contemporary questions in writing studies like habits of mind, knowledge transfer, and access and equity. How can what we know about peer tutoring enhance our abilities to coach students toward becoming better coaches of each other? How can students help their peers learn information and the necessary procedures to be able to do something with that knowledge that travels well beyond the classroom? I believe many possible answers to these questions are already right there in the pages of our many publications—including *Rethinking Peer Review*—and I am curious, inspired and excited by the prospect of future inquiries to come.

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