

## CHAPTER 5.

# PEER PERSUASION: AN ETHOS-BASED THEORY OF IDENTIFICATION AND AUDIENCE AWARENESS

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Peer review continues to puzzle writing teachers and researchers. Despite its intuitive appeal and an abundance of discussion regarding its potential benefits as an effective tool of process-driven pedagogy (Ching; Lam; DiPardo and Freedman; Kirby and White; Harris), there is little denying the gaps which often exist between the intended benefits and actual results of peer review (Diffendal; Brammer and Rees; Covill; Lam). We need, for example, to reject the deceptively alluring notion that if we teach students how to provide useful feedback, this feedback will, in turn, be recognized by their peers, and successful revisions will ensue.

In general, existing research offers few encouraging responses to the question of whether students actually revise in direct response to peer comments, as valuable peer-peer exchanges often do not translate into productive revisions. Most available studies of peer review tend not to evaluate the latency period, focusing primarily on the immediate interactions between students, and those that do typically suggest that feedback received does not, as we might expect, necessarily correlate to revisions made (see Topping; Lam; Kaufman and Schunn; Walker). Of course, peer comments lose a great deal of value when student writers do not take them up; there is value in *providing* feedback on the part of the reviewer, but clearly, much value is wasted when comments are ignored and the reviewer, despite his or her best efforts, has little to no influence on revision. By underpinning peer review with rhetorical theory, then, I hope to challenge this lack of influence by showing that to question the extent to which students revise based on peers' comments is to question the extent to which students are *persuaded*, by their peers, to revise.

In foregrounding its persuasive nature, I also resist the inclination to conceive of peer review as an exercise in student independence. Instead, I argue, we need

to recognize and find ways to more effectively acknowledge that student-student reviews, like any writing experiences, are audience-*dependent* and that despite the moniker, the instructor is a central figure of the peer review audience. To build this argument, I first examine the basic rhetorical makeup of peer review, using the Aristotelian framework of persuasive modes to illustrate that ethos is conspicuously absent from peer review, as students express a lack of trust in one another's reviews. I argue that we need to recognize the instructor's ethotic position as a source for this lack of trust between students, and from this, I suggest that we foster identification, as defined by Kenneth Burke, between instructor and students, as a means to extend this ethos to students. More pointedly, I argue that to be persuaded to revise, students must identify their reviewers with the instructor, as it is through this identification that the reviewer establishes a more productive sense of ethos, making the review process more persuasive. Rather than retreat from the instructor's central role in the classroom audience, a theory of peer ethos based on identification acknowledges that this role continues even during peer review sessions and offers a way forward for instructors to more actively mitigate the persistent lack of trust between students. I end with some practical suggestions based on my experience with building students' identification-based ethos and offer some important reminders about the need to ground identification-building activities in broader discussions of audience.

## THE BREAK(ING)DOWN OF PERSUASIVE APPEALS

Aristotle's modes of persuasion—*pathos*, *logos*, and *ethos*—are a useful place to start when trying to understand peer review as a failure to persuade, for several reasons.

They offer a succinct framework for understanding the rhetorical situation, and they stem from the fundamental concern with audience which Aristotle perceived and which, I argue, is crucial to understanding peer review. In the first chapter of his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle distinguishes between the truth-seeking purpose of dialectic, which is “to discern the real and the apparent syllogism,” and the more audience-based purpose of rhetoric, which is “to discern the real and the apparent means of persuasion” (7). While dialectic is concerned with reason and truth, and typically engaged only by those with the proper training, Aristotle realizes that “before some audiences not even the possession of the exactest knowledge will make it easy for what we say to produce conviction” (6). As such, he sees rhetoric as a means to appeal to public audiences, using not just reason and truth but other means of persuasion as well, and from this assumption he develops his modes. The modes thus speak to the enduring significance of audience—especially audience as a varied, public entity—in any attempt to

understand rhetorical situations, including peer reviews. More specifically, they also highlight the fundamental audience issue already reflected, implicitly, in the existing research on peer review, namely that a lack of revision based on peer feedback stems in part from a lack of peer-peer trust.

Most scholarship on peer review indicates students' general ability and willingness to appeal to pathos, to "dispos[e] the listener" by exciting emotions conducive to persuasion (38). Aristotle writes at length about friendliness being especially favorable to persuasion, as a friendly audience is one that sees its own beliefs and wishes reflected in those of the speaker/writer and is thus more receptive to the latter's ideas (125). Friendly feeling suggests a perceived sense of honesty and sympathy, both of which are intended to make a speaker/writer more well-disposed to his or her audience. Research suggests positive peer-peer emotions are fairly common, as there is no evidence that malice or antagonism exists within peer assessment relationships in any generalized way. Indeed, students may find themselves demonstrating an *excess* of emotional appeal, as they offer an overabundance of praise to their peers. In her discussion of student attitudes toward peer revision, for instance, Lee Ann Diffendal observes that a "common impediment to effective peer revision is students' ambivalence about criticizing their peers," as they often feel that "honest feedback should not supersede common courtesy" (35; 36). Students tempering feedback in the interest of maintaining cordial relationships or protecting self-esteem is a fairly common observation, and this is a trend not generally perceived as malicious or intentionally misleading by reviewees. Rather, this excessive praise is more likely an appeal to emotions which is overzealous to the point that it can, inadvertently, become counter-productive, when concerns about friendliness supersede concerns about reviewees' best academic interests. Yet, the basic intention to appeal to the reviewee's emotions is a wise one, rhetorically speaking; praise is detrimental only if it takes the place of constructive criticism.

The type of appeal Aristotle was most interested in was that of logical reasoning, and *logos* is relevant to peer review primarily as it relates to the presentation of "the truth or the apparent truth," (39) as by "showing or seeming to show something" (38). These qualifications that proof need not be infallible or universal are essential to composition pedagogy, as the contextuality of writing precludes recourse to any sense of absolute "correctness." The appearance of truth, which we might equate to the sense of "truth" defined by the particular facets of a given writing context, is more relevant to peer review processes than any absolute standard of truth Aristotle may have had in mind. Terms like "reliable" and "valid," when used by scholars to describe peer feedback, speak to the *logos* of the particular context. They indicate the extent to which students' comments are *true*—to the instructor's expectations, the assignment criteria, etc. Various

empirical studies have scrutinized the reliability of students' marks and indicate that, when asked to evaluate the work of their peers, whether by attaching an actual grade or providing comprehensive feedback for revision, students are able to do so with a fair amount of accuracy (see Topping; Patchan, Charney, and Schunn; Patchan et al.). Students are able to present feedback which is reflective of sound judgment and consistent with—true to—the rationale of a given writing context.

This is particularly important in light of evidence of students' negative perceptions of peer abilities (see Kaufman and Schunn; Brammer and Rees; Covill; Bhullar et al.). Student reviewers can and do exhibit the *logos* necessary for persuasion, yet students' perceptions do not necessarily reflect this. In their study of student attitudes toward peer review, for example, Charlotte Brammer and Mary Rees found that a majority of students did not trust their peers to review their papers, particularly because they did not trust their peers' writing skills. They observed that of the student survey, "comments that focused on the quality of the reviewer, most expressed concerns about classmates' dedication and ability to peer review" (80). Students expressed doubts about peers' emotional investment and intellectual ability, and the sample comments offered by the authors emphasize ability as the primary concern. A student admits, "I don't trust my peers to review my paper. I don't think they can do it competently, just like I don't think I can give a good Peer review b/c I am a horrible writer" (80). Another student laments: "If [my peers] can't write a good paper, why do I want them to correct mine?" (80). Students express a general suspicion that the feedback offered is, even if well-meaning, to some extent inaccurate.

Thus, despite the evidence indicating the presence of logical and emotional appeals in student responses, students do not necessarily trust their peers to offer them useful feedback. In short, the *presence* of *logos* and *pathos* does not correlate positively with students' *recognition* of them, a discrepancy which potentially cancels out their persuasive value and explains why students may not consistently revise in response to peer feedback. Thus, instructional focus on just the quality of peer comments is inadequate, as such focus mistakenly assumes that the quality of feedback correlates to a writer's use of it, avoiding the simple fact that a lack of peer-peer trust has the power to cancel out feedback value. As such, I argue that we need to place much greater emphasis on establishing *ethos* within peer assessments.

## DETERMINING THE SOURCES OF CLASSROOM ETHOS

In the second book of his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle explains that because rhetoric "is concerned with making a judgment," the speaker must not only "look to the

argument, that it may be demonstrative and persuasive” but must also “construct a view of himself as a certain kind of person” (112). A speaker who demonstrates, in addition to logic and expressiveness, an *ethos*—broken down by Aristotle into three core elements: practical wisdom, virtue, and good will—is “necessarily persuasive to the hearers” (113). He asserts that these three elements are those qualities that “we trust other than logical demonstration” and which make “speakers themselves . . . persuasive” (112). In his brief elaboration of the terms of *ethos*, Aristotle suggests that they are predicated in large part upon the perceived correlation of what one believes with what one claims to believe. Those lacking virtue, for instance, “though forming opinions rightly . . . do not say what they think,” and those lacking goodwill choose “not to give the best advice although they know [what] it [is]” (113). Aristotle’s conception of *ethos* is based on a perceived correlation between speech and knowledge/belief. One establishes authority by conveying the sense—whether genuine or not—that what one says or recommends is an accurate reflection of one’s knowledge/belief, and this sense is informed by occurrences beyond the bounds of the immediate rhetorical situation. What one expresses in the immediate situation must correlate to something beyond it—one’s past actions, for instance.

Yet, to what should students’ words correlate? As they express themselves and offer feedback to peers during review sessions, what is there beyond the bounds of the immediate session, to lend weight to their words? Aristotle provides us a useful definition for *ethos*, but not necessarily any reasonable means to achieve it. His statements about what people “really think” and what they “know” suggest a *kairotic* situation which extends beyond the words themselves, to the knowledge the audience members believe they have about the speaker, apart from his actual speech. He makes clear that varied authority dynamics may precede one’s speech, but his guidance for how to manage these dynamics range from statements like “praise is based on actions” to the assertion that education and goodness of birth are “attendant” to persuasion (79-80). He makes clear that the words of the immediate situation are not all that determine one’s *ethos*, but once we identify that *ethos* is the missing facet of the peer review experience, he offers us and our students only limited means to move forward. His understanding of *ethos* is clearly informed by the social stratifications of his time, and while fitting one’s words to one’s actions remains a wise bit of advice, it is not of much specific use in the context of a writing course. Moreover, the specific context of peer-peer assessments is more complicated than the speaker-audience dynamic implied in classical definitions of *ethos*, in that there is the additional presence of the instructor—and, by extension, the parameters of the course itself—acting upon the situation. It would be easy to interpret the Aristotelian conception of *ethos* as suggesting that *ethos* emanates primarily from the speaker and his/her

choices and that the appeal occurs solely between the speaker and audience, but neither is the case within student-student feedback experiences.

Roger Cherry's distinction between ethos and persona is useful to illustrate the limitations of the classical perspective toward ethos. Cherry argues that while ethos refers to a rhetor's portrayal of self in the attempt to establish credibility, persona is more closely associated with fiction and refers to an "intentional 'mask'" adopted by the writer. One produces or fabricates a persona but merely expresses or exhibits ethos. He attempts to clarify the distinction with the example of writing tasks which ask students "to assume the identity of a fictional personage and create a text appropriate for that individual," saying that such assignments require students to create both a "persona appropriate for the fictional rhetorical situation" and an "ethos . . . appropriate for the real (i.e., evaluative) rhetorical situation." The difference in terms seems fairly clear here, as students construct a character acknowledged by both reader and writer as imaginary, but what happens in the face of writing tasks lacking an explicitly fictional rhetorical situation? An assignment asking students to analyze an author's argument, for instance, offers no explicitly fictionalized entity for students to embody but does in some sense require them to construct a new identity—a voice that reflects the standards of the course and the expectations of the instructor. Such a voice may be less overtly fictional than that of a character in an imagined narrative, but this does not necessarily equate to it being objectively "real." Like Aristotle, Cherry appeals to the assumption that students must rely on themselves—whether by appealing to some element of their background or by tapping into some sort of genuine self—in order to establish their writerly ethos. For the writing student, however, this instruction is of minimal use, as the situated and discursive nature of writing makes any sort of essential self tough to identify or stabilize in any meaningful way.

Expecting students to exhibit ethos entirely on their own is unrealistic for various reasons, not least of which is that they are in a generally unfamiliar environment. Moreover, this classroom environment is one in which their sense of ethos is automatically challenged, by virtue of their position as students being evaluated and graded by an instructor. In our role as instructors, we are the ones expected to teach; this is not only a reason to extend our ethos to them but also an explanation why, if we do *not* extend it, they are unlikely to trust one another.

Typically—there are exceptions, of course—the instructor occupies a position of considerable classroom authority, and the research shows that, even in the face of valuable peer feedback, students are understandably concerned primarily with this authority. In the context of the more practical goals of most courses—successful completion, a strong grade—the instructor plays a much more substantial role than do peers, and students of course understand this. Various

scholars have explored the dynamics of classroom authority and argue that instructor authority is an inevitable, and in fact a necessary, reality of the classroom (see Bizzell; Gale; Pace; Lutz and Fuller; Bedore and O’Sullivan; VanderStaay et al.). Through this lens, however, the instructor is easily construed as the “true” or “ultimate” audience for any writing students produce, and subsequently peers are often left to occupy a pseudo-audience position which inevitably limits their influence. The instructor’s ethos, in other words, may hold great enough sway to potentially overshadow student ethos and undermine the persuasive power of the peer reviews.

I do not mean to suggest through this observation that instructors are unimpeachable or that their authority is indicative of some sort of intrinsic merit. As various scholars mentioned above attest, there are important differences between authority and other more stringent concepts like power and control. However, by virtue of their role as instructors, they *do* have inherent influence over students’ work. We may bristle at the dangers of instructor-student power relationships, but there is little denying the influence which comes along with acting as an audience. Aristotle certainly understood this, offering various observations on the importance of audience, among them the adage from Socrates, that “it is not difficult to praise Athenians in Athens” (136). Kenneth Burke likewise understood, further extending the classical understanding of the audience’s role. For Burke, rhetoric is not simply a matter of finding the right audience for one’s ideas; the audience actually participates in shaping them, as “an act of persuasion is affected by the character of the scene in which it takes place and of the agents to whom it is addressed” (62). In more recent years, composition scholarship has been continually informed by discussions of audience, like Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford’s influential “Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked.” Seen through their more focused framework, the instructor plays an increasingly complicated role in the peer review audience. In the practical terms of address, she is the concrete figure who will eventually rate the draft; she is also invoked by students, as peer reviews are guided by students’ sense of what the teacher wants.

These examples are simply meant to illustrate that audience has always been a central element of persuasion, and that if we are willing to acknowledge the instructor’s unique role as not just an audience member but typically the one whose authority is most perceptible and of greatest consequence, and to consider how this authority necessarily carries over to peer reviews, then the expectation that students will simply discover or build their own sense of ethos is decidedly unreasonable. Moreover, it also implies a certain level of powerlessness on the part of the instructor. It suggests that while we can work to improve their appeals to logos and pathos—guiding them about what sorts of comments to give and how best to express them—we cannot work to establish trust, that this must

come from the students. Yet, the existing research on peer review suggests that this point in the rhetorical setup is precisely where we need to more actively involve ourselves. Thus, an alternative method for establishing ethos is necessary. I propose that we conceptualize student ethos—in the context of peer review, specifically the reviewer’s ethos—as an extension of instructor ethos. Doing so not only highlights the contextuality of the peer review experience but also offers us a foundation from which to intervene and build greater student-student trust within the peer review experience.

## FOSTERING IDENTIFICATION, BRINGING STUDENTS INTO THE CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION

What we need to do, then, is extend our influence to reviewers, using our ethos to build theirs, through the process of identification. Burke writes in *Rhetoric of Motives* that “If, in the opinion of a given audience, a certain kind of conduct is admirable, then a speaker might persuade the audience by using the ideas and images that identify his cause with that kind of conduct” (55). Through the process of identification, “A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B” (20). Using the terms of peer review, the reviewer (A) can better persuade the reviewee (the audience) when he “identif[ies] his cause” with that of the instructor (B). Burke further explains that “In being identified with B, A is ‘substantially one’ with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique” (21). Through this consubstantiality the reviewer is at once a unique peer and a reflection of the instructor, and given that the instructor is the locus of classroom ethos, this identification is bound to heighten the ethos of the reviewer. Through this identification the reviewer becomes associated more closely with that audience which the reviewee recognizes as most authoritative; with this closer association the reviewer can more actively engage the audience dynamic which already exists between reviewee and instructor, inserting him or herself into the dynamic as an active participant. Rather than a pseudo representation of the audience, the reviewer becomes an extension of it.

Some may push back against the idea of inserting the instructor more actively into peer-peer interactions, based on the assumption that such interactions are meant to represent a transferring of authority away from the instructor. Yet, the notion that students are working independently of teachers when they engage in assigned peer assessments is fallacious, most fundamentally because such activities originate from and are monitored by the instructor. The instructor occupies a relatively stable, normative position in the classroom, and rather than ignore this fact, this concept of reviewer-instructor identification embraces it.



In identifying with the instructor, the reviewer is acknowledging a dual audience—the reviewee, who values this instructor-based identity, and the instructor herself, whose evaluation system informs the reviewer’s own. As such, through identification the reviewer can address the initial audience-based glitch in the peer review process, namely that the reviewee considers the instructor the only relevant audience, by developing a closer association with said audience. This framework acknowledges the uncomfortable reality that the teacher is the ultimate source of classroom ethos, and at the same time it accomplishes the tricky task of affording instructors the opportunity to actually disrupt this reality.

Acknowledging that peer review is not an independent student experience need not force us into the opposite conclusion, that it is merely another instance of a troubling power dynamic. In proposing identification as the route to peer review success, my intention is not to simply get students to trust one another by making them appear as conduits for the instructor, as I realize that asking students to parrot an instructor’s comments uncritically is of little lasting value to students. The gap between reviewer and instructor needs to be bridged, certainly, in order for feedback to be persuasive, but the arguably larger benefit of this framework is that it has the potential to actually reinforce certain fundamental principles of composition, in ways that have great long-term value for students. Indeed, viewing peer review through the frame of identification and consubstantiality allows us to see peer review as a means of developing the shared language and shared context of the classroom. Coupled with meaningful discussions about the concept of audience, identification-building can be useful to not only immediate review scenarios but also writing experiences in later coursework.

This encouragement of meaningful discussion stems from my broader assumption that composition is a discipline with content and, subsequently, that we should share this knowledge with students. I agree with Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, who assert in their collection on threshold concepts for composition that “writing is not only an activity in which people engage but also a subject of study,” and that the more transparently we discuss the content of composition with students, the more successful they will be (15). The concept of audience is a crucial facet of this content, so rather than avoid discussions of audience—and implicitly reinforce the spurious monolith of “good” writing—we should help students better understand how we function as a specific audience for their work and how identification enters into this relationship. In guiding students to identify with us, we need not present our language or values as the “right” or “correct” ones in any sort of universalized way. We can present them as *ours* and talk with students about how language and values are inevitably situated and how they will need to make different decisions for the different audiences

they face in the future. We can, in short, teach them about a *specific* audience, ourselves, and about the *concept* of audience. Various concepts explored in the encyclopedic first section of Adler-Kassner and Wardle's collection could easily serve as starting points for these classroom discussions.

Discussing the dynamics of identification with students also allows us an opening to further disrupt students' perceptions of "good" and "bad" writing. Burke explains that "Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very essence" (22). In the terms of composition, there would not be so many different textbooks, methods, and schools of thought on how to write effectively if we actually had one definition of "effective" upon which we could all agree. By establishing the terms of the classroom, those with which she hopes to see her students identify, the instructor can actively acknowledge that differing terms exist. As such, her ethos—and by extension, the students'—is established some way apart from the artifice of objective value, in a way that de-prioritizes distinctions between "good" and "bad" writing. Instructors can help students to reconceptualize the label "good writer" as a designation not of correctness but of identification with a particular audience of value, in this case the instructor. If we instead try to minimize ambiguity and clarify for students the (supposed) distinctions between "good" and "bad" writing, we will be no closer to understanding effective peer review. Such attempts perpetuate non-existent ideals, and they disregard the existing research, which shows that even if students *could* achieve absolute "correctness" in their reviews, this in no way necessarily leads to the employment of these reviews. Objectively "good" writing is not just an arbitrary and rather meaningless label; even if a reviewer *were* to exhibit it, the lack of ethos in the peer review setup would strip it of any impact anyway. Conceiving of ethos instead as a function of identification grounds it fundamentally in a particular audience, and exposing this dynamic to students works to offset their expectations of an objective or universal "good."

Moreover, this framework builds on existing research suggesting that students are more successful when they understand and interact with the specific criteria by which they are being evaluated. Various scholars have observed that asking students to engage directly with evaluative criteria typically leads to students' greater comfort with and accurate application of said criteria (see Leydon, Wilson, and Boyd; Ashton and Davies; Yucel et al.; McLeod et al.; Bird and Yucel; Hawe and Dixon; Li and Lindsey; Chong). In short, students understandably do better when they recognize what is being asked of them, and guiding students to more actively identify with the instructor builds on this observation in at least two ways. Practically speaking, students must progress

from knowing the criteria to actually employing it within their own feedback to their peers; moreover, they ideally gain a greater conceptual understanding, as they move beyond just identifying the criteria to understanding their varied purposes. Again, the key to making this effort most successful is to partner this call for identification with discussions of those concepts mentioned above, like audience and “good” writing, so as not to turn peer review into an exercise in mimicry. Hawe and Dixon hint at this particular risk when they note that “Students cannot be blamed for thinking they have been successful in their work once each element is ‘ticked off’ as present” if “they have been inducted into the notion that quality resides in the presence of properties identified in the criteria” (76). Writing instructors have the responsibility not only to foster identification but also to guide students away from an understanding of peer review as a simple checklist of desired qualities.

Striking this balance, between establishing specific expectations and challenging the objectivity of these expectations, is not necessarily an easy task for instructors, though. Perceiving this balance may be difficult for students, too, particularly those in the early stages of their development as writers and academics. Forwarding a concept of ethos as identification demands a greater sense of how this identification might actually be fostered, so it is useful to briefly consider some ways that instructors can translate this theory of ethos building into classroom practice.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR MINDFUL PRACTICE

The correlation of ethos and identification foregrounds the importance of community within the writing classroom in various ways, as it is only through the power of *shared* language that the reviewer-instructor link can be forged and recognized by the reviewee. Burke argues that “you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his,” and thus only through a process of shared recognition by all three parties—reviewer, reviewee, and instructor—can persuasive identification occur (55). It is not enough for the reviewer to take steps to identify him or herself with the instructor; the reviewee must be able to recognize this consubstantiation as well. For the instructor, the task becomes more than just building the link between herself and reviewers; she must also ensure that all participants are able to perceive and take part in this association. As such, the most effective methods for fostering identification will start at the level of the classroom, with the goal of establishing a shared knowledge among its many participants. There are plenty of ways to approach this knowledge-building, and to couple it with meaningful discussions focused on long-term value for students.

One of the more obvious, intuitive ways to encourage identification is to engage students in extended analyses of instructor comments, ideally as applied to samples of student writing. Reviewing samples with students is nothing new, but more often these are used as a means to analyze the student writing rather than the comments provided in response to it. Moreover, there is plenty of scholarship examining instructors' feedback methods (for recent examples, see Dixon and Moxley; Vincelette and Bostic; Laflen and Smith; Ferris) and how students make use of the individualized comments given to them (McGrath and Atkinson-Leadbetter; McMartin-Miller; Ruegg; Daniel, Gaze, and Braasch; Calhoun-Dillahunt and Forrest), but there is little discussion of how approaching instructors' comments as an ongoing text for *students* to analyze is valuable. By asking students to critique sample comments, instructors can encourage students to see their feedback as an additional text to critically examine and understand and ask them to rhetorically analyze things like wording, style markers, and the priorities implied by the instructor's various choices.

For instance, the instructor could give students a pair of samples and ask them to analyze sentence-level marks and consider any differing patterns between them. If one sample contains significantly more structural and conceptual weaknesses than the other, students will likely notice fewer sentence-level notes, and more global ones, in the former. This conclusion can then be used as an opportunity to discuss layers of priority students have to grapple with when reviewing and precisely how the instructor prioritizes different strengths and weaknesses. They can discuss, for example, the practical reasons a more global comment about evidence usage might supersede marks on run-on sentences which the instructor would otherwise offer and try to emulate this reasoning in their own reviews. As the students provide feedback to peers and make decisions about what to focus on and what to postpone, they can speak back to these conversations, aligning their decisions with the instructor's. In my own classes, I try to review numerous examples like this over the course of the semester, typically just prior to peer review sessions. I actively encourage students to draw comments from the samples we review together, always being careful to frame this drawing as engagement with a particular audience, me, rather than simple copying. An instructor's approach to the analysis of samples will be crucial in maintaining this distinction, as the question of *what* the instructor says via feedback is not nearly as important as the question of *why* she says it. Focusing too much on *what*—identifying choices and patterns without considering contextual purpose—would likely lead to uncritical parroting.

Along with offering feedback to analyze, instructors can also work more directly toward building a shared vocabulary, emphasizing it as the representation of the unique lexicon of their specific classroom. That shared vocabulary is a

means toward greater pedagogical effectiveness is a common assumption, and I suggest instructors can magnify the significance of this sharing by highlighting the distinctions between their classroom vocabulary and others'. Showing students the different definitions and connotation of words underscores the specific expectations of the instructor and, in the long term, the need for them to understand their intended audience; most importantly for peer review, it helps to imbue their own use of these words, as reviewers, with more precise meaning. One way to build this vocabulary is for the instructor to compile a list of words that she uses often in her feedback and to review her meanings as well as other possible meanings students may encounter. Words like "clear" and "unclear" would be obvious choices, as the instructor could discuss the different meanings that they take on within her own feedback—e.g. how a "clear" sentence does not necessarily signify the same thing as a "clear" idea—as well as how clarity often differs from one disciplinary context to the next. This could even serve as an opportunity for the instructor to refine her own language. "Clear," for example, was a word that I used to use quite often—and admittedly quite vaguely—in my own comments to students, until a class discussion about its meanings helped me to better understand my true intentions for the term. I tended to use "clear" in the context of thin analysis, when I noticed that a student needed to in some way further flesh out an idea, yet through various discussions with students I came to realize that while *I* understood that my goal was to encourage further explanation from students, this wasn't necessarily coming across in my choice of words. Subsequently, I have worked to become more aware of my own references to clarity when writing to my students, and I now make a point of analyzing my definitions of clarity with students, so that when I *do* use this terminology, they have a better understanding of my intentions and can try to put my comments to better use.

When it comes time for peer review, these discussions may then impact students' language as well. Whereas "clear" tends to be a popular go-to word for students to use, as marking text as clear or unclear can serve as a simple stand-in for more substantive comments, I typically notice that, as the course progresses, students use these terms in isolation less and less frequently. This general trend has proven true with other terms that I discuss with students as well, words like "awkward" and "good." The more I mention them in class and we analyze them for specific meaning, the more students tend to qualify and contextualize their uses of them, saying things like "awkward word choice" instead of just "awkward" and "good—quote really fits your point here" instead of just "good." Interestingly, I have seen that over time my students also start to challenge each other's usage, pushing for more specifics when their reviewers fall back into vague terminology. They begin to see, it seems, that when they push beneath the

surface definitions, they can find deeper feedback that is incredibly valuable to them as writers.

An example of a more individualized means of building reviewer-instructor identification, to be engaged ideally after large-scale activities like those above, is to ask students to draw on previous comments from the instructor to the reviewee as they build their reviews. Ideally reviewees would be willing to simply share previous papers with reviewers, but in the case that students prefer not to do so they could also offer reviewers a written or verbal summary of the feedback they have received. Either way, reviewers can then try to speak to these comments as much as possible as they craft their assessments of their peers' work. For example, if a student was given comments regarding a lack of textual evidence on a previous paper, the reviewer can critique the current work with an eye toward this particular issue and can actively cite the instructor's previous remarks as he/she comments on the peer's use of evidence in the current work. I do this in my own courses and find that referring to my comments as they are reviewing is fairly easy for most students and may, interestingly enough, encourage them to offer more pointed feedback, most likely because references to me act as a reassurance that their own remarks are on target. As the reviewer indicates recognition and understanding of the comments and is able to apply them to the current text, he/she acts as an extension of the instructor, deepening his/her identification. So, I have seen students progress, for instance, from general comments like "need topic sentence" to "remember her [my] comment on last paper—need to say paragraph's main point here," and from "put quote here" to "last paper didn't have enough evidence so remember to put quote for this." Behind every comment the reviewee receives is more weight, buttressed as each one is by the instructor's ethos.

It is important to highlight here as well that, just as my students' feedback tends to improve in various ways, my observations suggest that their engagement with said feedback also becomes more active and thoughtful. As mentioned at the start of this piece, a huge moment in the peer review process that remains ripe for greater exploration is that latency period after peer comments have been offered and recorded, and efforts to build stronger identifications with instructor feedback have immense potential to enrich that time. In addition to students pushing one another for greater detail, I typically notice a general increase in students' engagement with peer comments. In the past, unless given explicit instructions from me to do otherwise, students would typically shelve their peer comments once the review was over, usually only addressing peer feedback with me in those cases when comments were minimal or tough to understand; I would rarely see them much at all, beyond any assigned tasks I might ask them to do with the feedback. In contrast, I now find that students engage not only

each other more often but me as well, asking me questions about the feedback and, in many cases, making peer-inspired changes and reviewing them with me during office hours or after class. Further investigation is needed to draw conclusions about how, if at all, this greater involvement translates into more successful final drafts, but the influence on student engagement reflected in my own experiences is certainly promising.

These few strategies are by no means the only ones that can be used to extend the instructor's ethos to students, but my hope is that they illustrate the relative ease with which this ethos-based theory can be put into practice and, even more importantly, the instructor's responsibility to engage students in meaningful discussion of the larger purposes and goals of their classroom work. It would be rather easy to adopt any of the activities above in a superficial sort of way, incorporating them into peer review sessions as matters of routine or general busywork and not considering how they work to reinforce, or perhaps even challenge, one's existing pedagogical perspective. For them to have meaningful impact—meaningful not just in terms of students' immediate critical engagement but also in terms of their transfer potential—strategies aimed at extending instructor ethos need to be grounded in a much broader conceptual perspective. There is certainly more research needed to further support this identification theory, but my experiences support the notion that these strategies work *best* when one continually emphasizes to students those concepts like audience and purpose which are central to mindful writing and review processes.

## CONCLUSION

Students already realize that peer review, in all its forms, involves—or is at least supposed to involve—some vague sense of working with others, but this recognition is not equivalent to an awareness of the principles of rhetoric and composition underpinning the necessary distinctions between identification and correction. If instructors can frame the peer review process as an activity grounded in identification, rather than correction, and explore different ways to establish this frame for students, they can hopefully disrupt the rhetorical relationships which exist between students and infuse them with the greater trust required for effective reviews. Again, I use the term “frame” deliberately here for its connotation as an entire conceptual outline; in contrast, terms like “method” or “strategy” do not quite capture the scope of the necessary changes. Instructors could devise various “methods” for building a shared classroom vocabulary, for instance, but if they do not talk with students about why such steps are important and how they tie to larger concerns about audience, the emphasis remains on regurgitation rather than on mindful employment. Shared terms could be

simplified into shallow markers of “right” and “wrong,” in line with the corrective, checklist model of peer review, and thus the persuasive problems with the process would remain, which is why the broader frame is so crucial.

At a most basic level, what this ethos-based theory of peer review is meant to do is simply increase the chances that students will actually consider and incorporate peer feedback during the latency period. For all the research we have on what happens during the immediate process, we have yet to exhibit any great influence on the time to follow, when students grapple with—or more pointedly, *avoid* grappling with—the feedback they have received. Knowing that feedback quality is not necessarily correlated with revision quality should compel us to closely consider precisely what is missing, what is needed to make the time *after* the initial review a time of more active, conscientious engagement.

The entire peer review process constitutes a unique rhetorical situation for students, and while conventional wisdom may suggest that it is an experience during which the instructor is meant to temporarily cede or withdraw her authority, I instead argue that is actually an experience calling for greater intervention. Seen through the lens of the most basic modes of persuasion, it is clear that trust is an issue which trumps other rhetorical considerations at play in peer assessments. Without trust between students, any otherwise persuasive feedback they receive is of little consequence, and to make our students’ peer reviews more effective we need to embrace our own roles in establishing this peer-peer trust. Instructors are not merely responsible for providing the venue for peer review, pairing students up in certain ways and then passively waiting for success under the assumption that such “independent” work is useful for them. Students fail to establish ethos among one another in part because they recognize the already-established dynamic between themselves and the instructor and understandably perceive her as the overriding source of ethos in the classroom. Rather than recede from this recognition, instructors should more actively extend their ethos to students; doing so is an opportunity not only to achieve more effective reviews but also to strengthen students’ grasp of the fundamental concept of audience.

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