

Peering Into Revision

Daniel Fader

Use of peer grouping to improve the writing skills of students can be an exceptionally profitable experience for teachers of composition. One of the most challenging and rewarding methods of learning to use any teaching device, and especially the device of peer grouping is to do it yourself *and* observe yourself doing it: It is this dual experience that will be the formal center of my **Workshop** seminars this year.

Not only will members of the seminar belong to the same three-person group during their six hours in class, but they will also do several hours of work with those same group members outside of class. In both instances they will be responsible for maintaining a double view of themselves as passionate participants and dispassionate viewers of that participation — as well as the participation of their peers in the group. With the right combination of effort and good fortune, members of the seminar can expect to have an intensive experience of some of the strengths of peer grouping as it supports and enriches the teaching of writing: For example, the single most important function of the group in relation to the individuals who compose it may be that it defines a precise, proximate audience for the writing of each of its members. In the process of making use of that audience, all members of the group come to know their individual voices by the effects they have upon their peers. These effects are readily observable (as they are not when the teacher or an imagined person in the audience) and im-

mediately translatable into relative success or failure. From such immediacy of effect is most likely to come both affirmation and change.

Not only can peer grouping define audience and confirm the individual voice, it can also provide sources of invention otherwise difficult for individuals to discover during the composing process. Group members experienced in writing for each other and in considering the writing of their peers, can often enter into one another's conceptual processes in such a way as to lead their partners to ideas that are acceptable because they are clearly implied by the selection and ordering of their partners' own material.

Within the peer groups of the seminar, the primary work will be to define and apply principles of editing which form the basis for a rhetoric of revision useful to good and bad writers alike. By a "rhetoric of revision" I mean a coherent, cohesive series of textual activities which convince both writer and editor of their usefulness through their persuasive influence upon the form and meaning of particular texts. In the following example, the original text of a student's sentence is on the left and my edited version is on the right. Neither the student nor I care to make any claims of perfection. At the time she wrote and I edited the text, we both thought we had done as well as we could do.

1. It is a sad fact
2. of American political life
3. in the twentieth century
4. that many of its great leaders
5. have been killed
6. by the assassin's bullet.
7. Even more appalling
8. for most Americans
9. are the reports that the CIA
10. has attempted to kill
11. or has killed
12. leaders of other countries.

1. A tragic fact
2. of American politics
3. in the twentieth century
5. is the murder
4. of great leaders
6. by an assassin's bullet.
7. Equally appalling

9. are reports that the CIA
11. has murdered
10. or attempted to murder
12. leaders of other countries.