

Workshop 7

Responding to Writing: Peer to Peer

Overview

Peer response provides a tremendous learning opportunity for young writers. These interactions help students with topic generation and idea development, increase their confidence about sharing their work, force them to look more objectively at their own writing, give them valuable feedback for possible revisions, and allow them to learn from the writing successes and challenges of their peers. Peer response also helps students learn how to give constructive feedback to others—an important life skill.

“Responding to Writing: Peer to Peer” visits the classrooms of three teachers—fifth-grade teacher Jack Wilde, seventh-grade teacher Velvet McReynolds, and eighth-grade teacher Vivian Johnson—to explore various ways that teachers can structure student interactions, from whole-class responses to informal writing partnerships.

The video highlights teaching strategies that help students learn how to respond appropriately and meaningfully to each other’s writing. Both Jack and Velvet model response using their own writing, and Jack and his students demonstrate how a whole-class response to an individual writer can help all the students hone their conferencing skills. We also sit in as Jack facilitates a conference group, another way of helping students learn how to respond effectively to their classmates’ writing.

“Responding to Writing: Peer to Peer” abounds with classroom examples of students interacting with each other. It also features interview segments with the three teachers, as well as comments from Linda Rief, a practicing eighth-grade English teacher and the author of *Seeking Diversity: Language Arts With Adolescents*.

Workshop 7 Teachers

The teachers seen in the video program include:

- Vivian Johnson, Grade 8, T.A. Dugger Junior High School, Elizabethton, Tennessee
- Velvet McReynolds, Grade 7, Simmons Middle School, Hoover, Alabama
- Jack Wilde, Grade 5, Bernice A. Ray School, Hanover, New Hampshire

Background Reading

Before coming to the workshop session, you should prepare to participate by:

- Reviewing the materials for Workshop 7 provided on the Web site (www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/) including the teachers’ reflections.
- Reading the article provided under “Related Reading” on the Workshop 7 Web page and highlighting two or three sections that strike you as particularly useful or insightful, that raise questions in your mind, or that relate to your own practice. Record your responses to the article in your workshop journal.
- Reviewing the “Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 7,” available on the next page and on the Web site.

Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 7

In this workshop, you will see effective practices for helping students respond to each other as writers. These practices include the following:

- Teachers recognize that peer conferences not only contribute to better writing but also validate students and build respect and responsibility in a community of writers. Teachers carefully create conditions for peer conferences in which the students feel safe as writers and as respondents. The workshop shows students engaged in their work as writers, participating in a positive atmosphere.
- Through peer response, students experience an authentic reader of their writing, a reader other than the teacher and a reader who is important to them. This experience stimulates students' interest in writing—and in revising. It also helps students develop reader awareness, an important skill in writing.
- In peer conferences, students focus on their drafts and try to improve them; however, the teachers' goals are not merely to help the students develop better pieces of writing but to help students develop as writers. Teachers' explanations focus on strategies and skills that students can apply when writing other pieces. The practices used in the peer conferences help students gain more independence in their thinking about writing. Though students in a small-group peer conference focus on the work of one author, the discussion indirectly helps the other students as they apply ideas to their own writing.
- Peer conferences are organized in different ways, for example, whole-class response to a peer, small-group response (three to four students), response between writing partners, and teacher-mentored small-group response. Sometimes teachers determine the groups, and sometimes students decide with whom they will work. Partners or groups may work together for a relatively long period of time, or the make-up of the group may vary. Even in classes led by highly experienced teachers, problems occur in groups, and teachers, as well as students, may change the groups to help students.
- Teachers establish a methodical procedure for peer conferences. They model response and conduct mini-lessons on how to respond effectively and with respect. They also schedule regular times for students to share their writing with each other. Routines may vary, but a typical approach is for the student author to read the draft aloud and raise specific questions. Students may record their responses on a feedback sheet or sticky note and refer to these notes as they discuss the work with the author. In their responses, classmates identify what they think is going well and address the author's questions. To preserve the writer's ownership of his or her work, classmates phrase their responses in terms of possibilities for change. As peers discuss a piece, the writer often takes notes to help with revision. The writer may end the exchange by explaining plans for change.
- As students work together on their writing, the teacher circulates, asks questions, offers suggestions, and listens. Sometimes, the teacher calls attention to a student's work and asks the student to read and talk about changes and the advice offered by classmates. Mini-lessons often are based upon what teachers observe in peer conferences.
- Teachers often model response by reading a piece they have written themselves, and then leading the students in responding to the draft. Teachers are genuine in asking questions about their work. They listen carefully and often emphasize principles and language that can help students work with their own writing. Teachers also model a positive attitude; they are not defensive when advice is offered, and they demonstrate that writers consider the views of readers but also assume ownership of their work. In modeling their writing, teachers often use the overhead projector and/or provide copies, so that students not only hear the work read aloud, but also see and read it themselves. Students, too, can be asked to model for the class, reading their drafts aloud and asking for response.

- Aware of the pressure students usually feel in responding to each other, teachers take steps to reduce the pressure or risk in a peer conference. Modeling and establishing a routine are important ways to help students feel less pressure and be more open in discussing writing. Teachers often arrange classroom furniture to foster discussion. One of the most important ways to reduce the pressure is for the teacher to affirm students' accomplishments in peer conferences. The workshop showcases students who enjoy their experience in writing and in talking with classmates about writing. Teachers consciously foster such a positive experience.
- Teachers do not assume that students automatically will be effective in peer-conferences. They intentionally coach the students, they conduct mini-lessons, and they also set aside time to help students reflect on conferences. These discussions call attention to the results of revision based on peer conferences. Teachers affirm the value of writing, and help students practice a "writer's language," which helps students think about their own writing.

Facilitator's Outline: Workshop 7

This outline of the Workshop 7 video contains approximate entry points for each section. Use this chart to help identify the pause points in the Watch the Video section. Zero your VCR counter at the Annenberg/CPB logo at the beginning of the tape.

Segment 1 (0:00–12:27)	Introduction (beginning at 0:00)	
	In the Classroom (beginning at 4:28)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pair conferencing 	Jack Wilde
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring group conferences 	Jack Wilde
Segment 2 (12:28–33:33)	Interview (beginning at 12:28)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher as writer 	Linda Rief
	In the Classroom (beginning at 13:00)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using your own writing to model response 	Jack Wilde
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PATS response protocol 	Velvet McReynolds
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using your own writing to model response, Part 2 	Velvet McReynolds
Segment 3 (33:34–48:23)	In the Classroom (beginning at 33:34)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modeling response with a student writer 	Jack Wilde
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pair conferencing, Part 2 	Jack Wilde
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student reflections on peer response 	Jack Wilde
Segment 4 (48:24–end)	In the Classroom (beginning at 48:24)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole-class response 	Vivian Johnson
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal response group 	Vivian Johnson
	Interview (beginning at 56:06)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The long-term goal of teaching response 	Jack Wilde

Workshop Session

Discussion and Sharing (15 minutes)

- In your workshop journal, describe the most recent writing conference your students had with each other: its purpose, its length, when it occurred in the writing cycle. How did you structure the conference (pairs, small group, formal, informal, etc.)? How did you prepare the students? What feedback did you receive from the students about the conference? How would you evaluate its success? What might you do differently the next time? Share your responses with your fellow teachers.

If your practice does not include peer response, reflect on the reasons for this choice and share your thoughts with your colleagues.

Watch the Video (60 minutes video plus 30 minutes discussion)

Watch the video, stopping at the end of each segment (see the Facilitator's Outline on the preceding page for help locating the pause points). If you are watching the workshop on your own, use your workshop journal to respond to two or more discussion questions from each of the four segments.

Segment 1 (0:00-12:27)

[Pause point: After Jack's interview about teacher-mentored group conferences.]

- Do you assign students to response groups or pairs or do the students choose their partners? What are the reasons for your practice? If you set up the groups yourself, how do you determine their composition? What do you do if one of your response pairs or groups is having difficulty focusing, offering helpful advice, or getting along?
- Do you agree with Jack that having an adult sit in on student conferences at the beginning of the year is a good way to help students learn how to respond? How can teachers organize their instruction to make this strategy possible?
- So far, we've seen two response models: pairs and small-group. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each configuration? Which do you think would work better for middle-level students that you teach?

Segment 2 (12:28-33:33)

[Pause point: After the segment in Velvet McReynolds classroom.]

- During the whole-class discussion of Jack's narrative, what conferencing and response behaviors does he model for his students? What evidence do you see that the students are learning from this experience?
- The response protocols Jack Wilde and Velvet McReynolds teach their students have obvious similarities. In both instances, students begin with positive comments about what's effective in the writer's piece and then ask questions about passages they don't fully understand. But Velvet's last step differs from Jack's. She has her students give the writer a suggestion for improvement, and he has the writer ask questions about what he or she has written. What are the benefits and possible drawbacks of each of these approaches?
- What class management strategies does Velvet employ during the discussion of "The Devil Made Me Do It"? During this segment, she's in the position her student writers will be when they conference with each other. What effective behaviors does she model that the students can carry into their own response groups?

Segment 3 (33:34-48:23)

[Pause point: After Jack's students discuss how they benefited from their partner's responses.]

- What specific part of the protocol is Jack having his fifth-graders practice during the whole class response? What evidence do you see that his students are learning from this exercise? Do you think Jack's direction during this discussion is appropriate or does he intervene more than is necessary?

Workshop Session, cont'd.

- Based on what you observed in the two excerpts from Luke and Cora's conference, what do you think is working well? Do you notice any behaviors that might warrant additional instruction? Are both students benefiting equally from their interaction? What leads you to this conclusion?
- List some of the benefits of peer conferencing mentioned by Jack's students. Do you think their take on peer conferencing is similar to that of your students? What are some factors that might make conferences less successful, both from the student's and the teacher's viewpoint? How might these problems be addressed?

Segment 4 (48:24-end)

[View to end of program.]

- In Vivian Johnson's class, one of her students shares his poem with the whole class and receives feedback. What are some effective response techniques Vivian models and how does she encourage her students to be more independent in responding to their peers' writing? What additional benefits do her students receive from participating in a whole-class response to writing?
- Analyze the group conference three of Vivian's students are holding about an "I Am" poem. How would you describe the protocol the students follow? What effective behaviors do the students exhibit? What evidence do you see that the writer will use the feedback she receives in the conference in revising her poem?
- According to Jack Wilde, the ultimate goal of response is to help students learn how to "self-conference." Do you agree with Jack's assessment? What evidence have you seen in Jack's, Velvet's, and/or Vivian's classrooms that students are on their way to achieving this goal? Have you observed the correlation between peer response and increasing independence among your own students? What practices or strategies help students move from peer- to self-conferencing?

Going Further (15 minutes)

- Based on your own experience, on "Peer Response: Teaching Specific Revision Suggestions" (available under "Related Reading" on the Workshop 7 Web page), and on what you've observed in Jack's, Velvet's, and Vivian's classes, outline the steps you think students should follow in a peer response group and then share your ideal response protocol with your colleagues. If this is the protocol you already use, share your strategies for teaching it to your students.
- The protocols modeled in the workshop video and described in "Peer Response: Teaching Specific Revision Suggestions" would apply to any piece of writing at any stage of the writing cycle. However, teachers often use more specific and focused conference sheets that address specific criteria (see the conference forms available at the Workshop 6 Web page for some examples). In your experience, are there times that one of these approaches is more appropriate than the other? In general, do you think the more loosely structured guidelines or the focused response sheets are more effective for peer response? What are the reasons for your opinion?

Before Next Week

Homework

- Complete your exploration of the Web pages for Workshop 7—looking at materials, listening to audio files, and/or printing out resources. Record any comments or responses in your workshop journal to share with your colleagues.
- Evaluate your writing curriculum to see if and where you might insert more opportunities for modeling and practicing effective peer response into your instruction.

Background Reading for Workshop 8

Before coming to the workshop session, you should prepare to participate by:

- Reviewing the materials for Workshop 8 provided on the Web site (www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/) including Velvet McReynolds' lesson plan, supporting classroom materials, and student writing samples. These materials may be downloaded and printed.
- Reading the three articles provided under "Related Reading" on the Workshop 8 Web page and highlighting two or three sections that strike you as particularly useful or insightful, that raise questions in your mind, or that relate to your own practice. Record your responses to the articles in your workshop journal.
- Reviewing the "Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 8," available in this guide and on the Web site.

Selected Sources for “Responding to Writing: Peer to Peer”

Note: For more resources related to conferencing and responding, consult “Selected Sources” for Workshop 6: “Responding to Writing: Teacher to Student.”

Almeda, Cheryl. “In the End All Books Are Written for Your Friends’: Motivating Writing Through Peer Audiences.” In *Why Workshop? Changing Course in 7-12 English*, edited by Richard Bullock, 57-66. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1998. ISBN: 1571100849.

Ammer, Jerome. “Peer Evaluation Model for Enhancing Writing Performance of Students With Learning Disabilities.” *Reading and Writing Quarterly* (July/September, 1998): 263.

Barron, Ronald. “What I Wish I Had Known About Peer Response Groups But Didn’t.” *English Journal* 80.5 (1991): 24-34.

Brady, Suzanne and Suzanne Jacobs. “Children Responding to Children: Writing Groups and Classroom Community.” In *Understanding Writing: Ways of Observing, Learning, and Teaching*, 2nd Edition, edited by Thomas Newkirk and Nancie Atwell. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988. ISBN: 0435084410.

Brunce-Crim, Marna. “Ready to Write. Talk It Up: Strategies for More Successful Peer Conferencing.” *Instructor* (May/June, 1992): 14.

Collins, Jeffrey L. “Establishing Peer Evaluation of Writing: Students Need an Informed Teacher Model.” ERIC Document Reproduction Service <http://www.edrs.com> ED 243122.

Dale, Helen. “Collaborative Research on Collaborative Writing.” *English Journal* 83.1 (January 1994): 66-71.

Denyer, Jenny and Debra LaFleur. “The Eliot Conference: An Analysis of a Peer Response Group.” *Voices From the Middle* 9.1 (September 2001): 29-39.

Duke, Charles R. and Rebecca Sanchez. “Giving Students Control Over Their Writing Assignments.” *English Journal* 83.4 (April 1994): 47-53.

Farnan, Nancy and Leif Fearn. “Writers’ Workshops: Middle School Writers and Readers Collaborating.” *Middle School Journal* 24 (May 1993): 61-65.

Fletcher, Ralph and Joann Portalupi. *Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K-8*. York, MA: Stenhouse Publishers, 1998. ISBN: 1571100733.

Freeman, Marcia. “Modeling an Efficient Peer Conference: Managing the Daily Writing Workshop.” [videotape] ERIC Document Reproduction Service <http://www.edrs.com> ED 432012.

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Green, Robert. “Behind Their Backs: Proximity and Insult in Student Response.” In *Breakthroughs: Classroom Discoveries About Teaching Writing*, edited by Amy Bauman and Art Peterson, 281-293. Berkeley, CA: National Writing Project, 2002. ISBN: 1883920183.

Hillebrand, Romana P. “Control and Cohesion: Collaborative Learning and Writing.” *English Journal* 83.1 (January 1994): 62-66.

Hughes, Judy. “It Really Works: Encouraging Revision Using Peer Writing Tutors.” *English Journal* 80.5 (1991): 41-42.

Hughes, Richard D. “Falling Off the Skateboard: Experimenting With Peer Conferences In *Why Workshop? Changing Course in 7-12 English*, edited by Richard Bullock, 78-91. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1998. ISBN: 1571100849.

Selected Sources for “Responding to Writing: Peer to Peer,” cont’d.

Kerr, Jo-Anne. “Listening in on the Language of Collaboration in a Writing Workshop.” *Middle School Journal* 30.1 (September 1998): 3-8.

Kirby, Dan, Tom Liner, and Ruth Vinz. *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988.

Kletzien, S. B. and L. Baloché. “The Shifting Muffled Sound of the Pick: Facilitating Student-to-Student Discussion.” *Journal of Reading* 37.7 (1994): 540-545.

“Making Writing Conferences Fun and Productive With ‘Three Pluses and a Wish.’” *Curriculum Review* (May 1996): 10.

Manning, Maryann. “Peer Content Conferences.” *Teaching Pre K-8* (February 2002): 91-94.

McManus, Ginger and Dan Kirby. “Using Peer Group Instruction To Teach Writing.” *English Journal* 77.3 (March 1988): 78-80.

Neubert, Gloria and Sally McNelis. “Peer Response: Teaching Specific Revision Strategies.” *English Journal* 79.5 (September 1990): 52-57.

“Peer Conferencing and Writing Revision: A Study of the Relationship.” ERIC Document Reproduction Service <http://www.edrs.com> ED 260392.

Reisin, Gail. “Learning by Sharing Graded Papers.” *English Journal* 79.5 (September 1990): 62-65.

Rhodes, Lynn K. and Curt Dudley-Marling. *Readers and Writers With a Difference: A Holistic Approach to Teaching Learning Disabled and Remedial Students*. 2nd Edition. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988. ISBN: 0435072153.

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Silver, Kathi O. “The Extended Conference: A Technique To Encourage Writing.” *English Journal* 78.1 (January 1989): 24-28.

Spear, Karen. *Sharing Writing: Peer Response Groups in English Classes*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1988. ISBN: 0867091894.

Steinlage, Theresa M. “Getting the Wrinkles Out: Students Become Their Own Editors.” *English Journal* 79.5 (September 1990): 60-62.

Stemper, Julie. “Enhancing Student Revising and Editing Skills Through Writing Conferences and Peer Editing.” ERIC Document Reproduction Service <http://www.edrs.com> ED165187.

Vatalaro, Paul. “Putting Students in Charge of Peer Review.” *Journal of Teaching Writing* 9.1 (1990): 21-29.

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Notes
