**Communal Corrections: Facilitating Class-Led Peer Revisions in College Composition Courses**

***Rationale***

Revision is arguably the most crucial part of the writing process – it is also the most difficult part. Students generally fall into one of two camps on the subject of revision. One, their writing skills are generally low, so what they have produced is honestly the best that they can do. Or two, stronger writers know they can do better, but have no idea how to do it.

Assigning a one-on-one peer review usually leads to a few new synonyms and changes in comma placement, but no substantive revision. Having the instructor provide each student with a revision plan is not practical and removes the students’ onus on their writing. By incorporating Class-Led Peer Revisions in writing (and even non-English) courses, students are given a model of appropriate revisions, while becoming empowered in their own writing abilities.

***Instructional Plan***

1. Students must submit a rough draft of their current paper 24 hours before the class meeting
2. The instructor reviews rough drafts (not making any marks) for issues to address with the class – inconsistent citing, deviating from the thesis statement, lack of research or strong support, uninteresting use of language are common
3. The instructor pulls 3-5 sample paragraphs to use in the next class
4. In class, students are given a printed copy of the paragraphs (student names have been removed), while the instructor projects the paragraphs on the screen
5. Working one sample at a time, students are asked to read a paragraph and make any changes they deem necessary – depending on the ability of the class, they may be given a specific instruction, like focus on the use of quotations and citations
6. The instructor then asks for students to share what changes they made – at this point, some debate will happen, and it should, because that will show that students are considering the craft and style of writing, as well as the technical aspects
7. The instructor will facilitate debates and revisions, clarifying issues of style and making the appropriate corrections
8. Corrections should be made on the projected samples – use the Review Tools in Microsoft Word or write directly on the white board with the projected image
9. As is necessary, the instructor should stop the revisions and reteach elements of writing (like how to embed a quotation into original writing), so that students have notes and an idea of how to make a change, rather than just being told they are wrong
10. Students will continue to mark their samples and are encouraged to take notes on some of the bigger concepts
11. The whole process is repeated with each sample; towards the end, the instructor can choose to focus on one thing or ask students to conduct the activity in small groups
12. With the rest of class time, students will use these samples and notes to make adjustments in their own writing

***Choosing the Samples***

Be sure to choose samples that will provide help to as many students as possible. Pick paragraphs with common mistakes. Samples should be indicative of problems multiple students are having, though they can range in ability levels. You can also choose very strong works to serve as a model – by using work from the class, students see that strong writing is attainable and not just from a textbook.

***Results and Reflection***

Student Participation during Peer Reviews is always stronger with this strategy. Final drafts show a marked improvement from rough drafts – the key here is that students actually change their writing rather than making a few corrections and moving on. They are not able to rely on someone else to make the changes; even if their paragraph is picked as a sample, they still have to revise the rest of the paper. Try not to use the same student every time you do this activity.

I also do not think it is necessary to discuss every single issue or make a specific change. Often, my class will say that they know the sentence sounds strange, but they don’t know why. We will annotate that sentence, I may make a few suggestions of how it could be changed, but we don’t change it entirely. That forces the original writer to fix their work on their own. It also show that writing is not set in stone – it can be altered and tweaked depending on the context and style of the whole piece. If a class is particularly low, it can be overwhelming to note every single issue; rather, we just focus on the most impactful problems.

I have done this activity with students of various ages and ability levels, and it always leads to greater improvement than traditional peer editing. One of the changes that I did not anticipate is that the rough draft they write for the next paper is already much better. The students internalize those revisions and their first drafts naturally become stronger. From that point, we can often work on improving a paper stylistically, rather than just getting it to be more readable.

Although this can be intimidating for a lot of students, especially those in developmental writing, they quickly become comfortable with the idea. They see that we are not looking for only the mistakes. I usually ask my class to point out the strengths of every paragraph. Students are usually surprised at how good their writing is, or at how easy it is to fix something they once thought was insurmountable. After the first time, I often have students submit their rough drafts with a note asking if their introduction could be used as a sample.