

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING
IN THE UNIVERSITY WRITING CLASSROOM
AND WRITING CENTER

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ABSTRACT

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by Margo Brines

This thesis examines collaborative learning and its role in the university composition classroom. The introduction, Chapter I, provides a preliminary background on learning about writing using collaborative processes. Chapter II investigates the relationship between collaborative learning and Composition Studies and explores the work of scholars who have discussed social processes in the study of teaching composition; additionally, the chapter discusses the writing process, which is a useful concept for the collaborative composition classroom because it can invite students to converse about writing in progress. Further, Chapter III considers the use of small groups in the composition classroom and argues that small groups can help students make consistent progress on their writing when they engage in peer review, a process in which they read and respond to one another's writing. Chapter IV asserts that in offering feedback to one another, students can learn the distinction between higher- and lower-order concerns, offer a balance of praise and comments aimed toward improvement, and practice effective listening and close reading. As explored in Chapter V, full-class discussions, in addition to small-group activities in the classroom, can help build a supportive classroom environment and cultivate the exploration of writing at the college level. In conclusion, Chapter VI argues that collaborative learning can be both engaging and educational as a framework for learning about writing in community with others.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Scholars in Composition have dedicated considerable research to collaborative learning. Research pioneered by Kenneth Bruffee emphasizes that discussing writing with peers and instructors can help students learn more effectively than writing alone (“Collaborative Learning”). Collaboration on writing can build students’ individual writing skills and cultivate communities of academic support within composition classrooms and writing centers. My thesis investigates how composition instructors can create classroom practices that invite students to engage in collaboration throughout the writing process.

I see collaborative learning as a flexible framework that individual instructors can adapt to the needs and characteristics of their teaching style, the students they teach, and particular courses. Collaborative learning in the composition classroom can include a variety of activities and assignments, including, but not limited to, small group writing conferences and tasks, multiple-draft writing assignments involving collaborative processes and revision, and full-class discussions and activities. Composition instructors can consider ways to form effective classroom collaborative groups, model written and verbal feedback in response to students’ writing and effective communication strategies within small groups and class discussions, and invite students to engage in discussion and inquiry about the writing process and course assignments.

Building a respectful environment open to diversity in thinking can cultivate collaboration among students, tutors, and instructors in the composition classroom and writing center. Throughout my experience as a graduate assistant in Central Michigan University’s

writing center, I have learned how collaboration works in writing center tutoring and observed its benefits in engaging students at all stages of the writing process.

Writing center tutors and students converse about processes ranging from forming thesis statements to building the structure and organization of essays. Collectively, students and tutors can discover ways to strengthen writing skills and develop effective writing processes. I draw upon my experiences working collaboratively with students in the writing center in my understanding of collaborative learning scholarship. In making connections between collaborations in the writing center and in the classroom, I explore the shared space between these two sites of student interaction and inquiry in my investigation of collaborative learning.

In Chapter II, I discuss Donald Murray's research on the writing process (*A Writer*). I also explore John Lannon's scholarship on the writing process and consider the relationship of the writing process to the collaborative composition course. Additionally, I connect the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)'s Universal Design for Learning (UDL) with the collaborative composition course and explore ways in which courses can be flexible, adaptive, and engage all learners, including students with disabilities. Multiple-draft assignments and small group activities interspersed throughout composition course can help students as they navigate their individual writing processes in conjunction with specific writing assignments.

Chapter III analyzes the role of small groups in the composition course and the potential benefits of small groups for students in navigating the writing process. Multiple researchers have demonstrated that small groups can provide students with intellectual and academic support and offer consistent feedback and response through the use of peer review. The ways that instructors prepare students for peer review can be important for shaping a supportive and productive

classroom environment, and I discuss numerous scholars' methods for teaching the process of peer review. At the same time, flexibility for students in navigating the dynamics of their groups and determining the content of their comments is important to invite students to demonstrate responsible autonomy within their small groups. Guidelines for response can offer students a framework for the content and framing of their responses and leave room for flexibility for students working with various writers and texts.

Chapter IV discusses the role of feedback in the composition classroom. Feedback can help students work toward increasingly more effective drafts. A great deal of research has been conducted on methods and practices for responding to writing. In this chapter, I consider numerous scholars' research on feedback and discuss ways to offer comments that balance higher order and lower order concerns, two commonly used terms in Writing Center and Composition Studies. Higher order concerns may include areas such as developing ideas and a thesis, finding audience and purpose, and organization, while lower order concerns may address grammar, punctuation, and spelling. As another approach, Karen Spear advocates offering both supporting and challenging feedback and writes about the importance of listening in connection with providing feedback. Additionally, Ruth Mirtz suggests that students use "I" statements in their feedback, and Donald Daiker emphasizes offering praise. Peter Elbow examines two types of feedback: reader-based, which focuses on readers' perceptions of writing, and criterion-based, which discusses writing in connection with specific criteria ("Feedback"). In the composition classroom, students can learn to consider others' ideas and suggestions for their writing at the same time they make their own decisions throughout the revision process.

Chapter V explores ways instructors and students can engage in discourse in full-class discussions that promote greater collaboration among students and instructors. I discuss a number of scholars' research on classroom discourse to explore ways in which instructors and students can interact in discussion. A supportive community within the classroom is important for creating a context where students can feel comfortable sharing both their writing and their perceptions of others' writing. To help build a supportive environment and set a context for small group conferences, full-class discussions and activities can be used in the collaborative classroom. The interactions among students and instructors can help provide models for ways students can interact in their small groups: listening, asking questions, building upon one another's comments, and collaboratively exploring ideas. These interaction patterns can be used both in small-group and full-class settings to help students and instructors effectively work together as writers and responders.

Chapter VI offers concluding thoughts about collaborative learning and its potential role in the composition classroom. The use of small groups and full-class discussions can lead to more collaborative classroom settings, and collaborative learning is one framework instructors can draw upon in teaching college-level writing courses. Collaborative learning has the potential to engage students in the composition course as they learn, think, and discover possibilities for writing in community with others, and my experiences in the writing center have shown me that collaborative learning matters for students in learning about writing.

CHAPTER II

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND WRITING

John Trimbur writes that the collaborative learning movement has helped composition instructors become more aware of “the importance of social interaction for learning to write” (“Collaborative Learning” 87). Collaborative learning in the composition classroom involves students and instructors engaging together in discussions and activities related to writing in a classroom environment where students’ input and contributions are encouraged and valued. As a framework, collaborative learning can be student-centered, active, and dedicated to the premise that students can learn effectively through working together with their classmates and instructor. In this chapter, first I discuss Paulo Friere’s problem-posing education and connect it with collaborative learning; explore direct instruction’s role in courses also working for collaboration; tie CAST’s Universal Design for Learning to the collaborative composition classroom; and discuss diversity in the collaborative classroom. I then explore the individual and social nature of writing discussed by Anne Ruggles Gere; situate the writing process in scholarship and explore its relationship with collaborative learning; and discuss the works of Donald Murray, John Lannon and Irene Clark in relation to the writing process. Finally, I emphasize that writing processes may vary depending on the writing task and the writer. My pedagogical understanding of collaborative learning is flexible, combining a conceptualization of writing as a process with a deep respect for diversity in educational settings and a commitment to creating flexible and adaptive spaces for learning.

Working in the writing center has transformed the way I view education. Through their presence in the writing center and their words, both written and spoken, students have taught me

a great deal. I have learned that student writers almost always have something to say if they are provided a space, whether in the physical spaces of the classroom or writing center or the intellectual space of a student-centered writing assignment, where they have the opportunity to say it. Given what I have discovered about what students have to say, I cannot imagine teaching composition in a way that does not invite students to speak, to listen, and to share with one another and their instructor in the classroom. Through experience, I have observed that students can find words to write and speak if they are invited and encouraged to elaborate on what they have to say, asked questions, and supported both interpersonally and academically.

The collaborative classroom acknowledges that students bring intellectual, interpersonal, and educational resources into the classroom; they do not come to educational settings without prior experiences with education and life. Respecting, acknowledging, and seeking to understand the resources that students already bring to the classroom or writing center can validate them as individuals and serve as a starting point for their continued learning. Full-class discussions and small group activities in the collaborative classroom are sites where students can be encouraged to share their resources through conversation. Maintaining a focused classroom setting requires a constant balance of conveying academic expectations and respecting each student's experiences. It matters that students have equal opportunities to express themselves in writing and in speech. This does not mean that "anything goes" in discussion or writing—more so that the dominant discourse is not permitted to silence multiplicity in voices and experiences. Instructors can work actively to ensure that mutual respect is a clearly conveyed expectation for classroom proceedings and that all students' ideas are listened to and valued.

Kenneth Bruffee's presentation of collaborative learning includes students' working together to "reach consensus" in small groups (645). Alternatively, John Trimbur introduces a different notion of consensus: "I am less interested in students achieving consensus (although of course this happens at times) as in their using consensus as a critical instrument to open gaps in the conversation through which differences may emerge" (614). Trimbur's discussion of consensus offers an alternative to asking group members to reach a collective position. If differences arise in small group or full-class activities, discussing those differences in conversation could be fruitful. I see the composition instructor's role in the classroom as helping students stay on the topic of writing, maintaining a classroom environment that includes respect toward all participants, and helping students navigate challenges when necessary.

Trimbur writes that a criticism of collaborative learning is that it can suppress individuality and encourage conformity. He notes that this critique can be valid when students participate in groups; however, collaborative learning can also offer individuals the opportunity to "take control of their situation by collaborating with others" (603-4). I agree that collaborative learning does not necessarily suppress individuality, and it can empower individuals. If members of groups validate one another and offer encouragement and invitation for each participant to offer contributions, collaborative groups have the potential to foster creative expression of individual personalities and viewpoints. Further, Trimbur discusses the "asymmetrical relations of power in everyday life" (609). Hierarchy and dominance can play out in collaborative activities. Trimbur recommends "organizing students non-hierarchically" (615). Working to foster nonhierarchical groups in the composition course is important, and it is possible to cultivate an overall classroom environment that reduces hierarchies. Instructors could

communicate to students the expectation that each group member is to have ample opportunities to voice his or her ideas and that no group members are to dominate activities. Additionally, instructors could observe interaction patterns in the classroom and help facilitate classroom settings where all students are consistently invited to contribute. Differences in ideas can emerge naturally in the classroom and receive respectful responses if instructors help maintain an overall appreciation for diversity in the classroom.

Flexibility of Teaching Methods

Paulo Friere describes students as “critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” (81). He proposes “problem-posing education,” where individuals can engage in inquiry (84). In the collaborative learning classroom, peer review sessions and full-class discussions are sites where students are invited to ask and respond to questions—their own and those of their instructor and classmates—and explore their writing processes in the context of a supportive environment. I support Freire’s ideas about the need for both students and instructors to be active contributors in the classroom, and collaborative activities can offer opportunities for students’ voices to be heard frequently and actively in the composition classroom.

However, I also support instructors’ choices to use direct instruction in cases where they determine, after reflection and consideration of their options, that it is the mode needed to convey specific information in the collaborative classroom. However, I advocate being brief in direct instruction to allow maximum opportunities for students to speak during a class period. Interspersed with collaborative activities, direct instruction can help students gain early exposure to new topics. It is not always realistic to lead students to find their own answers when they are unfamiliar with a topic or have not had sufficient exposure to the material.

For example, if students have not learned about citation in the past and are now being required to cite all of their sources in an assignment, asking them to figure out how to cite with no direction for getting started may not be an effective way to introduce citation in the composition classroom. Students could be provided with sufficient resources for reading about citation before being asked to implement it. Ideally, however, students could also engage in collaborative activities to apply what they have learned through instruction or their reading—meeting in small groups, they could practice citing sources in text and writing works cited entries. This approach to teaching citation could combine brief direct instruction with structured collaborative activities. The classroom does not have to be limited to one mode of instruction. Overall, I advocate balance in classroom activities and proceedings and a collaborative framework focused on fostering students' active participation as they discover possibilities for writing and learning.

Respect for Diversity

Donald Murray applauds the diversity of writing processes and individuals in writing classes: “We do not teach writing effectively if we try to make all students and all writing the same. We must seek, nurture, develop, and reward difference. The rich diversity of our students is to our advantage” (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 5). I agree with Murray's assertion and have found it rewarding to talk with diverse student writers. Diversity is an asset to the composition classroom and writing center: I see differences among individuals as something to appreciate and learn from. My experiences working in the writing center have contributed to my valuing diversity because all individuals who enter the writing center—staff members and student writers alike—add something unique to the space.

The classroom space can also be a site for conversation and diversity. James Paul Gee analyzes diversity in discourse within the classroom and the interplay of diverse discourses in thinking processes:

Good classroom instruction (in composition, study skills, writing, critical thinking, content-based literacy, or whatever) can and should lead to meta-knowledge, to seeing how the Discourses you have already got (not just the languages) relate to those you are attempting to acquire, and how the ones you are trying to acquire relate to self and society. But to do this, the classroom must juxtapose different Discourses for comparison and contrast. Diversity, then, is not an ‘add on,’ but a cognitive necessity if we wish to develop meta-awareness and overt reflective insight on the part of learners. (*Social Linguistics* 173)

In other words, Gee suggests that the classroom can show how various discourses are alike and different; diversity is important for forming an awareness of discourses. Understanding and welcoming differences in discourse can bring classroom participants toward a fuller understanding of how and why individuals approach writing differently, but writers can come together in the common pursuit of learning more about their possibilities for writing and finding ways to make compositions their own. Additionally, the collaborative composition course can be a rich site for diversity among writers. James Paul Gee’s assertion that diversity is a “cognitive necessity” (*Social Linguistics* 173) speaks to the collaborative classroom because the very framework of collaborative learning can mean that a variety of voices emerge in the classroom through writing, speech, and class readings. In observing and appreciating differences in discourse, writers can gain a richer understanding of language and understand others and

themselves more fully. Instructors can help students appreciate various discourses by integrating into the course curriculum readings from diverse authors. This can help communicate to students the value of learning the perspectives of a diverse range of individuals and honoring inclusivity.

I am passionate about teaching methods and practices that are inclusive of all students, including students with disabilities. Universal Design for Learning (UDL), created by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), provides a framework that can be helpful for conceptualizing a collaborative composition course that provides all students with access to the class curriculum and materials. Individual accommodations for students with disabilities can be determined by Disability Services Offices typically available at college campuses; in addition, CAST asserts that building a flexible, adaptive classroom framework can help all students participate in class activities.

CAST maintains that learners “differ in the ways that they perceive and comprehend information that is presented to them.” For example, CAST asserts, some students are more visual than auditory learners or vice versa, and students who are blind or have a visual impairment, or who are deaf or have a hearing impairment, “may all require different ways of approaching content” (CAST). Because learners take in information differently, CAST recommends presenting information using “multiple means of representation.” For instance, CAST suggests providing alternatives for information that is presented through auditory means by offering visual representations. In the collaborative composition classroom, this could include making sure that information conveyed verbally about assignments and course curriculum is also provided in a hard copy and/or electronic handout. It could also involve an instructor using a visualizer or writing information on the board while also presenting information verbally. CAST

suggests that presenting information in multiple ways could help all students comprehend the information more effectively.

Conversely, CAST recommends providing alternatives for information presented visually. This can mean making sure that assignments and texts are also conveyed through speech when possible. Reading texts and assignments aloud in class could help students learn the information more effectively. The writing center has shown me the benefits that can come from reading texts aloud, and I support reading aloud course materials as well. When course materials are presented both visually and verbally, comprehension can be improved for all students.

Universal Design for Learning also involves offering “multiple means of engagement.” This can mean providing multiple ways for students to participate in a course. According to CAST, learners “differ markedly in the ways in which they can be engaged or motivated to learn.” CAST emphasizes as part of this principle that some students would rather work with peers, while others prefer to work by themselves. This is important to account for in collaborative learning courses, which often require students’ frequent participation in groups. In collaborative writing courses, I recommend balancing individual assignments and class activities with collaborative group work and class discussions. This provides all students with the opportunity to work both individually and with others. For example, in a class that meets three days a week, one class period could involve a full-class discussion; the next class period could provide students with time to write individually, then to share their writing with a small group, and the final class period that week could be a peer review session, followed by more individual writing. Balancing individual and collaborative activities can help ensure that students can engage in the course in different ways

Anne Ruggles Gere has discussed writing as both an individual and social process. I prioritize examining the shared space in the composition classroom and writing center where the individual and social processes meet. Gere emphasizes a historical and present-day notion of writing as an individual act (56). She acknowledges the individual view of writing, which depicts writing as a solitary activity, but focuses her research on ways in which writing has been and continues to be a social process, not solely individual. In her discussion of language development, Gere highlights the social dimensions of learning and using language. She argues that the individual dimensions of writing can co-exist with the social dimensions (6). In terms of the individual dimensions, in the composition classroom and writing center, I recognize the need for students to attend to some aspects of the writing process on their own to foster their independence and confidence as writers capable of working both individually and with others. I see a necessity for individual students developing their abilities to use written language effectively without direct collaboration and assistance from others.

For example, in standardized testing situations and in college courses where students write in response to assignments and essay questions that they are asked to complete without others' input, having the ability to handle writing as an individual act is important. Composition courses can help students learn collaboration at the same time they encourage individual initiative and independence. Collaborative activities can be balanced with the expectation that students also know how to write individually when necessary, developing their own discretion in response to writing decisions and tasks while considering others' ideas and writing in response to conversation with their readers.

Jeanne Marcum Gerlach writes, “Listening to different points of view about how to solve problems or to different perspectives on issues helps students to reach deeper levels of understanding about their subjects” (10). When students talk with others about their topics, they can discover or recall facets of a topic that they may not have considered integrating into their papers. The experience of sharing ideas can help students evolve their drafts effectively as they engage in the writing process, and the larger context of the classroom can foster an environment where writing and connection with others are central.

James Paul Gee insists that for effective learning to occur, “[learners] need immersion in actual contexts of practice . . .” (*What Video Games* 114). Contexts of practice can include small groups that students participate in during collaborative learning activities. As Robert Brooke suggests, students can explore possibilities for writing by participating in these groups (12). As part of the wider collaborative classroom, small groups can provide support for students as they engage in thinking, reading, and writing both individually and with classmates and instructors throughout the writing process. Brock Dethier asserts that students can help fellow classmates (48). Working in the writing center has allowed me to observe a setting where students actively help other students with writing, and I have also seen the benefits of peer review in a variety of writing courses I have taken. Students and instructors alike can bring different ideas and experiences in their readings of student writers’ papers and offer strategies for revision throughout the writing process.

The Writing Process

When I use the phrase “the writing process,” I am referring to the name of the movement as it is discussed in scholarship and do not intend to imply that there is only one writing process. I mean to include the wide range of processes that writers use in the activity of writing. As emphasized by Donald Murray, writing is a process, not only a product (“Teach Writing”). Murray has been an influential researcher on the writing process in Composition Studies. According to Lad Tobin, additional scholars who have contributed to writing process research include Peter Elbow, Ken Macrorie, Janet Emig, Ann Berthoff, Natalie Goldberg, William Coles, Maxine Hairston, Thomas Kuhn, James Marshall, Thomas Newkirk, Lester Faigley, and Sharon Crowley (3-7). Many more researchers have made contributions to writing process scholarship, which has become a widely known area of composition pedagogy. Collaborative learning and discussions of the writing process pair well together because the process view of writing can open opportunities for instructors to structure their courses around students collaborating at different points in conjunction with specific assignments.

Although individuals have different writing processes, writers do share activities in common when they write, and bringing students together to discuss these activities can support them as they explore writing within the composition course. In the collaborative classroom, students have supporters, their classmates and their instructor, who can help them through writing challenges, and most colleges and universities have writing centers that can also help students with writing. The instructor is not the only helper and supporter; students can support one another if the pedagogical scaffold and framework of the classroom provide opportunities for them to talk to one another.

The stages of writing suggested by various scholars offer ideas for instructors to spark students' thinking, planning, and writing strategies in conjunction with specific assignments in the composition course. Checking in with the full class on how assignments are progressing prior to due dates could allow instructors and students to have a dialogue at various points throughout the writing process and help one another through challenges and celebrate successes. However, it's worth noting that students tend to approach assignments on their own timing. They may not all be working on the same aspects of an assignment at once, and they may be experiencing different problems with writing. One student may be wondering how to add more details to a paper after a peer review session, while another is considering where to find sources. However, within classes, it's likely that more than one student is facing the same writing problem in connection to an assignment, and addressing roadblocks in class could help multiple students. Even a brief, ten-minute full-class discussion or question-and-answer session can be useful for students in navigating the writing process, and knowing they will meet with small groups to talk about their papers can be motivating for students as they write on their own schedules outside the classroom. Sharing writing in small groups can offer students the opportunity to give and receive feedback from their classmates.

Still, the writing process is not the same for each individual writer who approaches an assignment. The journey that each writer goes through to complete a piece of writing is unique to that writer. In short, it's likely that no two individuals write exactly the same way or take precisely the same steps in their writing processes because each person is unique physically and psychologically. Robert Blake describes the complexity of the actual processes of writing:

“During the composing process, while the writer's hand, eyes, and brain interact to produce a

piece of writing, the writer, like someone playing three-dimensional chess, needs to keep in mind simultaneously the key elements of message, audience, writer's role, focus, and structure . . .”

(47). Blake argues that stages in composing processes can be labeled, but what happens during those stages is not entirely clear (48). I see writing as a complex and not easily understood act in terms of its underlying physical and psychological processes, and there is in reality no single writing process when writing is viewed from a physical and psychological perspective. However, the academic conversation about the writing process is useful for stimulating thought about ways to teach writing.

A discussion on the individualized nature of the writing process is warranted because the collaborative composition classroom needs to be flexible in order to meet students' individual needs. I view the writing process as open-ended, meaning that the concept is not rigid or predefined, but continually evolving. Writing process models are useful starting points for thinking about writing, but individuals vary from one another in their writing processes. However, research on stages of the writing process can be useful because it may allow instructors to help students find strategies for writing at various points in writing their assignments.

Models of the writing process can be useful in that they describe various decisions and processes that writers engage in while composing. Research on the writing process can explore the journey of writing a paper and the various tasks and choices on that journey, rather than a singular emphasis on the written product. John Lannon emphasizes that writers choose sequences in their writing processes that work for them rather than making decisions about planning, drafting, and revising in “a predictable sequence” (11). For instance, students may engage in

revision in the midst of drafting, or they may plan sections of a paper while drafting. However, discussing the overall ideas of various stages of writing can be useful to help students become aware of common activities (revising and generating ideas, for instance) that can occur during writing. Students tend to have at least some level of prior experience with writing, but writing for college composition courses can require that their skills be used in different ways than before.

Murray's discussion of the writing process has influenced the field of composition and later research on the writing process. Murray emphasizes that there are a variety of writing processes, which depend on the "personality or cognitive style of the writer, the experience of the writer, and the nature of the writing task" (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 4). Because writing processes are so individual, composition instructors teach students with diverse writing processes. An exploratory, open-ended view of the writing process is useful for composition courses because there is still much to learn about how writers compose.

Murray emphasizes that the writing process is not a linear model, "but recursive. The writer passes through the process once, or many times, emphasizing different stages during each passage" (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 4). John Trimbur asserts that the elements of the writing process don't represent a set of steps; different writers approach the writing process in their own ways (*The Call to Write*). Additionally, Trimbur indicates, the elements of the process are not always separate; some writers revise throughout composing, while other writers might compose quickly and revise later (*The Call to Write*).

Writers also spend different amounts of time on various parts of the writing process. Trimbur writes, "Depending on the writing task and their own writing habits, writers learn how to manage the elements in ways that work for them" (*The Call to Write* 502). Murray discusses

the writing process in terms of collecting, planning, and developing. He argues that writers move through these three phases as many times as necessary throughout the writing process (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 57). According to Murray, writers can collect information through awareness, observation, recall, empathy, interviewing, and research (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 13-6). The types of data that writers draw from can be as unique as the individual writer. Sometimes students need ways to access their ideas on a particular topic to get started or continue writing. Brainstorming is one way of generating ideas and can involve listing whatever comes to mind, circling items in the list that are surprising, and connecting arrows between pieces that are related (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 14). As Murray suggests, trying various strategies for brainstorming can help with collecting material for writing.

Murray's discussion of collecting connects to Irene Clark's research on invention because both scholars emphasize generating ideas. Clark writes, "As a concept in composition, 'invention' refers to the process writers use to search for, discover, create, or 'invent' material for a piece of writing . . ." (47). Clark offers strategies for building an "invention-oriented classroom atmosphere" (58). First, she recommends cultivating an environment open to "experimentation and exploration" so students can explore possibilities more freely (48). Second, she stresses that students learn to develop their ideas actively, and exploratory writing can help students consider what they know about a topic, may lead to useful content, and can help students to know if they need further information (58). Clark cites discussion as another way that students can engage in invention. George Kennedy's research suggests the importance of talking as a way to facilitate invention and its usefulness in helping students get ready to write (qtd. in Clark 59). According to Clark, ancient rhetoricians emphasized the importance of being familiar

with a topic to be written about (57). Clark discusses the necessity of students understanding their assignments and becoming comfortable with the subject they're writing about (57). She also recommends "scaffolding" assignments, or having due dates for different components of an assignment, to encourage students to not wait to address their assignments the night before they're due (58). Scaffolding can allow students to pace themselves more effectively in completing a writing assignment, and invention strategies may be facilitated by inviting students to engage in invention for multiple components of a writing assignment.

Another invention strategy Clark discusses involves "exploring a topic through questioning" (61). Clark writes, "Responding to questions encourages writers to reflect on experiences, facts, opinions, and values they already know about the topic, determine what they don't know about the topic, decide what they need to find out, and then evaluate the material they find" (61). In other words, questions can encourage reflection, reveal areas for further exploration, and help with evaluating information. Asking questions can be a useful way of facilitating invention, or using Murray's term, collecting (*A Writer Teaches Writing*).

In his discussion on planning, Murray writes, "Effective planning doesn't discourage discovery as long as it's open-ended and experimental" (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 17). However, he emphasizes that the amount of planning writers engage in depends on "the cognitive style and experience of the writing as well as the nature and familiarity of the writing task" (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 40). Some writers plan meticulously; others can proceed into drafting without a concrete plan, but plans can be useful for getting started on and finishing a piece of writing.

Murray compares having a plan to having a map (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 23). To make a plan, writers can “draw a sketch of the writing to be drafted” (34). Murray asserts that some writers require a sketch that is detailed, others can write from a few main points, and still others assert they do not need a sketch (34). Murray emphasizes, “The sketch is not a blueprint that has to be followed; it is a way of guessing what the piece of writing will look like” (34). Like Clark, Murray discusses the practice of asking questions: he poses reader-centered queries such as “What does the reader need to know?” and “What will interest the reader?” (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 21). Asking and answering questions can be useful in multiple stages of writing, including drafting.

Murray emphasizes the exploratory nature of the first draft: “The purpose of the first draft is to discover” (51). Drafting can take a duration of time and a variety of practices, and Murray’s recommendations include building a habit of writing every day, writing at regular times, having a certain place for writing, investing in writing tools, composing a chunk of text at a time, free-writing, and consulting with another writer (47-9). Many of Murray’s ideas concern how to sustain the process of writing.

John Lannon asserts that the way writers engage in the writing process depends on the type of writing they’re working on—whether it’s a research paper, essay exam, letter, or some other type of writing—and if the topic is familiar to the writer, he or she might not spend as much time planning (11). Writers, Lannon suggests, make various decisions throughout planning, drafting, and revising. In planning, decisions can include locating a topic, determining a thesis, identifying readers, and forming an organization (7). Drafting may involve deciding what readers “need to know first,” determining the order for subsequent materials, and forming a conclusion

for the writing (6). Revising can be a process of asking how to improve the writing and making sure it conveys the points the writer wants (7). Lannon emphasizes that decisions don't necessarily occur in this particular sequence, but these decisions need to be considered before a final draft is turned in (7). However, the decisions that each writer makes may be unique to his or her writing process and fit the specific piece of writing.

Different writing tasks may also lead to varying writing processes. For instance, planning, drafting, and revising for a research paper that requires multiple components and the integration of a variety of sources—an assignment students often encounter in composition courses—likely requires a different writing process than writing a college entrance essay, which many high school students compose. However, commonalities exist between the two tasks. They both involve generating ideas, writing sentences, addressing issues of organization, and thinking about audience. Exploring connections between familiar genres of writing and new genres can help students in the composition course explore what it might mean to approach new genres. Discussing potential processes for approaching specific assignments can help students build on what they already know and discover their own practices for a different educational context and a variety of genres of writing.

Collaborative learning is a useful framework for the composition class because it can allow ample room for writing to be explored as a process, for classroom participants to engage in inquiry, and for students to work together. John Updike asserts, “Writing and re-writing are a constant search for what one is saying” (qtd in Blake 46). In collaboration with their classmates and instructor, students can discover through writing what they want to say and how others respond to their writing. Viewing writing as a process in the classroom can open opportunities

for students to collaborate throughout the duration of writing their assignments. They can engage in discussion after assignment requirements are distributed to better understand what rhetorical purpose they are being asked to address, when they are choosing topics, while developing plans for their writing, and throughout revising and editing their final drafts. In the writing center, I have experienced working with students during all of these points in the writing process. The idea that writing is a process has become a lived reality for me because almost all papers students bring to the writing center are still being written, and the concerns students bring to the writing center represent the challenges they face while engaging in the process of writing.

Students can help fellow students with writing if they are encouraged to take seriously the tasks of offering response and helping classmates navigate their assignments. Students do not need to be experts on writing to offer their input. No one classroom participant knows everything, but collectively, as Brock Dethier suggests, students can combine their resources. In the writing center, if a tutor does not know the answer to a student's inquiry, he or she often asks other tutors if they can offer information, and at least one person in the room can help or knows where to look for the answer. The same phenomenon can happen in the classroom. Composition students often do not have the same level of experience with academic discourse as writing center tutors; however, they can offer the skills of listening, helping writers clarify their ideas, and providing tips and ideas collected from their own educational journeys and experiences of approaching the same assignment. Through asking and responding to questions in the classroom, students can provide support and help one another progress from early drafts and initial ideas to final drafts. Instructors can guide students through their collaborative processes by engaging them in

discussions of the writing process and providing opportunities during class sessions for students to talk to one another.

Additionally, instructors can emphasize that the writing process is different for everyone, and each writer will approach an assignment in his or her own way; however, there are intersections and commonalities among students' processes for writing. For instance, multiple writers in the classroom may all be experiencing similar challenges with navigating the library's electronic databases or generating ideas for their introductions. Encouraging dialogue about these challenges, both in small groups and full-class discussions, can help students leave class knowing more clearly how to continue working with their writing. As Anne Ruggles Gere has asserted, writing is both individual and social. The collaborative composition classroom can acknowledge this by building into the very structure of the course opportunities for students to work together as they develop their ideas and learn skills for academic writing.

CHAPTER III

SMALL GROUPS IN THE COMPOSTION CLASSROOM

When students collaborate on writing-related tasks and activities, they can learn about writing and research through discussion and mutual sharing of ideas. Composition scholars have asserted that small groups can allow students to have multiple readers for drafts of their writing, generate ideas during early stages of the writing process, and have support throughout the writing process. Groups can invite students to voice their ideas and offer suggestions and contributions to classmates in a smaller setting than full-class discussions and can increase students' participation in discussing their individual writing processes and assignments. Rebecca Moore Howard discusses not only the importance of small groups, but of peer response to drafts: "As in other disciplines, small group discussion has become a staple of composition pedagogy. Even more common to composition classrooms is the practice of peer response to writing: students each read an assigned paper, and then classmates respond to and make suggestions for improving the draft" (54). Peer review, also known as peer response, is the practice of students' responding to one another's writing, and as Howard suggests, it is widely used as an activity in composition classes. In this chapter, I explore the use of small groups for a range of purposes in the composition classroom. Additionally, I discuss building supportive classroom environments conducive for both small group and full-class activities; teaching the process of peer review; finding options for facilitating small group activities in early stages of the writing process, including prewriting and brainstorming; and understanding the potential for collaboration throughout research processes in the composition classroom.

Collaborative learning scholarship emphasizes that students can explore assignments more effectively when they have regular opportunities to talk about their writing. Collaboratively, writers can find ways to navigate forward in their writing processes. As Richard Gebhardt suggests, students and instructors can be supporters for one another in multiple stages of writing. Collaborative activities can invite students to talk about writing and research at as many different stages of their projects as possible. Integrating small groups into the classroom in ways that fit the contexts of specific courses and the needs of students can create classroom environments where students and instructors know one another and are interconnected as they work on writing.

Robert Brooke writes that collaboration offers students a “small community of writers” (12). He emphasizes the potential of small groups in helping students understand the effects their words have on others (12). When students listen to how classmates respond to their writing, Brooke argues, they learn more about how different individuals understand the same parts of the writing (23). Responders can help writers see new possibilities and areas of confusion in their work that may not have been apparent to them before. Small groups are ideal sites for students to respond to one another’s work because they can provide an opportunity for students to collaboratively discuss ideas with the writers.

Randi Browning asserts, “When we ask our students to collaborate, we are asking them to develop and use a different set of skills and to consider and balance others’ ideas and concerns with their own while they work to complete the given task” (143). These skills can range from negotiating ways to integrate feedback into writing to active listening and navigating the dynamics of reader response. Fiona Paton emphasizes that peer review can help students build the interpersonal skills of respectful listening, voicing opinions, offering tactful advice, and

“negotiating between different points of view” (291). Small groups can provide students with both social and academic support by offering them a group of responders to their work.

Further, creating positive and inviting spaces for students and instructors to work together can help writers try out new ideas, clarify what is already written, and collaboratively discuss writing. Part of building positive spaces can involve making time for students to establish and maintain positive and professional connections with one another while focusing on the business at hand during class sessions. In the writing center, I have found that sessions seem to run more smoothly if students and I take a few minutes for introductions and light conversation before settling in to work on writing. A learning environment can be more conducive toward students working together if they know one another to some degree. Introductions and brief periods of socialization outside the context of a specific paper or assignment can help establish an inviting environment for writing-related discussions and may help students feel more comfortable offering one another feedback.

Students can get to know one another better through reading and talking about their writing, but intentionally taking a few minutes to talk about current campus events, how classes are going in general, and asking about students’ majors and coursework can help establish interpersonal connections, which may help in facilitating small groups and class discussions. In the writing center, I try to ensure that I establish and maintain interpersonal connections with writers and fellow writing center staff members at the same time I help keep a focused working environment by keeping the majority of my speech centered on writing.

Maintaining a focus on writing and tying it to interpersonal connectedness can be helpful for facilitating invention. It can require a sense of trust in others to publicly vocalize or write

ideas for the first time, both in the classroom and the writing center. Trust can be fostered in spaces where students and instructors make maintaining positive and professional relationships a priority. When trust is present in a classroom, peer review among students can more easily be facilitated, and a positive classroom environment can be cultivated.

Part of creating a classroom environment conducive for peer review and other types of small group activity can involve being mindful of the noise level in the classroom while students are working together. It's important that students have the opportunity speak up in groups, asserting their ideas confidently, and simultaneously be conscious of their vocal volume and aware of the fact that other groups are working around them. Mary Healy suggests that monitoring the overall noise level in the room during small groups can be important to ensure that students can hear others in their individual groups while multiple groups are engaged in discussion.

My experience in the writing center is that when my colleagues and I keep our voices at a reasonable volume when conversing with students, the overall noise level in the room remains conducive for pairs to hear one another. However, when there are a large number of pairs working together in the same space, and multiple students are reading aloud, it can become difficult to hear within groups. In the classroom, when students are working in small groups, it may be challenging to hear whomever is speaking if multiple groups are working at the same time. Reminding students to keep their voices at a reasonable volume could help reduce noise levels in the room and help with hearing and communication. Mary Healy asks students to raise their hands if their concentration is disrupted by the noise level in the room during group work; this is a useful practice to ensure that students have a way to easily let the instructor know if they

are having difficulty with hearing within their groups. Alternate spaces could be found for groups to work if the overall noise level in the classroom is too loud or distracting for group members to comprehend what is being said in the group.

Flexible seating arrangements for group activities can be important for all students, including students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Rebecca Day Babcock has researched deaf students working with interpreters in the writing center, and she emphasizes that “all deaf students are different, and they know their own communication needs” (113). Her research relates to small group activities in the classroom because both settings involve students talking informally together about writing in groups of two or more.

Researchers have discussed furniture arrangements for small group activities and emphasize having moveable furniture. This can allow all students to arrange classroom furniture into formations that can work for each member of their group, including deaf students working with or without interpreters. Additionally, flexible furniture formations can be important if a group member is using a wheelchair. Having classroom furniture that may be moved easily can help make the classroom more accessible for all students and help facilitate effective small group activities, including peer review.

Peer Review

Peer review is a process where students read one another’s writing and offer verbal responses, written responses, or a combination of both. For some writers, predicting certain audience reactions may be possible without reader response partway through the writing process, but as Peter Elbow suggests, reader responses can play an integral role in understanding the effects one’s writing has on others (“Feedback”). Steven Zemelman and Harvey Daniels suggest

waiting to initiate peer writing groups until students have had time to get acquainted and become comfortable with the course, and they recommend having groups meet regularly once they start working together (187). Zemelman and Daniel's thoughts about peer response articulate the benefits that can come from students talking together about their writing:

When peer response is most effective, students aren't just hunting surface errors in one another's papers. They are at once fellow inquirers and mutual audience. . .when reading first drafts, groups serve as interested audiences: they focus on ideas, discuss the subject itself, ask questions, tell writers what parts worked, as well as where they were confused and what they'd like to hear more about. (188)

In peer review, multiple perspectives can come together for a writer's consideration in reshaping, expanding, editing, and re-envisioning, sometimes to small degrees and sometimes more extensively, written work. As Karen Spear and others demonstrate, readers can help writers engage in thinking about the revision process in a number of ways, including asking questions, listening, providing suggestions, offering encouragement, and respectfully challenging ideas.

Teaching Peer Review

Scaffolding peer review is important to ensure that students understand how to successfully conduct themselves in responding to one another's writing. Anthony Edgington talks with students about what constitutes "critical commentary" and points out that it does not include noting all the flaws in a paper (21). This helps to communicate the expectation that students respond to others' work respectfully. Students in Edgington's classes also observe a "fishbowl" activity where participants from the class have a practice peer review session (21).

Once students begin peer review with their classmates' writing, Edgington asks students to complete a worksheet that encourages the writer of the paper to be more active during the process; the worksheet invites writers to pose specific questions to have readers answer and involves readers noting the paper's "overall strengths, areas of confusion, and suggestions for revision" (24). It also asks two to four questions from Edgington that relate to the assignment's criteria (24). Edgington writes that the writer holds the responsibility for posing questions from the worksheet, keeping the discussion flowing, and asking readers to say more about their comments and suggestions (24). Like Edgington, Fiona Paton recommends making peer review worksheets relate to the assignment; in addition, she creates different worksheets for each assignment (297). Finally, she suggests staying away from yes/no questions on worksheets because they lead to simplistic answers (299). As these researchers demonstrate, if instructors decide to use peer review worksheets, they can be shaped to fit the assignment and changed periodically. Edgington's emphasis on having the writer take responsibility for asking questions could help ensure that peer review sessions are more geared toward writers' current concerns with their papers.

Other researchers suggest having students engage in conversation about their papers without using a worksheet. Lisa Cahill writes that when she provided students with long worksheets, they spent more time in class looking at the paper itself than talking to the writer (306). Catherine Kalish, Jennifer L.J. Heinert, and Valerie Murrenus Pilmaier suggest conducting peer review sessions that focus on conversation rather than written responses from students: "Essentially, our method emphasizes students working in pairs, the reviewer taking the role of an engaged reader (rather than instructor or expert), the writer thinking critically about his or her

work, and both students focusing on having a conversation about each of their papers” (30). I, too, prefer the option of not having worksheets in conjunction with peer review and think that articulating comments through conversation can be effective. I have learned through writing center work how to respond verbally to students’ writing, and it can be a useful skill for students to learn how to offer verbal feedback through conversation.

Students can work together with responsibility and accountability for helping fellow classmates. Macrorie reminds students of their responsibility to offer ideas to other writers by emphasizing the unique perspectives that readers can bring to their responses: “There is no other you in the world. No other person with the same set of past experiences. Only you can say what you feel and think, what your response to the writing was” (92). I appreciate Macrorie’s emphasis on the value of each student’s responses and his focus on responsibility. Instructors can also help ensure that students are accountable for their participation in peer review. Jason Wirtz suggests that instructors can ask students to reflect on peer review in writing, and Fiona Paton and Anthony Edgington assert that students can be required to complete worksheets in connection with peer review. In the collaborative composition classroom, students are each responsible for composing and submitting individual writing assignments, and they are also responsible for participating in peer review and small group activities. This means reading their classmates’ writing, offering written or verbal feedback, and contributing to small group discussions about students’ writing.

Edgar Thompson describes an approach to teaching students about responding to one another’s writing that involves engaging the class in discussion about effective response strategies. He uses sample student papers written by individuals not in the class for a series of

activities. After passing out the first paper, he asks students to read the text and write their responses on the back for the writer; he invites several students to share their responses, which tend to be quite critical of the paper (110). After several students have contributed, Thompson offers his own response that first addresses the paper's content by noting what he liked about it specifically and offering questions that could help expand the ideas (110). In his response, Thompson selects one "mechanical" issue to discuss, capitalization, rather than mentioning everything regarding grammar and punctuation that could be revised (111). Thompson writes, "I emphasize that [students] do need to be honest, but there is no reason why they can't be honest in a caring, helpful fashion. I suggest that they give feedback in much the same way they hope to receive it" (111). He recommends that students note a positive attribute of the paper before talking about areas to revise (111). Thompson's emphasis on initial praise is important because it can prevent sessions from containing only criticism. Encouraging students to offer praise while teaching effective response can communicate expectations to students for how they can frame their feedback and may help students prepare to balance positive comments with comments aimed toward revision.

Reading aloud their work may be one strategy that students find beneficial during class if time allows. Before they work with one another, Thompson lets students know that it is their choice whether they want to read their papers aloud within their groups or silently, but reading aloud can find issues with the text's wording or words that have been left out (111). Students may choose not to read aloud, but if necessary, instructors can make it a requirement for peer review to emphasize the helpfulness of reading aloud for the revision process. Thompson emphasizes that as students listen to the writer read, they can write down questions to talk about

later with the group, and these questions might yield “specific suggestions for revision” (111). In cases where students do not receive copies of their peers’ papers prior to the class period, the method of reading aloud can be used to place an emphasis on listening to the paper and constructing an immediate response. When students exchange copies of their papers before class, they may have more time to think about their responses. The approach of hearing the paper read aloud for the first time can be exciting, however, and creates a sense of immediacy in writing center sessions that I enjoy. Instructors can decide which approach to students’ receiving the papers of their peers could work most effectively for their specific courses.

Thompson combines initial preparation for responding to writing with follow up about how the process of responding is proceeding for students throughout the course. Before students participate in their first sessions, Thompson takes time to answer questions, then forms groups with three or four students in each group (115). For group selection, Thompson writes, “I prefer to choose the groups randomly at first and then make adjustments as necessary after students have worked together a while” (115). He walks throughout the room, observes, and listens while students participate in groups, and once students have gained experience, Thompson sometimes joins in on groups and serves as a model for offering feedback (115). Instructors’ joining groups can be helpful to students if it allows them to see patterns of effective response, and organizing groups of three to four students is reasonable. Thompson’s approach of requesting reflection from students on the results of their group work could help facilitate more effective response: following their sessions together, Thompson asks students to write briefly in class about “what worked or didn’t work in their group” (116). Then he follows up by collecting and reading the papers, making suggestions, and offering a summary of students’ comments (116). Throughout

subsequent classes, Thompson continues to check in with groups on how they're doing, which helps keep groups from becoming unproductive (116). I appreciate Thompson's ideas about conferring with students periodically about their processes for responding to classmates' work, along with his emphasis on the importance of responding diplomatically both in the roles of reader and writer.

Donald Murray offers further ideas about ways to organize and facilitate groups. He suggests that the writer first comment on his or her paper, group members listen to the comments and read the text, then respond to the writer's initial comments and their reading of the paper. Finally, the writer makes a response to what the group members have said (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 193). Murray emphasizes the importance of inviting writers to speak about their papers and to clarify the types of suggestions they are looking for before receiving comments (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 194). Inviting writers to ask for specific types of feedback in peer review can help them create a focus for sessions and subsequent revisions of their work.

In addition to reading peers' papers, students can also learn about writing by reading professionals' writing. Murray writes, "It is important for beginning writers—and experienced writers—to read masterly examples of finished writing. Such writing sets goals, establishes standards, inspires and teaches" (188). However, Murray also emphasizes that students can benefit from reading writing that is still being drafted so they can see the processes that happen before writing is published (188). It is important for students to not only read texts in progress, but professional writing, and ideally, students can read texts that approximate the types of writing they might create for specific assignments. For example, if students are writing a research paper, they might read one another's drafts and at least one piece of writing written for a

book, professional website, or magazine that resembles a research paper, preferably one written in an accessible voice and style that students can relate to. This can help students see examples of finished pieces in addition to the drafts in process they read during peer review.

Kalish, Heinert, and Pilmaier offer students a starting point for their conversations during peer review; they provide a list of questions that students can draw from in responding to classmates' papers, but do not require them to write down the answers (32-3).

They state that "most of the students did consult this list of questions during their peer review sessions, but they knew that these questions were intended to inspire discussion and were not meant to be answered, in writing, by the reviewer" (33). In their conversations, Kalish, Heinert, and Pilmaier encourage students to focus on more than grammar and to address higher order concerns, which can include "audience, genre, purpose, strategies," along with considering what to do for specific assignments (35). Kalish, Heiner, and Pilmaier's emphasis on higher order concerns bears similarities to Paton's recommendation that students read for "focus, audience, development, and coherence" (292-3). Encouraging students to emphasize higher order concerns, and spending time in class clarifying what those concerns can include, may help ensure that students' feedback encourages further development of ideas.

Ken Macrorie suggests some key reminders to students participating in peer review groups, which he calls "helping circles" (92). He recommends offering a "large reaction" to the writer first and only later to talk about the "small suggestion" (92). For instance, saying, "I think your thesis is clear, and you made a convincing case for this side of the issue" is a large reaction, while "Maybe you could connect these two sentences" would be a small one. Macrorie also suggests that writers help "draw out" responders by asking them to elaborate more on their

comments (93). His ideas could serve as a flexible, yet specific set of guidelines for students participating in peer review.

Further, Donald Murray asserts that students can benefit from learning to reach multiple individual readers and to navigate the responses they receive because this process requires that they decide as individuals what to do with their texts (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 190).

Implementing feedback can develop students' capacity to make independent decisions about their revision processes, whether they receive written or verbal feedback.

Some instructors ask students to prepare both types of feedback for peer review, while others prioritize verbal feedback over written feedback or vice versa. Murray writes that students can either prepare written feedback before discussion in class, or written feedback could substitute for oral responses (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 195). A combination of written and oral feedback can be effective; if writers know they will receive written feedback or an annotated copy of their text, they can focus their attention on listening to what responders say during peer review and making their own verbal responses. Writing written feedback also can help students be more prepared to offer verbal feedback to writers in class. In their written responses, Murray recommends that students respond to two simple questions: "What works?" and "What needs work?" (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 199). These questions are a good starting point, and instructors might come up with further assignment-specific questions for students to use in conducting peer review.

Instructors can consider a number of decisions in forming peer response groups for the composition course. They may determine whether to form consistent groups or to vary the composition of groups throughout the duration of the course, consider the optimum number of

students in each group, negotiate their role in the classroom during small group activities, and determine methods for preparing students to respond to their classmates' work.

Some scholars support keeping small writing groups consistent. Ruth Mirtz writes, "Students learn more about themselves, their writing and responding practices, and small group communication by sticking with a group, resolving conflicts, and improving the small group, even if by small degrees" (97). Wendy Bishop also advocated students' remaining in the same groups to encourage them to develop working relationships with one another (qtd. in Clark).

In contrast, other scholars suggest changing the composition of groups throughout the duration of the course. Jason Wirtz writes that he prefers to change group dynamics to prompt students to "be flexible with one another and to work successfully with a variety of people" (13). Fiona Paton works for a "genuine sense of community within the class as a whole" and recommends switching groups for each peer review session so that all students will have worked with every student in the class by the end of the semester (295). For groups in general, not specific to the composition course, CAST recommends having flexible groups, or groups that shift in their membership, because "flexible rather than fixed grouping allows for better differentiation and multiple roles, as well as providing opportunities to learn how to work most effectively with others." Students can learn to work well with others in a consistent group, too, but shifting groups can help students learn to work with a greater variety of classmates.

Instructors can also determine the number of students who will participate in each group, which may depend largely on how much class time is available for students to respond to one another's papers. Zemelman and Daniels write, "Three is a good number for peer groups. It

allows each writer to get two opinions but helps control time by limited the number of papers to be read in each round of work” (187). Larger groups can provide an even greater range of feedback, but may reduce the number of time that can be spent with each paper. Peter Elbow recommends allocating 15 minutes for each writer’s paper when feedback is being provided in writing groups, and he notes that more time is likely needed if writers go into discussion or read aloud (“Feedback” 274). Additionally, Elbow suggests having readers offer feedback “as it occurs to them” during the first meetings, then to have readers take turns giving feedback after several weeks. Once each person has offered feedback, groups can have discussions where readers share ideas that occurred to them while others were speaking if additional time remains (“Feedback” 275). This approach can help ensure that each group member has the chance to voice his or her perspective and manage time effectively to ensure that each paper receives an equal amount of time.

Kalish, Heinert, and Pilmaier indicate that their students prefer working in pairs because it can allow them more in depth discussion about individual papers (38). The opportunity for more discussion about each paper is a major advantage to working in pairs, although it can mean that students don’t have the opportunity to exchange feedback with and talk to as many other writers. Kalish, Heinert, and Pilmaier indicate that providing a number of sample student papers for students to work with during classroom activities allows students to still see multiple student texts (36). This approach may not allow students to talk directly to more than one writer about his or her work, but can help students see examples of assignments.

Other decisions for instructors can involve negotiating their role in the classroom during small group sessions. Ruth Mirtz joins two or three different groups during sessions to participate in the negotiations that are proceeding and to observe how groups are operating (98). Sometimes she brings her own writing to the group to model being both a “writer and a responder” (98). Mary Healy echoes Mirtz’s suggestion to join groups, sometimes with a paper of her own that students can respond to (290). After the class period, Healy writes notes about her observations with groups, and the notes help her balance time among varying groups (277). Murray prefers to observe and monitor groups without participating directly in them and to discuss problems afterward if needed; he works to get a sense of which groups are working well and which groups are struggling and uses this information in forming groups later on (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 199). The methods that instructors use for arranging small groups and negotiating their role in the classroom during group activities depend on their preferences and the dynamics of their classes. Instructors’ periodically joining groups has the potential to help students and instructors learn from and collaborate with one another and assist instructors in understanding more closely how students navigate responding to one another’s work. The information they gather from listening to individual peer review sessions can help them find ways to address the topic of peer review with the full class.

Each small group in a class will have different dynamics, and writers arrive to peer review sessions with different personalities, degrees of preparedness, and intentions for their writing. An instructor scanning the classroom during peer review sessions may see one group of students looking down at their papers and talking quietly, while in another group, the writer is listening as members offer enthusiastic comments. Letting peer review sessions take their own

shape and direction can give students space to find their own sense of a working group dynamic. Additionally, instructors can help keep students on task by limiting the amount of time that can be spent on peer review sessions and offering verbal reminders to stay focused if necessary.

Establishing guidelines is necessary to ensure that students have a sense of how to proceed with peer review, especially if they are not familiar with the process upon entering the course; on the other hand, strict guidelines may leave students feeling constrained when they begin to offer feedback. A balance of guidance and flexibility is important, and it can be facilitated by discerning when to offer direction and when to remain present, listen, and observe as students negotiate interactions. Additionally, it is important to emphasize respect and responsibility as core components of peer review. These qualities can form a basis for providing feedback to writers and helping them to expand ideas.

Reflection on the peer review process could be incorporated into composition courses to encourage students to think about how the feedback they receive connects to revising their work. Jason Wirtz asks students to write two paragraphs at the end of their major papers. The first paragraph describes the suggestions they received from peers, discusses ways in which they made use of peers' comments, and notes which feedback they chose not to use; the second asks for three specific instances of feedback students offered to others (11). Wirtz writes, "These two paragraphs not only help me to assess the quality of the peer review sessions but they help me facilitate the peer review sessions. For example, I can read over these comments and get a good sense as to how the peer review sessions are working, or not working, for students" (11). Wirtz's practice of asking students for brief written reflection on peer review, turned in with their major

essays, could help emphasize that peer review is important and that students are to be responsible both for considering feedback and providing useful suggestions to others.

Mary Healy recommends bringing students back together for a full-class discussion following their time responding to one another's writing. When they reconvene as a full class, students quote useful responses they received, discuss any problems that arose, and point out aspects they noticed about their papers (273). Keeping small groups within the same general vicinity can speed the process of reconvening if instructors choose to follow small groups with a larger discussion. Facilitating a full-class discussion after peer review sessions could be helpful in helping students reflect on peer review and consider ways to alter the process, if necessary, before the session. Bringing the class together following peer review could also provide the instructor with an opportunity to voice any final reminders and due dates and to address students' questions before the class period concludes.

Peer review can be an important dimension of composition courses that regularly incorporate it, and instructors can determine ways to frame for students the activity of peer response in their specific classes. Instructors can discuss ways to provide comments that go beyond surface-level readings toward engaging writers in thinking more about their ideas. Overall, peer review can offer students practice in exchanging feedback on written documents, and the process of peer review can be facilitated in a variety of different ways, providing instructors with space to develop practices that suit their courses.

Facilitating Small Groups Early in the Writing Process

A great deal of scholarly conversation surrounding the use of small groups in the composition classroom has centered on peer review of drafts. Students are asked to write a draft, distribute either hard copies or electronic copies, and have classmates offer their responses. However, Richard Gebhardt recommends facilitating collaborative activities for a wider range of writing-related tasks than response to completed drafts: “Students can receive feedback from sympathetic allies while they are generating ideas, jotting down notes about possible theses, running up against dead ends in research, developing a rhetorical stance, supporting generalizations, and so on” (74). It’s important to note that students and instructors can potentially address any of the areas Gebhardt names in the context of talking about an early draft. The writing of a draft tends to reveal to the writer what needs to be discussed in a small group. However, instructors can also offer students opportunities to gather in small groups to discuss their projects in multiple stages of the writing process, including before drafts are written.

Since preparation for writing can take a substantial commitment of time in itself, it makes sense to dedicate class time toward discussing planning and generating initial ideas. However, having time to talk about assignments in small group activities without the requirement of a complete draft could become unproductive if students use the time for off-topic discussion. To help students focus their time together, instructors could devise a specific task, verbally walk students through how they might go about addressing it, and let students know about it at least one class period ahead of time so they have the opportunity to think about what they might discuss. Gebhardt offers a number of activities that could be addressed while developing preliminary ideas for an assignment. For example, he suggests that working in collaborative

groups, students could discuss topics they are considering; brainstorm to find ideas for potential topics; freewrite, followed by sharing and reflecting; help one another find a focus for writing; and get a sense of how an audience might respond to a “projected paper” (73). These tasks could provide support for students prior to or while writing early drafts. Topic selection, specifically, is a key component of early stages of writing.

Topic selection is important because the topic a student selects can strongly influence his or her experience of writing a paper, and if research is required, the research process can be influenced by the availability of resources on that topic. If a topic will clearly be difficult to condense into a paper of the suggested length for an assignment, it can be important to help writers focus on a smaller piece of the large topic. Gebhardt writes that “the group could discuss whether each topic is limited enough to be completed in a paper of the assigned length . . .” (73). Additionally, if a topic lacks preexisting research, writing a research paper about it can be a difficult task. Asking students to consider the availability of resources on a topic could help with topic selection. They may not yet be familiar enough with the library’s resources to assess what types of sources are available for their topics; however, instructors, library staff members, or writing center tutors could help guide students through preliminary searches for materials if they are having difficulty getting started.

As Gebhardt suggests, students could also discuss topic selection in groups (73). I would add that students could ask one another questions to help focus their topics. Asking focusing questions can help to make broad topics more specific. For example, if a student says, “I want to write about teaching,” asking “What subject and what level of education?” can encourage a student to think about how to make the topic of teaching more specific. Students may have

specific ideas within a broad topic, and asking questions may help reveal the specifics of their topic. If students and instructors take a supportive role by asking writers questions and suggesting ideas, they could collaboratively help writers focus their ideas.

Collaboration for Research Processes

In addition to inviting small groups to convene during brainstorming and prewriting, students can discuss research processes for composition assignments. Prior to engaging in collaborative conversation about research processes, it's important that students receive an orientation to research processes, whether through the library or from their instructors in connection with specific assignments, because students in first-year writing courses, especially, are often new to navigating research at the college level. Learning research strategies and tactics for finding sources can be enhanced by inviting a reference librarian to talk with students about how to find resources at the library, and students can discuss present and past experiences with using electronic databases, books, Internet websites, and other materials.

In my experience, it can be helpful to ask students directly what they have already learned about research. When I work with students in the writing center on research, I work to understand what they presently know in order to build on it, offering suggestions and ideas for navigating resources the library offers. I've experienced helping students with multiple steps in research, including finding sources, evaluating the credibility of sources, developing research questions, and refining topics. I see a need for an instructor- or librarian-lead orientation to research for students at the same time I emphasize the potential of collaborative groups in helping students with research processes. Engaging in research processes with the help of others can provide students support as they navigate their own research processes. Offering students

frequent opportunities to talk about their research processes in small groups can provide an opportunity for them to share ideas and resources. Students could also work together on specific tasks such as generating research questions and evaluating the credibility of specific sources.

In small groups, students have the potential to offer one another ideas in connection with research processes, provided that instructors guide them and structure collaborative tasks that are closely connected with course assignments. Structuring assignments so students are working on specific research-related tasks at approximately the same time could help students talk collaboratively about how to approach tasks such as generating research questions, finding sources, and evaluating sources. Even if students are pursuing different topics, which I think is ideal because it invites them to explore their own interests, they could compare processes for researching that may share commonalities with other group members' processes. Collaborative activities surrounding research can make it a less isolating process and offer students the opportunity to share ideas and strategies with the guidance of their instructors

Generating effective research questions is integral to the research process. Questions can help create a beginning point for research, and continuing to ask questions throughout research can shape the direction of a project. Mick Healy writes, "One type of active learning that focuses on student direct engagement with research is inquiry-based learning, which refers to forms of learning driven by a process of inquiry" (75). Students can develop questions that guide their research, and hearing others' perspectives on preliminary questions could help students focus their queries. For example, "What is involved in improving education?" is a broad question; if students ask the writer to elaborate further, perhaps asking what type of education and inquiring about the demographics of the population being studied, they could help the writer generate a

more specific question, such as “What is involved in improving high school education in the state of Michigan?” Having a sounding board for research questions in the form of collaborative groups can help students navigate the preliminary phases of their research projects.

A wide range of potential sources for research is available to composition students, and research suggests that they most commonly choose websites. In a study of first-year Composition students at the University of Georgia, Caroline Cason Barratt, Kristin Nielsen, Christy Desmet, and Ron Balthazor found that 51 percent of students’ total citations were for websites, 25 percent for articles, and 20 percent for books (42). The authors write, “Students cited an astonishingly high variety of Web sources, representing an equally wide range of quality” (43). A discussion in class about ways to assess the credibility of sources could help students learn to cite reputable sources; further, a small group activity could be useful for students’ learning.

To determine if sources are credible, students could bring to class one sample resource they are considering using for their projects. Students could read sources in small groups, determine if they are credible, and assess if they could be used as a resource for the writer’s essay. Considering multiple perspectives on the same source could help students think about what makes sources credible and apply their thinking to real sources under their consideration for their projects. In the collaborative classroom, as Richard Gebhardt suggests, small groups can be facilitated to help students with assignments at multiple stages in the writing process, including prior to writing drafts. Students may have the potential to work together at any stage of writing, including brainstorming, prewriting, researching, and drafting. Instructors could consider whether they would rather have students respond only to complete drafts or if collaborative

activities for generating ideas and engaging in the research process might be useful in their courses as well.

As part of the composition course, small groups are important because they can offer students the opportunity to discuss writing in a smaller context than full-class discussions can provide. Full-class discussions can allow students to discover a wider range of perspectives about a topic; however, small groups are useful for activities like peer review, where it is imperative that each writer receives undivided attention for a longer duration of time than full-class discussions and activities can typically allow. In facilitating multiple small groups at the same time in the composition classroom, instructors can help several groups simultaneously responding to individual writers' papers, or they can invite multiple groups to respond to questions, prompts, and activities, offering each group member the opportunity to participate more extensively than can be possible in a full-class activity.

Small groups can be part of an overall supportive and open-minded environment in the classroom and help students consider new perspectives as they navigate a variety of writing assignments, challenges, and successes, and the working relationships students build in small groups can be important for their success as writers. Establishing a predictable cycle for peer review, where students are consistently asked to respond to their classmates' drafts, can motivate students to complete drafts because they know other students will be responding to their work as an organized classroom activity.

In the composition classroom, small groups can be most successful when they are well integrated into the overall goals of the course. For example, instructors can communicate to students the value and importance of working effectively with others on writing and make it a

clear objective for the course. Giving and receiving feedback can teach students how to listen to others' ideas with open-mindedness, generate specific suggestions for revision, and decide how to implement suggestions into their own writing. The composition course, in pairing the learning about writing with participation in small groups, can provide meaningful experiences of collaboration throughout the writing process.

CHAPTER IV

FEEDBACK

Exchanging feedback is crucial in the collaborative classroom because it is one of the major ways that students and instructors can share dialogue about writing and help build revised drafts of specific assignments. In her discussion of peer response groups, Karen Spear suggests using the terms “feedback” and “response” rather than “criticism,” which can have negative connotations (131). Feedback can be offered in several ways: through oral comments during peer review; through written comments, whether provided by the instructor or by peers; and through combinations of written and oral feedback. Students’ feedback does not replace instructors’ feedback, but supplements it; exchanging feedback can give students the opportunity to read one another’s work and to receive input from other students in addition to the instructor. Students can learn to revise for readers’ comprehension and understanding at the same time they form a vision for their work and negotiate ways to incorporate suggestions into their writing. Providing feedback to others, in addition to receiving it, can benefit students. As they offer comments on organization, ideas, clarity, and the effectiveness of drafts in meeting assignment requirements, students can consider these elements in their own writing. Giving and receiving feedback, as a practice for the composition course, is important for helping students to make consistent progress on their writing and to learn the skills of responding to others’ writing.

Offering feedback to others and handling received feedback diplomatically in revising drafts are skills that can be learned and practiced by student writers. Understanding revision processes and strategies for providing feedback can provide students with insight on how to most effectively offer written and verbal comments and to utilize others’ suggestions. The more

knowledge instructors have about revision processes and approaches for offering feedback, the more effectively they can prepare student writers to exchange feedback in the composition course. Researchers in Composition Studies have produced ample research on feedback and revision processes that can assist instructors in conceptualizing ways to teach peer review. In this chapter, I discuss revision and multiple-draft assignments in connection with the composition course, examine Donald Murray's scholarship on internal and external revision, explore research on multiple approaches for providing feedback, and investigate the concept of audience and its connections to peer review and Composition Studies. Additionally, I emphasize Ruth Mirtz's discussion of "I" statements and consider Karen Spear's scholarship on listening and supporting and challenging feedback. I conclude with a discussion on teaching reading strategies and their relationship with understanding texts and offering effective feedback.

Revision and Multiple-Draft Assignments

Revision of writing is important to the composition course because it can teach students strategies for creating more effective texts throughout the writing process. Composition courses emphasize multiple-draft assignments to offer students opportunities to revise their papers. Muriel Harris recommends teaching students to "re-see and then re-draft a piece of discourse" (30). She asserts that the view that a first draft is fixed can lead to not engaging more with the ideas within the draft (30). Harris argues that sometimes, however, one-draft writing is a necessary skill, such as when writing essay exams, placement essays, and "on the job writing where time doesn't permit multiple drafts" (30). However, Harris asserts that revising texts is an important skill for students to learn. Although one-draft writings are sometimes necessary in specific situations, multiple-draft assignments can be beneficial in composition courses because

they can offer students the opportunity to submit at least one draft for feedback before turning in a final draft. Students can re-envision and revise initial drafts as they work to make their texts increasingly accessible for their audiences. Receiving feedback on an initial draft can help students discover multiple perspectives on their work and work toward revision of their writing.

John Ramage, John Bean, and June Johnson discuss some potential benefits to writing multiple drafts. The first is that creating a draft can help writers capture ideas as they are developed by the “working memory”; drafting can invite a student to write down what he or she is currently thinking about a topic (439). This suggests that creating a draft can be a way to store information early in the writing process. Once a draft has been constructed, Ramage, Bean and Johnson assert, the writer can see “evolving ideas whole, note problem areas, develop more ideas, see material that doesn’t fit, recall additional information, and begin extending or improving the draft” (439). In other words, an initial draft can give a writer a place to work from in further developing a piece of writing.

Second, Ramage, Bean, and Johnson emphasize, writing more than one draft can allow a writer to shift and adjust his or her ideas (439). They assert that a finished draft may be different from a first draft “not simply in form and style but also in actual content” (439). This suggests that in returning to read early drafts, writers may construct another draft using the first draft as a base, but articulating their ideas in different ways. Additionally, Ramage, Bean, and Johnson note that writing multiple drafts can help writers “clarify audience and purpose” (439). Finally, Ramage, Bean, and Johnson assert that writers can also “improve structure and coherence for readers” in constructing multiple drafts (440). In other words, writers can read an early draft considering how readers may respond to the current structure and make changes that can help

readers navigate the draft more effectively. Ramage, Bean, and Johnson suggest that constructing multiple drafts can help writers continue to develop their texts beyond the first draft. This can assist writers in understanding potential areas for revision.

Internal and External Revision

Donald Murray refers to two categories of revision: internal revision and external revision (“Internal Revision”). As Murray presents these concepts, internal revision can be a process of developing one’s own meaning, while external revision can involve thinking about how the paper will be perceived by an audience. To describe internal revision, Murray writes: “Under this term, I include everything writers do to discover or develop what they have to say, beginning with the reading of a completed first draft. They read to discover where their content, form, language, and voice have led them. . . . The audience is one person: the writer” (81)

In working with content, Murray asserts that writers “gather new information or return to their inventory of information and draw on it. They discover what they have to say by relating pieces of specific information to other bits of information . . .” (83). According to Murray, they also “reject words, choose new words, bring words together, switch their order around to discover what they are saying” (83). Finally, Murray asserts, writers consider voice, which is thinking about how their written words “convey a point of view towards the subject, their authority, their distance from the subject” (84). Although Murray describes internal revision as a process a writer engages in with the only audience as him- or herself, I see that through asking questions, readers can encourage writers to think about strategies for revision and to further develop the meanings of their texts.

For instance, when readers ask writers questions about content, with an aim toward developing ideas, they can help the writer make connections between information that they know already, but have not included in their paper, and the current content of the paper. If a reader asks, “Can you think of any other examples to put in the introduction?” he or she is helping the writer connect information and add more content. Structure and form could be explored if a reader asks why a paper is organized in a certain way and prompts the writer to explore what the structure and form do for the meaning. Revision can be facilitated with the help of others, whether the writer’s own meaning is being clarified, the writer is concerned with audience, or both audience and meaning are areas of concern.

During external revision, Murray asserts, the writer may read the paper as if he or she is taking an outside perspective (81). In other words, when writers engage in this type of revision, they think about an audience’s point of view. In the collaborative classroom, readers could help the writer with revision by asking him or her to consider audience-specific choices. For instance, asking writers how to use appropriate word choice and terminology for a certain audience could be considered a matter of external revision. Readers can also serve as audiences themselves and offer their reactions, which can help with the process of revision.

In discussing revision with students in the collaborative composition classroom or the writing center, I would not draw a conceptual boundary between internal and external revision because the two processes can be similar, especially when revision is collaborative. When drafts are exchanged, and writers attempt to incorporate readers’ comments into their revisions, they often have to think not only about their own meanings, but about how to address the readers’ comments. Internal and external revision can be related processes if the writer is clarifying his or

her own meaning with an equal concern for the audience's understanding, especially in the collaborative composition classroom, where revision is approached with the help of others.

Purpose and Intention

Lil Brannon and C.H. Knoblauch emphasize the importance of asking students about their intentions for their writing (161). Identifying a writer's purpose and intentions can play an important role in offering feedback because it can help readers provide ideas that are more aligned with what the writer intends to do. In the composition classroom, students usually have the advantage of working on the same assignment in connection with the course. Brannon and Knoblauch suggest that asking a writer about what he or she is aiming to do could help readers get a sense of the writer's purpose and intentions for the paper. To find out what kind of feedback a student is seeking in the writing center, I ask, "What do you want to work on?" This type of question can offer writers the opportunity to clarify what they need from a writing center or peer review session, and it can help responders focus their comments toward a writer's purpose and intentions.

I have found that asking students about their intentions for specific passages of their papers to be especially useful if the meaning is unclear to me as a reader, and asking questions about intention tends to open a dialogue about what the writer meant. Questions about intention can encourage writers to articulate the thinking behind their ideas and to expand or clarify those ideas, and asking about intention can also communicate to students a sense of ownership and responsibility for their writing.

Robert Brooke discusses ownership of writing in relation with collaborative groups. He emphasizes ownership as a key component of writing courses and notes that it “refers to the choices writers have over their material, their processes, as well as how they understand and feel about their material and processes” (20). Part of taking ownership in the collaborative classroom can be determining how to revise a paper after receiving feedback. Carol Berkenkotter has shown that students in collaborative courses handle feedback they receive in ways that are unique to them as individuals. Berkenkotter found that student writers respond differently to feedback and have varying reactions to determining how to shape their drafts after receiving readers’ input. One writer she describes is more other-focused in incorporating feedback, working to revise in response to the feedback of her readers, while another writer works from an inner sense of direction for his text.

Writers can hone their abilities to make individual decisions about their writing, using their discretion about which peer feedback they incorporate, at the same time they seek to create texts that are comprehensible, interesting, and accessible to their readers and that align with expectations for academic writing. In reading a writer’s drafts, readers can tell the writer which parts of a text were confusing or ambiguous. Depending on the student writers’ level of experience in composing within academia, they may be able to help one another with understanding conventions for academic writing and how they can be applied to the current draft. Subsequent drafts beyond the first can become increasingly clearer for readers’ comprehension and more academic.

In the writing center, I constantly balance trying to understand what students are working to do in their papers with communicating my perceptions and ideas as a reader. In addition to

seeking to genuinely understand what they are saying in their writing and speech, finding out what brings them to the writing center, and offering feedback that aligns as closely as possible with what they want to address, I feel a responsibility to respond as a reader and offer my own thoughts and perceptions that connect with the craft of writing. I often provide information about writing conventions that I have gathered based on my experiences writing in academic settings. Specifically, I talk frequently with students about assignment requirements, organization, word choice, theses, general versus specific ideas, audience, grammar, and punctuation, along with asking questions geared toward helping writers expand on their ideas.

Development

The writing center has introduced me to the term “development” in the context of helping writers revise, which can involve encouraging them to expand further on or clarify their ideas. Asking questions can help foster development. Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff propose asking readers, “What is almost said?” and “What do you want to hear more about?” (8). Elbow and Belanoff write that this can be especially useful for developing a piece of writing when it seems like there is more to add, but the specifics of what to add haven’t yet become apparent to the writer, and these questions can prompt readers to contribute their own ideas to the topic (8). Similarly, Elbow and Belanoff recommend asking, “What are your thoughts on my topic? Now that you’ve heard what I have to say, what do you have to say?” (8). Again, they emphasize that these questions can be particularly valuable in the early draft stage. They are excellent questions to ask when the writer has developed a certain position and wants to know about any counterarguments or different threads on the same topic that he or she could pursue for a particular paper.

Talking about the topic can help students generate further content that may not yet be present in the paper. When students say something I think could add to or modify their written ideas, I find it important to keep the conversation in the context of how the paper could integrate the spoken ideas rather than talking at length about the topic outside the context of the paper. In writing center sessions and during peer review, there is limited time for dialogue, and developing the ability to have a focused conversation that generates specific content for a text is important. During peer review sessions, instructors can emphasize to students that one purpose of peer review is to help fellow classmates determine how to revise and to expand on the text rather than talking extensively about the topic itself. In the writing center, my goal for each session is to help the writer gain a clearer sense of direction for how he or she might proceed with a paper, and I try to keep conversation focused on the paper, even if we are talking about the topic of the text for the purpose of development. In addition to developing ideas, I frequently talk with students about organization.

Organization

The organization of writing can have a major impact on how easily it can be navigated by readers. Sometimes organizational issues are more apparent to readers than they are to the writer of a text. Activities designed to familiarize students with organizational concerns could help prepare them to discuss organization in the context of their classmates' work. After providing a sample paper for students in class, instructors could show students how paragraph order and placement can affect the overall cohesiveness and clarity of a paper. Discussing ways in which paragraphs could be rearranged in a text could help students see organization as an element of writing. They could learn to read their classmates' drafts with a sense of how paragraph order

can be arranged for more organized writing, and they could note places where transition sentences could be added or clarified to help readers navigate the writing.

In addressing organization in the writing center, I look to see that the paper has a logical progression of ideas from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. If paragraphs seem like they are not connected to one another, I indicate to students that they could add transitions at specific points, or I offer suggestions for moving a paragraph to a different point in the document. To help writers make transitions throughout a paper, I sometimes ask them how paragraphs are related to one another and encourage them to think of transition sentences. Transition sentences can help make writing more fluid and aid the reader in seeing connections between different sections of a paper. Bringing students' attention to what transition sentences do and how they can be crafted could help them more effectively address organization in peer review. Additionally, the organization of texts can be an important aspect of genres for writing.

Genre

The concept of genre can be useful to the composition classroom because it can provide a way to help students understand various types of writing assignments and construct their own writing. Irene Clark reports that scholars have been interested in genre for centuries: she notes that Aristotle found genres that were literary in *The Poetics* and identified different oratory types in the *Rhetoric* (181). Conceptions of genre have changed over time. Aviva Freedway and Peter Medway write that traditionally, genres were considered mostly literary, definable in terms of form and content regularities in texts, fixed, and able to be placed into categories (qtd. in Clark 181). However, views of genre, Clark asserts, have become wider and defined differently (182). She reports that genre is now used to refer to more than “textual or structural characteristics, but

rather in terms of *function*” (181; emphasis in original). Clark adds that genre has been “reconceptualized as a rhetorical construct” (181). This means that genres can be rhetorical, not only a set of characteristics. During the past three decades, Clark notes, genre has been considered a “*typified social action* that responds to a reoccurring situation” (182; emphasis in original). This suggests that genres can be used to fill specific rhetorical purposes. Amy Devitt writes that “people use genres to do things in the world (social action and purpose) . . .” (698). Devitt suggests that genre can now refer to a way to address a particular situation, not only a category.

Further, Irene Clark provides a description of ways in which genres can be used in real-world situations:

This new way of understanding a genre in terms of its social context provides a perspective that has potential for examining many different genres, real-world genres such as business letters or greeting cards as well as academic genres such as lab reports or school essays. This perspective views a text as a typical rhetorical interaction that is situated within a social context. (182)

In other words, Clark asserts that the view of genre as a way to respond to a rhetorical situation, within contexts that are social, can be used to understand a wide variety of genres.

In the introduction to Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff’s book *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, Charles Bazerman writes, “To communicate effectively we need to know what kind of situation we are in, what kinds of things are being said, and what kinds of things we want to accomplish. . . .” (qtd. in Clark 183). Bazerman emphasizes understanding situations and considering what could be achieved in those situations. Clark adds

that scholars have discussed ways to teach students “genre awareness,” which she defines as “understanding texts in terms of genre, viewing a text in terms of its rhetorical and social purpose, and recognizing how various elements of a text derive from its rhetorical function” (187). Clark explains that genre awareness can teach students how a genre meets a purpose that is rhetorical and how different parts of a text, along with the “intended reader,” writer, and the text, “are informed by that purpose” (188). In other words, Clark suggests that genre awareness can involve considering what purposes genres can fulfill and how those purposes can influence both the text and the readers and writer of a text.

Additionally, Amy Devitt asserts that users of language can employ genres for their own purposes: “Genres help language-users achieve certain aims, fulfill certain functions, perform certain actions, and do things with language” (702). Communicative purpose, then, can be intricately linked with genre. As Irene Clark reports, various scholars have noted that being aware of genre may help promote creativity (195). Devitt adds that “free variation” is present within genres (qtd. in Clark 195). These researchers suggest that genres can be ways to understand various purposes for communication, and within awareness of genre, writers can make decisions and approach genres in different ways.

In the composition classroom, genres can offer students a starting point for understanding how they could navigate their assignments. Amy Devitt argues for genres remaining “fluid and dynamic” (715). An advantage to sharing writing collaboratively, researchers have asserted, is students can have the opportunity to see how an assignment can be approached in different ways. Jason Wirtz asserts that through peer review, “students are consistently reading the way that their peers respond to an identical writing prompt with limitless variety and nuance” (8). I see the

potential for full-class activities, combined with peer review in small groups, to help students understand certain genres and form their own writing. If an assignment brings to students' attention a specific genre, such as a research paper, a class discussion about that genre prior to writing their drafts could help students learn how writers might approach the genre. Instructors could also show students some writing samples to help illuminate the genre.

Audience

Another important aspect of composition is audience, and Irene Clark and other researchers in composition have argued that having peers read their writing can help students expand their sense of audience. Clark asserts that students tend to think of audience for their writing as their instructor, and they may not be aware of how audience relates to “purpose, form, style, and genre” for a text (109). Clark discusses how “audience has been a significant component of rhetoric since classical times,” and in the *Phaedrus* in 370 B.C., Plato advised rhetoricians to craft their speeches for their audiences (Clark 110). Aristotle also suggested that speakers shape their discourse toward audiences and discussed appeals that rhetors could use for persuasion (Clark 110). Clark acknowledges the difficulty of completely knowing audience for written discourse, where the audience for a given piece of writing can be distanced from the writer (110). However, cultivating a sense of how an audience can affect the ways a writer crafts a piece of writing can be an important development for student writers. The appropriateness of students' writing for specific audiences and contexts often depends on their understanding the idea of audience.

Receiving peer feedback, Clark argues, is among the most helpful ways for students to learn about the concept of audience (125). Although scholarship in composition has

demonstrated that audience is a complex construct, when students have more than one reader for their writing, they may more effectively begin to explore and understand the idea of audience in writing. Having readers who offer their thoughts, opinions, reactions, and suggestions for a piece of writing can make more concrete the idea that writing can communicate ideas to be read and processed by real people.

The intended audience for a given paper may not be peers; however, having peers read a paper can provide a starting point for building a concept of having readers, individuals who read the writer's work and react to it. Richard Gebhardt suggests that in collaborative groups, students could also help one another in writing for audiences other than fellow students (74). Writers can consider audience at any stage of the writing process, but Richard Gebhardt argues that discussing audience with their groups in very early stages of the writing process can help students (74). The writer may be able to imagine an audience on his or her own, but thinking about the audience collaboratively with a group may lead to a stronger sense of how to write for specific audiences.

On the other hand, in "Closing My Eyes as I Speak: An Argument for Ignoring Audience," Peter Elbow makes an argument for thinking about audience less while composing (140). According to Elbow, it's possible to help students both develop an awareness of audience and learn to shape discourse for readers' needs and conversely, to encourage them to "be *less* aware of audience, to put audience needs aside" (140; emphasis in original). Elbow recommends not thinking of audience in "the *early* stages of writing" if a sense of audience is inhibiting the writing process (130; emphasis in original). Elbow offers the following suggestions for handling audience in writing: "A useful rule of thumb is to start by putting the readers in mind and carry

on as long as things go well. If difficulties arise, try putting readers out of mind and write either to no audience, to self, or to an inviting audience. Finally, always *revise* with real readers in mind” (142; emphasis in original).

As Elbow suggests, later stages of writing may be more beneficial than early stages for cultivating awareness of an audience, and during an early draft stage, students can benefit from focusing on getting their ideas into writing without complicating the process with excessive audience awareness. As a general suggestion for generating ideas in early stages in the writing process, I think that responding to questions such as “What do I think about this topic?” and “What have other people said about this topic?” and focusing on writing answers to those questions can help with composing an early draft. Then, once an initial draft is composed, writers can turn toward asking how their draft could become more accessible or clear for readers.

Elbow asserts that in some situations, it may be beneficial to not think about audience while writing; however, he also notes that thinking about audience at some point in the writing process is important. In the collaborative composition classroom, students will likely have readers for most pieces of writing, and it’s important that they write something that they feel comfortable sharing with members of the class and their instructor; having a sense of responsibility toward their topic selection and the presentation of their papers is important. Audience awareness could be discussed in the collaborative classroom, as well as discretion about when to consider audience and when to focus on development of ideas with less audience awareness if necessary. Drafts can then be revised with greater audience awareness. Minor audience-specific details, such as using second-person point of view and informal language, can

be addressed for revision in later stages of writing as well as early stages. Understanding types of feedback can help in making suggestions for revision.

Guidelines for Offering Feedback

Teaching students effective strategies for providing feedback is important because without guidance for offering productive responses, peer review is quite an open-ended process. This open-endedness can be an advantage, as it offers students a multitude of possibilities for responding to one another's writing. However, it can also lead to students feeling unsure about what to say or write in their responses to classmates' writing. I value an approach to teaching peer review that includes instruction about offering feedback. The open-ended characteristic of peer review can still be retained, as each student paper will be different and thus require responses geared toward the content and form of that particular piece of writing. At the same time, offering students ideas for approaches they may use in peer review can provide them with a basis and a starting point for constructing their own responses. This can help ensure that peer review is productive and that writers leave the session with specific, tangible suggestions for revision as well as a sense of what they have done effectively in approaching specific assignments. Instructors can introduce students to these key approaches prior to their first peer review session and continue emphasizing them throughout the duration of the course:

- Prioritizing higher-order concerns
- Considering Peter Elbow's reader-based and criterion-based feedback
- Using "I" statements
- Employing active listening
- Offering praise

- Balancing Karen Spear's supporting and challenging feedback
- Employing reading strategies

Some students will arrive to the composition course having participated in peer review before, while others may be approaching the process for the first time. In any case, providing guidance for offering feedback can help students more clearly understand how to approach the peer review process.

An important distinction to convey to students is the difference between higher- and lower-order concerns. According to the Purdue University Online Writing Lab, higher order concerns include audience, purpose, making sure the paper has a thesis at its center and is organized logically, and looking for areas where the paper needs more details and specifics. In contrast, lower order concerns can include punctuation, spelling, choice of words, and the structure of sentences.

When possible, I prioritize making suggestions aimed toward higher order concerns. At the beginning of writing center sessions, I try to find out what the assignment is about and get a sense from students if there are requirements for organization. This helps with understanding the main ideas of an assignment before looking at details. Like Kalish, Heiner, and Pilmaier, I believe that encouraging students to center their peer review discussions on higher order concerns matters. Prioritizing lower order concerns in peer review sessions may leave less time for students to discuss more broadly the ideas they are working to write for a specific assignment. There is a place for discussing lower order concerns, but it's important to consider the stage of writing the paper is in before focusing on the grammar and punctuation of individual sentences, which may be omitted or moved around in the document if the writer is still developing ideas or

working on organization. Later in the writing process, revising individual sentences is often needed to prepare a paper for submission; early in the writing process, however, discussing higher order concerns can help writers continue to develop their ideas.

A discussion on the difference between higher order concerns and lower order concerns could be beneficial for students in preparation for peer review sessions. Students unfamiliar with the idea of higher order concerns may gravitate toward focusing on lower order concerns at the expense of discussing the assignment, the writer's purpose and intentions for the writing, organization, and other areas that can significantly affect their direction as writers. A peer review session can easily be consumed by discussion of grammar and punctuation, but if content is still in the process of being added and omitted, sentences carefully revised for lower order concerns may not make it into the final draft. The timing of peer review sessions can also make a difference in whether higher or lower order concerns are addressed. A peer review session that occurs shortly after receiving an assignment may be more conducive for addressing higher order concerns than a session that takes place close to a paper's due date. Facilitating peer review sessions for early drafts, with time built into the schedule for revisions, could help lead to more discussion of higher order concerns.

When I respond to students' papers in the writing center, balancing higher order and local concerns is key, and finding out which stage of writing individual students are in can be helpful. During early stages of writing, working with students to clarify their ideas and helping them understand assignments is a top priority. I sometimes wait to address polishing sentences until a student is in a later stage of writing because other concerns like defining a thesis and addressing clarity and organization take a higher priority. However, if a text's grammar or punctuation is

making its meaning challenging to comprehend for me as a reader, I make discussing these areas an early priority as well.

If students and I are focusing on grammar and punctuation, I work to see patterns rather than pointing out every instance of a particular type of grammar or punctuation characteristic. When possible, I try to find out what the writer's intention is if it relates to a specific grammar or punctuation pattern. For example, I might notice that verb tense switches frequently throughout a paper and ask the writer what tense he or she wants to use. An exception is when a writer is using a citation style that requires a specific verb tense; then I explain what tense could be most logical. Students can also ask one another about intention as they address various concerns for revision. Asking the writer what he or she means to say is one way of finding out about intention and can help with both developing broader ideas and helping to clarify individual sentences. Balancing higher order and lower order concerns and taking into account the writer's intentions can help facilitate successful peer review sessions.

Peter Elbow makes a distinction between reader-based and criterion-based feedback ("Feedback"). These two types of feedback can be explored in the collaborative composition classroom because they can provide options for working collaboratively to revise writing. According to Elbow, criterion-based feedback tells how writing works in relation to criteria such as quality of ideas, organization, effectiveness of language, and usage, while reader-based feedback can discuss the effects the writing has on the reader (240). Elbow notes that "the distinction between the two [types of feedback] can sometimes, in practice, seem fuzzy" (241). For instance, he notes that criterion-based feedback is still centered on something that a reader experienced, and reader-based feedback comes from some type of "criterion of judgment or

perception” (241). For example, Elbow offers, a reader can say a piece of writing “isn’t unified,” (241), but that might be the reader’s form of saying he felt lost while reading (241). In other words, criterion-based and reader-based feedback are not necessarily mutually exclusive because readers’ perceptions are tied to each.

However, to me the most important difference between criterion-based and reader-based feedback is the choices of words and concepts used in each. When Elbow discusses criterion-based feedback, terms he mentions include organization, abstractions, generalizations, point of view, reasoning, conclusions, introductions, and grammar (252-4). The direct mentions of criteria can distinguish reader- from criterion-based feedback. I can either say, “The organization is unclear here,” or I can say “I was a little confused while reading this because the paragraphs seem out of order.” In the writing center, I find it useful to talk with students about what I mean when I use writing-related terms. As part of Universal Design for Learning, CAST recommends teaching vocabulary. Some students may be familiar with vocabulary that signifies writing concepts, while others have not been introduced to specific words before. For instance, if students aren’t sure what diction is or what a thesis does, using those words without explanation can be confusing. Discussions about vocabulary can help instructors understand students’ perceptions of writing concepts based on their past educational experiences and may be useful for students in understanding terms in the context of their class, especially if terms are included in written or verbal feedback.

Elbow recommends using both reader-based feedback and criterion-based feedback (251). He notes that criterion-based feedback can be used to discuss specific aspects of writing that could be improved in future drafts, such as adding transitions (243). Criterion-based feedback

can directly discuss the writing rather than noting the reader's reaction (243-4). However, reader-based feedback can be helpful because it can communicate what the reader is experiencing from the text; it lets writers know what "what the words are doing" (247). Elbow calls reader-based feedback the "raw data" of feedback (246). Criterion-based feedback requires translating perceptions into judgments about the writing, whereas reader-based feedback asks for "what [readers] saw and what was happening to them as they read" (246). Both criterion-based and reader-based feedback can be used to show writers how the paper is perceived by readers.

As a guideline, Ruth Mirtz recommends asking students to use "I" statements in giving feedback (97). I think that when students own their statements as their perceptions by using "I" statements, their feedback can be more direct and communicate that they are talking about their own responses. Additionally, being specific rather than general in offering feedback can be more helpful. For example, saying, "I felt like the ending of the paper might work better at the beginning" is a specific "I" statement, while saying "The organization seems unclear here," a more criteria-based response, leaves out "I." In offering guidelines for reader-based feedback, I agree with Mirtz's suggestion that "I" statements can be helpful, along with asking students to be specific rather than general in their feedback. It can also be helpful if students refer to the paper itself in offering feedback rather than saying "you" in providing comments to the writer, especially when offering suggestions for revision. For instance, students could say, "I think that the logic in this first paragraph is not clear" instead of "You are not being clear in this first paragraph." Limiting the use of "you" can shift the emphasis from the individual writer to the writing itself.

Further, Karen Spear notes the importance of listening in small groups, emphasizing that writers need to listen to each other in order to give useful feedback (132). I agree that listening is key, whether it involves listening closely to what a writer is saying verbally or paying attention to what is being said on the written page before offering feedback. Spear writes, “Good listening is reciprocal not just receptive; active not passive; responsive not silent” (116). In discussing reciprocal listening, Spear writes, “Listeners can help to clarify meaning, highlight major ideas, recall undeveloped issues, elicit further elaboration, sustain thought, and point out inconsistencies” (117). In other words, Spear recommends that listeners also offer verbal responses rather than listening silently. Further, Spear notes that students can “build their ideas collaboratively with the help of their listeners” (117). To encourage active listening in the classroom, instructors could model listening skills both during full-class activities and in the context of small groups. Listening is important for building a respectful environment for all classroom activities.

Part of showing respect when offering feedback can also involve finding opportunities to offer genuine praise. Donald Daiker emphasizes the importance of praise in comments on students’ writing. He suggests that praise may be particularly important for apprehensive writers (105). John Daly and Michael Miller studied apprehensive writers and found that when they write, they are not as likely to take a position and use fewer words than less apprehensive writers (qtd. in Daiker 106). Additionally, research has suggested that students’ attitudes about writing may be influenced by receiving praise: in a study of 139 eleventh grade students, Thomas Gee discovered that when students only received criticism or no comments, they formed more negative attitudes about writing than students who were given only praise comments, and they

wrote shorter papers than students who received praise (qtd. in Daiker 106). A balance can be found between offering praise and noting areas for improvement. I make sure I offer at least one comment of praise during every writing center session, preferably more, and I try to offer praise early on in the session. Students need to know that readers are paying attention to what works well, not only looking for issues to address. Praise is important whether it comes from instructors or students' peers. Scholars have emphasized the importance of students' offering praise in small groups. Susan Miller recommends that during writing conferences, every participant says one area he or she appreciates about the paper and notes one area to address in revision, along with making sure the author has a chance to ask questions (308). This can create an intentional balance of improvement oriented-comments and praise.

Being specific with comments of praise can be helpful. According to Daiker, students report that criticism must be specific in order for it to be useful, but they appreciate vague comments of praise on their writing (111). However, vague compliments like "Good" and "I like your paper" might not help the writer see what, specifically, the reader likes about the writing. Daiker notes that at a conference, Donald Murray stated that one of his favorite ways to begin a response to student writing is "I like the way you" (qtd in Daiker 111). This can be a useful way to make praise comments more specific and can bring students' attention toward useful strategies for writing along with offering encouragement.

Instructors can encourage students to be specific in their comments to one another and model specific comments themselves. Comments can be specific whether they are praise or improvement-oriented. Mary Healy models being specific in offering feedback; for example, instead of writing simply "unclear," in a comment, she asks, "What is the connection you see

between inflation and automobile production?” (285). Phrasing comments specifically, emphasizing respect, and aiming for a balance of praise and improvement-oriented comments can be an effective approach in responses to students’ writing.

Karen Spear discusses ways to encourage both “supporting” and “challenging” feedback in small groups. Prior to meeting with their groups, Spear recommends that students write questions to ask group members; she emphasizes that writers can start the feedback process by making specific requests to their small groups (141). She suggests that supporting feedback be reinforcing of writers’ ideas and asks groups to find two or three things they appreciate in a draft (143). This can help students intentionally offer praise. Spear writes, “Encouraging students to make comments like ‘That’s a good idea’; ‘I really like the way you said that’; ‘I understand exactly where you are going’ opens up the dialogue and, perhaps more important, can encourage attentiveness to details in a paper” (143).

Conversely, Spear also discusses challenging feedback, which can highlight assumptions, challenge generalizations, request clarification and bring up counterexamples (147). Challenging feedback, according to Spear, can “guide students in thinking analytically about a conclusion or about why they have arrived at it” (147). Spear offers a list of challenge questions adapted from Louis Rath’s *Values and Teaching* that students can ask each other, such as “Does this conclusion hold in all cases?” (qtd. in Clark 148). This approach of offering students an inventory of challenge questions, Spear writes, can provide students with a structured way to give challenging feedback (150). To help students become more comfortable asking challenge questions, Spear suggests practicing in a “neutral, large group discussion or in a small group situation they can observe and analyze” (149). A “neutral” discussion could consist of students

practicing challenge questions without using a classmates' paper as an example until they are familiar with what these questions are and how they can be utilized.

Further, teaching reading strategies in the collaborative classroom could help students read more reflectively the texts of their peers. John Trimbur offers strategies for reading that students can use with print and electronic texts, including underlining, annotating, and summarizing (*The Call to Write* 30). These strategies can be ways to engage more with a written text. According to Trimbur, underlining can be used to find main points and recall key information; in reviewing notes on a text, looking at underlined sentences can help readers recall the writer's meaning (34). Trimbur notes that annotation includes writing comments in a paper's margins in order to engage with the ideas. Some suggestions he offers for annotation include writing out a text's main points, expressing agreement or disagreement with the ideas of the writer, posing questions, and drawing connections to other sources (34). Further, Trimbur writes that summarizing is a process of condensing a piece of writing. He notes, "A good summary identifies the main idea and important supporting material" (36). To craft a summary, Trimbur suggests first reading the text to annotate and underline it, finding the purpose and main point, starting the summary with a statement discussing the writer's major point and purpose, and using notes written on the piece of writing to help in summarizing (36). Discussing strategies for close reading prior to the first peer review session could prepare students to annotate, underline, and summarize before they apply the strategies to their group members' texts. The class can practice using reading strategies with a sample student text or a published professional text and note similarities and differences in their responses. This activity combines teaching close reading strategies with teaching effective response for peer review.

Once students are familiar with close reading strategies, they can receive copies of their group members' papers and engage in underlining, annotating, or summarizing prior to conferencing with other writers. During peer review sessions, readers can draw on what they learned from engaging with the text in offering feedback to the writer, and they can provide copies of their annotations, underlined passages, and summaries to help writers see how readers engaged with their texts. Receiving a written copy of their texts with evidence of close reading from classmates may help writers understand how their classmates engaged with their writing. Reading strategies can be useful in comprehending a large variety of texts, and practicing them with both published pieces of writing and other students' texts could help familiarize students with the connection between engaged reading and effective feedback and response.

Observing the changes that occur between students' drafts can be a useful way for instructors to see how students are handling the feedback they receive. Mary Healy monitors progress of students' writing by asking them to turn in each draft of their papers with the final draft on the top. She looks over the first draft and checks suggestions and revisions before she reads the final draft. In her comments, Healy uses "the contrast (or lack of contrast) between drafts" as a foundation for her responses (277). She writes, "I emphasize in my written comments instances of thoughtful revision I see in the papers I collect from the students. Slowly, as [students'] perception of the differences between their first and second drafts grows, their involvement in the revision process deepens" (290). Healy suggests that acknowledging students' revisions may help them gain more investment in revising. She recommends reading two drafts of one paper to the class and encouraging students to talk about differences between the drafts (290). Showing students how a draft can change as a result of revision illustrates that

writing is a process and may help students understand more clearly how revisions can be useful in their own work and how feedback can lead to positive changes in their writing.

Feedback can take a central role in the collaborative composition classroom. In addition to receiving instructors' feedback, students can offer feedback to one another through the process of peer review. Instructors can communicate to students that there are ways to offer reader response that go beyond correcting grammar and punctuation, and focusing on development of ideas and addressing the assignment can often be the most productive use of peer review sessions. Addressing higher-order concerns in offering feedback can expand students' understanding of what it means to engage with another writer's ideas. To me, it means taking a genuine interest in what the writer has to say, reading with a desire to help him or her make the writing as effective as it can be, and bringing awareness to places in the text where something could be added or expanded. For peer review, response can involve communicating what could be revised and helping the writer balance suggestions with his or her own vision for the text, which can foster sessions where student writers are working together for the common goal of addressing assignments in unique and effective ways. Instructors can offer students key guidelines they can refer to during reader response in the classroom. This can help student writers to have a basis for their responses and more consistently offer useful, meaningful response, focusing their comments and offering productive feedback for fellow writers. Feedback is essential for student writers as they navigate writing at the college level. In the collaborative composition course, it can help writers to further develop their compositions throughout the writing process.

CHAPTER V

FULL-CLASS DISCUSSION AND COLLABORATION

Exploring research about class discussion and patterns of classroom discourse can help reveal ways for students and instructors to move toward greater collaboration and for a wide range of voices to emerge in the composition classroom. In addition to small group writing conferences, full-class discussions and activities can be integrated into collaborative learning composition classes and engage students and instructors in course materials and assignments. Class discussions are important to the collaborative classroom because they can promote student engagement and offer students an opportunity to hear a wide range of ideas and views. Understanding research on various types of moves in classroom discourse can help instructors facilitate more effective classroom discussions and prompt stronger student engagement. In this chapter, I examine Arno Bellack et al.'s classic research on various types of moves used in classroom discourse, including soliciting, reacting, structuring, and responding moves; explore David Wallace and Helen Rothschild Ewald's scholarship on alternative speech genres, or interaction patterns that differ from traditional classroom discourse; and examine research by Martin Nystrand and Adam Gamoran on using the communication practices of uptake, authentic questions, and deictic references. I also present strategies for facilitating effective classroom discussions discussed by Barbara Davis, Margaret Lyday, and E. Kathleen Booher.

Class discussions can be integral to courses where students can have the opportunity to assert their views and to hear their classmates' perspectives in addition to the ideas and materials presented by their instructors. Margaret Lyday writes that in order for class discussions to be successful, teachers need to have some goal in mind for the discussion, and students need

sufficient “raw material” to be able to contribute, whether from “previous experience, reading, or prior class presentation” (217). I have observed that students’ contributions can lead to other students’ and instructors’ contributions, fostering collaboration in the classroom. For example, one student speaks about a particular assignment or reading. Another student responds either directly or indirectly to that student’s response, offering his or her own perspective. The instructor offers a response that builds upon both of the students’ contributions, followed by a third student initiating a different but related topic for discussion. When all students are free to speak and to both maintain and alter the direction of discussion, discussions can occur that are interesting, lively, and foster students’ learning and engagement.

Working in the writing center has provided me with models for what collaborative discussion can look like. When the writing center is especially active, with four or five students working with tutors at various tables, a visitor entering the center could observe students and tutors of various ages and backgrounds talking about writing. Most of the talk concerns assignments, ideas for compositions, writing conventions, and writing classes. Participants in writing center sessions can learn not only about writing, but how to work more effectively with other human beings—how to hear and process wide ranging viewpoints and ways of speaking. The composition course, too, can bring students together for the purpose of discussing writing. They can share ideas in response to assignments and learn about working collaboratively with other writers as they construct multiple drafts of their writing.

When students work together in the composition classroom, each student, as Ken Macrorie emphasizes, brings a unique perspective. It is important that students are heard, especially in the contexts of writing courses and the writing center, where their thoughts, ideas

and research can form the basis for their writing. Students can learn more effectively when they not only listen, but speak, when they can connect both intellectually and socially with the content of their courses. A collaborative classroom can bring students into a context where they can get to know one another because the very framework of the course can ask for students' verbal and written contributions. Students can learn more about what it means to write by participating in a collaborative course with fellow writers and an instructor who helps facilitate an ongoing discussion about writing.

Nystrand and Gamoran argue that engaging classroom talk resembles conversation because it is not predicted in advance and is negotiated (265). Jim Cummins writes that “reciprocal-interaction instruction” requires a “genuine dialogue between student and teacher in both oral and written modalities, guidance and facilitation rather than control of student learning by the teacher, and the engagement of student/student talk in a collaborative learning context (qtd. in Nystrand and Gamoran 266). Genuine dialogue lends itself well to collaborative learning because such dialogue can invite a mutual flow of ideas exchanged among classroom participants.

Analyzing speech genres can help reveal what traditional classroom discourse consists of and offer a basis for trying alternative patterns of discourse, which can foster more genuine dialogue in the composition classroom. According to Xedia Hadjioannou, a speech genre is “a distinctive type of interaction” (370). Classrooms have speech genres, or patterns of interaction used by teachers and students, and research has been conducted about traditional classroom speech genres. Hugh Mehan found that traditional classroom discourse involves teachers initiating questions, students responding, and teachers evaluating students' answers (qtd.

in Nystrand and Gamoran 263-4). Mehan, Nystrand, and Gamoran's research was preceded by Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman, and Smith's influential scholarship on patterns of classroom interaction.

Moves in Classroom Discourse

Bellack et al. developed a coding system for classroom discourse and conducted a study of discourse in 15 "problems of democracy" classes in seven high schools in suburban and metropolitan New York City (9). Their scholarship can offer a basis for understanding traditional patterns of classroom interaction. Since their research was published in 1966, numerous scholars have written further about discourse in the classroom, including ways to facilitate alternative patterns of discourse. Bellack et al. coded each discourse move in the classroom as a "soliciting," "structure," "response," or "reaction" move (16) and all types of moves were made by both students and teachers at varying frequencies.

Understanding these moves can reveal patterns of classroom interaction that have been regarded by other researchers as traditional classroom speech genres. I view traditional classroom discourse as useful in that it is one way of communicating course content. However, traditional classroom discourse places the teacher in the role of initiating most topics and questions, and I would like to see classroom discourse offer students more opportunities to offer ideas and questions themselves. The moves made within traditional classroom discourse can be used in alternative discourse, but as suggested by David Wallace and Helen Rothschild Ewald, a greater proportion of the moves can be made by students. This can lead to more student-centered dialogue in the composition classroom, with instructors facilitating discussions that seek to

involve as many students in the classroom as possible and providing ample opportunities for students to express their thoughts, concerns, questions, and ideas.

According to Bellack et al., the individual addressed by a soliciting move can be the teacher, every student in the class, any single student, or one specific student (95). A soliciting move asks a classroom participant to do a certain activity or task, which can be either substantive or instructional (88). A substantive task asks a classroom participant to engage with the class's subject matter, while an instructional task connects to maintaining the classroom's social context and may be responded to either with either a linguistic or a nonlinguistic move (88). For instance, a soliciting move addressing a substantive task could ask, "What is the purpose of the thesis in this paper?" An instructional task, in contrast, could ask, "Could someone please volunteer to distribute the assignment sheets?" Soliciting moves can take the form of assertions, commands, or requests that expect a response (132).

In Bellack et al.'s study, soliciting moves accounted for one third of interactions, and 86.9% were made by teachers, constituting 28% of teachers' total moves and 11.3% of students' moves. This suggests that teachers made the majority of soliciting moves in the classroom, although students did initiate some soliciting moves: students proposed 8.3% of soliciting moves asking for a substantive task and 4.4% for an instructional task (108). Bellack et. al's summary is that teachers were the main initiators of soliciting moves and asked for substantive tasks more often than instructional tasks (109). When students made soliciting moves, they typically expected the teacher to be the responder; 83.3% of soliciting moves by students were directed toward teachers (109). Teachers' soliciting moves usually expected a response from one student.

Soliciting moves from students directed toward other students were rare (130). In other words, students seldom asked one another questions with substantive or instructional content.

Soliciting moves could be, but were not always, framed as requests. According to Bellack et al., about 65.5% of teachers' soliciting moves took the form of requests, while students' soliciting moves were 90.6% requests (122). Teachers expressed soliciting moves as 29.8% commands, while students express their soliciting moves as 7.6% commands (122). In other words, both teachers and students more often made soliciting moves in the form of requests, although students' moves were more likely than teachers' moves to be requests.

Bellack et al. assert that responding moves, in relation to soliciting moves, occurred when someone in the class attempted to fulfill a task asked for by a soliciting move (93). Responding moves constituted 30% of all moves in the discourse (123). Overall, responding moves included 65.4% of students' moves and 5.5% of teachers' moves (124). For example, if a student says, "The author uses a lot of quotes" in response to the soliciting move "What did you notice about the essay we read?" the student's statement could be considered a responding move.

The difference between responding moves and reacting moves, Bellack et al. write, is responding moves only occur in relation to soliciting moves, while the purpose of reacting moves is to rate another move positively or negatively or to clarify, expand on, or synthesize what was said in another move (165). In Bellack et al.'s study, reacting moves accounted for 38.9% of teachers' moves and 15.1% of students' moves (190). An example of reacting move is "Good point" (173). Reacting moves, however, do not necessarily evaluate, and in Bellack et al.'s research can be statements that simply relate to the content of other moves.

In contrast to reacting and responding moves, Bellack et al. write that structuring moves direct classroom activities and the behavior of teachers and students (133). Among other uses, they may propose the topic for discussion, launch or stop interactions between students and teachers, announce an activity that is coming, propose an activity, or some combination of the above (135-9). In Bellack et al.'s research, most activities referred to by structure moves involved talking, for example, "Let's now discuss. . ." or "Let's go into. . ." (156). Overall, 61.4% of structure moves announced talking (156). This suggests that structure moves can be used to indicate that further discussion in the classroom will occur.

Alternative Speech Genres

David Wallace and Helen Rothschild Ewald suggest strategies for encouraging alternative speech genres, patterns of interaction that differ from traditional classroom instruction. In analyses of discussion in their classrooms, David Wallace and Helen Rothschild Ewald used Bellack et al.'s coding system and categorized conversation turns in their classroom discussions as reaction, solicit, structure, or response moves (41). In discussing Bellack et al.'s research, Wallace and Ewald write that "the sequence of solicit, response, and reaction moves was much like what later researchers called the IRE pattern: teachers initiated topics with solicit moves, students responded, and teachers reacted with evaluations of students' responses" (41). In other words, Wallace and Ewald connect Bellack et al.'s research to later research on traditional classroom discourse.

To study how classroom discourse proceeded in their own classes, Wallace and Ewald analyzed both the moves they made in discussion and the moves made by students. In their research, they found that the most common pattern of interaction in their classes involved

“students speaking directly to each other in reaction moves” (53). Wallace and Ewald call this student-student interaction “cross-talk” (38). They indicate that cross-talk can be indicative of alternative speech genres. Wallace and Ewald add that another indicator of alternative speech genres is the degree to which students and instructors “share the floor” (34). In traditional classroom interaction, students take about one third of conversation turns, and teachers take about two thirds (34). Wallace and Ewald’s research highlights what alternative speech genres can look like in the classroom: students speaking directly to other students and sharing the floor with instructors. Cross talk can lead to greater collaboration among students because they can ask and answer questions proposed by one another and use reaction moves to build upon others’ contributions.

Instructors can participate in class discussions without primarily using the IRE pattern of initiating questions, waiting for student responses, and making evaluative replies. Wallace and Ewald suggest a number of strategies for shifting from IRE and using alternative speech genres in the classroom. They recommend that teachers make structure and solicit moves that encourage students to be active participants (54). For instance, in a graduate class, Ewald used two structure moves that set up class activities, and students engaged in cross-talk in response to her structure moves for the majority of the class period (54). However, Wallace and Ewald note, “The sparseness of the guidance from Helen in this discussion must be seen as a function of the small class size, the educational experience of the graduate students, and the design of the course” (55). Using alternative speech genres might be more challenging in the undergraduate composition course, where class sizes are larger. Whether using minimal structure moves in a specific class

would be feasible depends on what is necessary to teach that day and also on the degree to which students offer their own contributions and talk directly to one another about the topic at hand.

In addition to encouraging cross-talk among students, authentic questions and a practice called uptake can also be used to encourage student engagement. Nystrand and Gamoran assert that uptake and authentic questions can lead to higher reciprocity in the classroom. According to Nystrand and Gamoran, authentic questions do not have prespecified answers (261).

Additionally, they are open-ended and signal that teachers are interested in hearing students' thoughts (264). For example, if a teacher asks, "Why do you think that?" this can be considered an authentic question and lead to greater engagement from students than asking a question with a specific set of answers. Wallace and Ewald suggest that authentic questions are rarely posed in traditional discourse in the classroom: in IRE-style discussions, teachers ask questions to see if students know the 'correct answer'" (57). In contrast to questions used in IRE-style discussion, Wallace and Ewald write that their questions "invited students to nominate topics or encouraged students to explain their positions further or to clarify and challenge positions taken by others" (57). In other words, questions in Wallace and Ewald's classes were used more as a way to encourage students to express their views than to provide a preset answer.

For a question to count as uptake in their study, Nystrand and Gamoran specified that it "had to incorporate a previous answer" (273). This could mean quoting from the answer (273). For instance, if a student says, "I agree with the author," and a teacher responds, "Why do you agree; can you say more?" the teacher incorporates the word "agree" into his or her follow-up question, quoting the student. Wallace and Ewald also recommend using uptake (55). According to Wallace and Ewald, when instructors engage in uptake, they "pick up on a topic mentioned by

students and expand it in further discussion” (55). For example, if an instructor says, “Earlier there was some confusion about ways to use anecdotes in this essay; does anyone have ideas for how to do that?” he or she is engaging in uptake by mentioning the content of students’ previous classroom discourse and raising a question to encourage additional discussion based on what students have said.

Another communication practice Nystrand and Gamoran suggest is making a deictic reference that points to the previous response (273). A deictic reference could be “What do you mean by *that*?” (273; emphasis in original). The word *that* makes reference to the previous statement without quoting it directly. It’s important to note that in a collaborative classroom, both instructors and students can use uptake and authentic questions.

Further, Wallace and Ewald note the benefits of “encouraging students to elaborate with direct or indirect affirmations” (56). Wallace asks students questions for clarification and questions that encourage students to comment more, while Ewald uses affirmations showing that she is listening actively, such as “uh-huh” and “okay.” Using affirmations in the classroom can communicate that students’ contributions are valuable. Students may also affirm one another’s comments by noting their appreciation for what another student has said.

Another strategy Wallace and Ewald suggest for moving toward alternative speech genres is letting long pauses elapse in the classroom when needed (55). They write, “In the two class sessions we have been discussing, silences lasting more than ten seconds were fairly common” (55). Brock Dethier also suggests waiting for students to speak (143). When students do not at first make contributions to class discussion, leaving some silence in the class period for

other students to respond to that student can help ensure that students do not become used to responding only to instructors' questions.

Although Wallace and Ewald write that most discourse in their classes involved cross-talk, where students made direct responses to one another, they note that sometimes they did directly intervene in discussion when they found it appropriate (58). For instance, Ewald took time to refocus and summarize discussion of a case study, and Wallace asked students to come up with discussion topics and used a structure move to ask students to reconvene after peer review (59). While students were participating in cross-talk, Wallace managed the “pace and direction of the discussion” (59). Instructors can negotiate their roles in the classroom while encouraging students to actively respond.

Flexibility in Classroom Interaction

I see uptake, authentic questions, structuring moves, soliciting moves, responding moves, and reacting moves as tools that instructors and students can use to navigate discussion and classroom activity, with room for flexibility in interaction styles depending on the business at hand during a particular class period and the preferences and needs of students and instructors. Rather than a set of predefined guidelines, I value flexibility in interaction. Instructors can model using uptake, authentic questions, soliciting, structure, response, and reacting moves and encourage students to join discussions using various moves themselves: asking questions, responding to classmates, and proposing topics, with the general expectation that they connect to the flow of discussion. Instructors could use their turns in discussion to introduce key pieces of information, to spark further contributions from students and to help ensure that a range of students are adding to the discussion. The tasks and activities instructors propose could

encourage maximum participation from students and be designed to use the time allocated for a class period as effectively as possible, inviting all students to speak.

Sometimes students need encouragement to contribute to class discussion, and instructors can take an active role in fostering class norms and practices that encourage student engagement. Barbara Davis recommends having students introduce themselves at the start of the term, learning students' names, and encouraging students to learn one another's names (75). Davis also emphasizes making sure each student in the class has the chance to speak during class in the first two or three weeks of the term because it can become more difficult for students to contribute the longer they proceed without talking in class; she recommends facilitating small group sessions early to help all students participate (76). Her suggestions about offering each student the opportunity to speak early in the term and encouraging introductions are important to ensure that a full range of students' voices are heard in the classroom.

Margaret Lyday emphasizes calling on students by name, using their ideas as a springboard for the next point, writing comments on the board, summarizing the major points of discussion by using students' examples, asking for reactions to comments made by students, and offering enough time to think of responses. She emphasizes that teachers should be willing to wait for students to offer a response in discussion (217-8). Additionally, she notes, "Sometimes, providing questions for students to write about before class or during the first few minutes of class gives [students] a head start" (218). Davis writes that instructors can take notes about what arises from discussion and use the notes to summarize, keeping track of areas requiring further clarification or students' responses that could lead to further points (69). She also recommends

using brainstorming sessions in the classroom where anyone can offer an idea without being “questioned, praised, or criticized,” and all responses are noted on the board (67-8).

Davis also offers guidelines that can be helpful for instructors in forming questions to ask students during discussions. She recommends keeping questions “brief and clear,” avoiding questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no” and instead aiming for “how” and “why” questions that students can think about for themselves (85). Focused questions without a “single right answer,” she emphasizes, can be more effective than broad questions, and it’s better to avoid “leading questions,” where the answer is implied in the question (86). These guidelines can help shape questions that encourage students to think about and articulate their own answers.

Additionally, Davis suggests posing questions “based on shared experience,” such as events students have attended (67). Shared experience could also include asking questions about a reading that students have been assigned or a campus-wide issue versus a topic that only a small portion of the class may have familiarity with. For example, asking the class if they are familiar with an unassigned book or film may engage the students who have read or seen it, but those who have not experienced it can feel left out during the discussion.

Intentionally closing class discussions could help students not only process what has been said, but understand what is coming in the next class session. To close a discussion, John Clarke highlights the importance of asking students if they have any more questions and offering a closing summary that signals the discussion is about to end, emphasizing key points, and offering a framework for the next class (qtd. in Davis 71). E. Kathleen Booher describes an activity called *processing*, where instructors facilitate a full-class discussion following work in small groups; she suggests selecting two or three questions to help the discussion have a focus (43). Davis’

guidelines for forming questions could offer a useful starting point for instructors in selecting questions. Booher suggests that processing sessions can range from a few minutes to twenty minutes or longer, depending on the instructor's objectives, and can be a useful way to bring closure to a class (44).

Seating arrangement can be important for facilitating collaborative discussion. About seating arrangements, Booher suggests the following: "It helps if students are seated in a somewhat circular or horseshoe arrangement, individually or clustered in groups. The more eye contact each student can make with others in the entire group, the more likely they all will be to engage in dialogue rather than to speak only to the teacher" (43). For discussions, Davis also recommends arranging seating in a semicircle so students can see one another (76). I agree that circular and horseshoe arrangements, if they are possible in a specific classroom, tend to be most conducive for discussion because they allow all students to see one another. These furniture arrangements may not be possible in every classroom, but if the space allows, discussion can be greatly enhanced by intentionally creating an arrangement that allows for maximum interaction among all classroom participants.

Full-class discussion is important to the composition class because it is one of the major contexts in which students have the opportunity to hear one another's ideas, questions, concerns, and perspectives about assignments and course concepts. Class discussions can increase students' capacity to build community in the classroom and take a meaningful stake in their own learning. Providing ample opportunities for students to contribute and influence the direction of discussions can help students ensure that their questions are answered, that their concerns are addressed, and that they can collectively share ideas on how their coursework is progressing. As

David Wallace and Helen Rothschild Ewald assert, using alternative speech genres in the classroom can offer students more opportunities to shape the direction of discussions.

Alternative speech genres can make learning more active, convey that students' ideas matter, and emphasize that communication in the classroom is reciprocal. Mutual respect is an essential element of classroom interaction and is a prerequisite for both students and instructors to feel comfortable sharing their ideas. Showing respect can mean being open to diversity in thinking and background and ensuring that each student in the class has ample opportunities to speak. Instructors can both model respect for students and clearly communicate their expectations for respectful classroom behavior to students when necessary. This can help ensure that a space conducive for collaboration is fostered. Creating an open framework for class discussions, while still conveying the expectation to stay on the topic of academic writing as much as possible, can offer students more opportunities to make meaningful contributions and to help build a classroom setting that is alive with the sounds of many voices and acknowledges all that students have to offer to the university. Discussion in the composition classroom can provide a space for students both to be heard and to listen to one another's contributions as they discover writing and collaboration.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Collaboration in the composition classroom can build a classroom environment where students are supported and engaged as they practice writing at the college level. Through small group activities such as peer review and full-class discussions, students can be invited to share their views and ideas and participate actively during each class session. Collaborative learning is an effective framework for the composition course because it can be student-centered, reciprocal, and interactive for instructors and students alike. When students have ample opportunities to speak and participate in the classroom, a classroom community can be formed that supports students through the duration of a composition course. I have not forgotten the communities that were forged in my undergraduate and graduate writing courses, and I suspect that other students don't easily forget the interpersonal connections that are fostered in the classroom. Students can not only make friends in collaborative composition courses, they can gain confidence in their ability to convey their thinking through writing in the collaborative composition classroom and beyond.

A collaborative framework invites students to get to know one another and build connections that may be conducive to their development as writers, and they can engage in activities designed to help them think about writing: their own papers, their peers' writing, and the contributions of published authors. Collaborative activities in the composition course can be geared toward helping students learn more about elements of composition, such as audience, purpose, and organization, and support them in navigating specific assignments. Additionally,

multiple-draft assignments can help students build their individual writing skills, while collaborative activities can support students throughout their writing processes.

For the composition course, collaborative learning can be a flexible framework for instructors to draw upon in determining ways to approach specific course content. They may choose to use direct instruction when they feel it is necessary or appropriate in presenting course material and facilitate collaborative activities at other times. The collaborative classroom can be flexible enough to shift between direct instruction and collaborative activities, depending on the task at hand and the flow of each class session. In addition to collaborative learning as a framework, utilizing CAST's Universal Design for Learning can ensure that all students have access to class materials and opportunities to engage in the curriculum in individualized ways. I envision a composition classroom where collaborative learning's focus on students' active participation in class sessions meets Universal Design for Learning's emphasis on flexibility, adaptability, and inclusiveness.

Respect for diversity is crucial in the composition classroom, as writing courses include students from a variety of backgrounds and identities. Instructors can facilitate writing courses where all students' identities, backgrounds, and home languages are valued, while still helping students learn the skills of academic discourse by teaching specific strategies and conventions for approaching writing assignments. To help ensure that diversity is respected and valued in the classroom, instructors can integrate diverse authors into the course curriculum; stress that students must be diplomatic in expressing disagreement, whether with other members of the class, the instructor, or published authors; and help maintain a classroom space that is inclusive

for students of all backgrounds and identities. This can help ensure that the collaborative classroom fosters equality and respect for all participants.

Using a collaborative framework for the composition classroom can create an academically engaging and dynamic classroom setting. Through small group activities like peer review and full-class discussions, students can work together on writing and have active conversations about ways to approach their assignments. Instructors can determine classroom procedures and activities that fit the context of their own courses and teaching styles, considering collaborative learning as a framework that can help foster students' engagement. I support collaborative learning in the composition classroom because it can invite students to learn, think, and write in community with other students and their instructors.

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