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Writers are best able to learn and improve their writing when they view writing as an ongoing process and activity that requires a writer to move through multiple drafts of the same piece. Students learn the most from the feedback they are given when it both points to their strengths and where things are working well in their writing and gives specific, constructive feedback that they can use in revision. In “Have We Ever Done a Good Job Teaching Writing?”, Bill Hart-Davidson explains how he has learned from his research that it is “the givers who gain the most from the practice of framing high-quality feedback.” Through my experiences of interviewing a first-year writing (FYW) instructor at UMass and observing one of their classes, I have realized it is not always enough to plan time for feedback-giving between students and tell them how to comment on each other’s writing. Students need to feel like they know how to give high-quality feedback in the context of the course, and the social environment of the classroom needs to foster their confidence in talking to each other about their writing.

During my interview with Coates, a freshman-year writing instructor, they talked about how they have noticed students being less willing to talk during in-class discussions after the disruptions that the earlier years of the COVID-19 pandemic caused for their education. This was in response to my question about what Coates might want to change about the structure or curriculum of FYW courses at UMass Amherst. I found it interesting to gain some insight into an instructor’s perspective on how the experiences of online schooling and other disruptions to

college-aged people's lives and schooling has appeared to impact the social and learning environments of college classrooms. They admitted they didn't have a solution for this but suggested that allowing students to spend more time together to get to know each other better would help. From what I've seen and Coates' concern about lack of engagement in discussion, students often aren't saying much to each other out loud when asked to give feedback on each other's writing in Coates' FYW classes. Coates didn't ask the students to give peer feedback during the class period I formally observed, but from what I've seen in the other section that I notetake for students tend to talk a minimal amount and quietly during peer-revision. I agree with Coates that two 75-minute class periods a week may not be enough time for students to become completely comfortable sharing and talking about their writing with each other. Although, I think that other factors likely play a role in creating this social environment in which students seem to be talking about their writing during peer-revision less than expected. I believe the guidance Coates, or any instructor, gives their students on feedback-giving and the way they structure and present activities in general plays an important role in influencing the level of engagement of their students.

Looking at Bill Hart-Davidson's description of deliberate practice and of what high-quality feedback means - which connects to what Coates' referred to in our interview as "deep revision", we can see that giving this kind of feedback and incorporating it into thoughtful revision requires instruction and practice. Hart-Davidson draws on research to demonstrate that a "program of deliberate practice" is what helps writers improve, which he summarizes as comprising of these four activities: giving high quality feedback, "planning revision focused on higher order concerns," "criterion-referenced review", and reflective writing on the previous activities. Based on conceptions of writing as a process and something that requires continual

learning for each new context one writes in, I believe it is vital that all of these activities are practiced and that students draw connections between them. Giving and receiving feedback and planning revision seem to be especially connected in learning to write, and are the basis of this concept of deliberate feedback. Without these two activities the other activities can't happen successfully. Hart-Davidson defines high-quality feedback more specifically as comments that "1) are easily understood by the receiver, 2) reference shared criteria, and 3) are actionable, allowing the receiver to make a change to their writing that will improve it".

In order for students in First Year Writing classes to benefit most from giving and receiving feedback, they need to be communicating to each other what kind of feedback they would like and talking through the feedback they give each other. Although they could be giving high-quality written feedback via written comments in a document, from what I observed it seemed like they weren't given much specific criteria from Coates' to base their feedback on. In our interview, Coates described how when they give students prompts for assignments they try to keep it as open ended as possible so students can write about their interests. It is difficult to give feedback that is helpful in revision when you don't know what writers' intentions or goals are and also don't have a set of criteria beyond a simple prompt. Students need to have some shared criteria to base their feedback, which could be criteria that the writer generates themselves. Although, if this is the case, writing instructors need to provide guidance and scaffolding to help students come up with criteria for their own writing. I think Coates does give students some direction on how to give each other feedback, but I have not seen them focus on the criteria or goals feedback should be based on.

Learning and practicing how to give high-quality feedback on someone else's writing and how to accept feedback and incorporate it into revision is among the most helpful skills that

students can gain and develop in writing courses, especially an introductory course like FYW. It is important that students feel confident in their abilities to give and receive feedback and feel comfortable discussing their writing with each other. I believe it is easier for students to effectively give the kind of high-quality feedback that Hart-Davidson advocates for if they are communicating verbally with the person whose work they're reviewing. This is important in order to understand what the writer wants from revision and to clarify or add to one's written notes. In my own experiences in classes, I am more likely to feel hesitant or unsure of my feedback on someone else's writing if I am only making comments in writing. Writing the comment out on a page or as a Google Doc comment feels more permanent and I tend to rethink my wording to make sure my tone is right and I'm being clear. Being able to read someone's work, make some written comments in the margins, and then discuss my feedback feels more low-stakes. It also makes the whole exercise feel more productive, as the writer can ask me questions or confirm that they understood my suggestions or thoughts.

Coates is warm and enthusiastic as an instructor and tries to make their class a place where students feel comfortable discussing and sharing their writing, although various factors seem to still be impeding students' ability to have robust discussions during peer-feedback and other group work times. In "Dispositions Toward Language: Teacher Constructs of Knowledge and the Ann Arbor Black English Case" by Arnetha Ball and Ted Lardner, the authors discuss different ways of understanding teacher efficacy, which they define as "a teacher's beliefs about the power she or he has to produce a positive effect on students" (478). The authors describe how teacher efficacy differs from other explanations of teacher knowledge, writing "the alternative we propose would place the teacher, the student, and the site of literacy instruction at the center, each exerting its influence on the others, each influencing an orientation toward the activity of

the course, each in relationships with the others which are at best dialogical and… often contradictory and conflictual" (Ball & Ladner 483). This view helps explain how teachers' pedagogical knowledge translates to what they do in the classroom and what happens in the classroom. In Coates' FYW sections, the influence that Coates exerts on their students as an instructor seems to at times contradict the way students view the activities and assignments they are doing.

I saw evidence of this happening in the class period I observed during an activity Coates called the "Nightmare Copyeditor Scenario". This scenario asked students to add punctuation back to an excerpt from a memoir that Coates had removed all of the punctuation and paragraph breaks from. Coates explained before introducing the exercise that punctuation is important not just for understanding, but can affect the tone of the piece and add nuance. Although Coates views punctuation as a tool to be used creatively in writing to add meaning, the way they presented and structured the activity did not convey this effectively. They told students to look at the grammar and punctuation guides listed on the course page, including common mistakes to look for while copyediting, for reference to use while re-punctuating the piece. This likely impeded students' ability to use punctuation in creative and perhaps unconventional ways during this exercise, since they were simultaneously being asked to be aware of grammatical rules and mistakes. The students worked on the document without talking much and only a few students responded when Coates asked why they were making certain choices with punctuation. This shows that students were likely not confident enough with what they were doing to be willing to share their thinking or express confusion out loud. Coates' pedagogical knowledge and ideas about what will work in the classroom did not adequately consider or anticipate how students would experience and react to this assignment. This shows how instructors play a role in

fostering or hindering students' confidence in engaging in discussion in a writing classroom, and their impact can contradict their intentions and values unintentionally.

I believe that students are more likely to gain a deeper understanding of the role and importance of revision in the writing process if they do so in conversation with other writers. This means giving each other high-quality feedback on drafts and having meaningful conversations about this feedback. The essay "Changing Your Mindset about Revision" by Robert Irvine, he characterizes writing as a "developmental process in which we discover *what we mean to say* and *how we actually say it* as we work on and rework a piece of writing" (319). Having someone else read your writing and then discuss it with you reveals how this reader is interpreting what you are saying and how effectively they think you are saying it. This allows you to evaluate if you actually mean what you are saying in your writing and to examine how you are communicating your ideas, which is the kind of reflection that allows for in-depth revision focused on broad concerns. I believe that engaging in verbal discussion during peer-feedback allows both parties to learn more from the process than just written comments would, in most cases. The instructor of a writing course plays an important role in fostering an environment in which students feel confident and comfortable doing so. There are many factors that an instructor like Coates cannot control relating to the social environment of the classroom, such as students' past experiences with feedback and revision, the amount of casual chatter students engage in before and during class, and the size of the classroom. The small size of the room made it difficult for anyone to speak in Coates FYW courses without potentially being heard by everyone. Although instructors often can't change such factors, they can provide students with the instruction and practice to build their confidence in giving feedback and revising their pieces. Structuring activities in ways that make it easier for students to engage with

confidence can foster more discussion. For exchanging feedback on writing, knowing what to base one's feedback on and how to communicate with one's partner will make open discussion easier and the activity more beneficial for students' learning.

Works Cited

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