

Creating the Perfect Storm: Making Peer Assessment Work in Required Courses

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Benefits of Peer Assessment

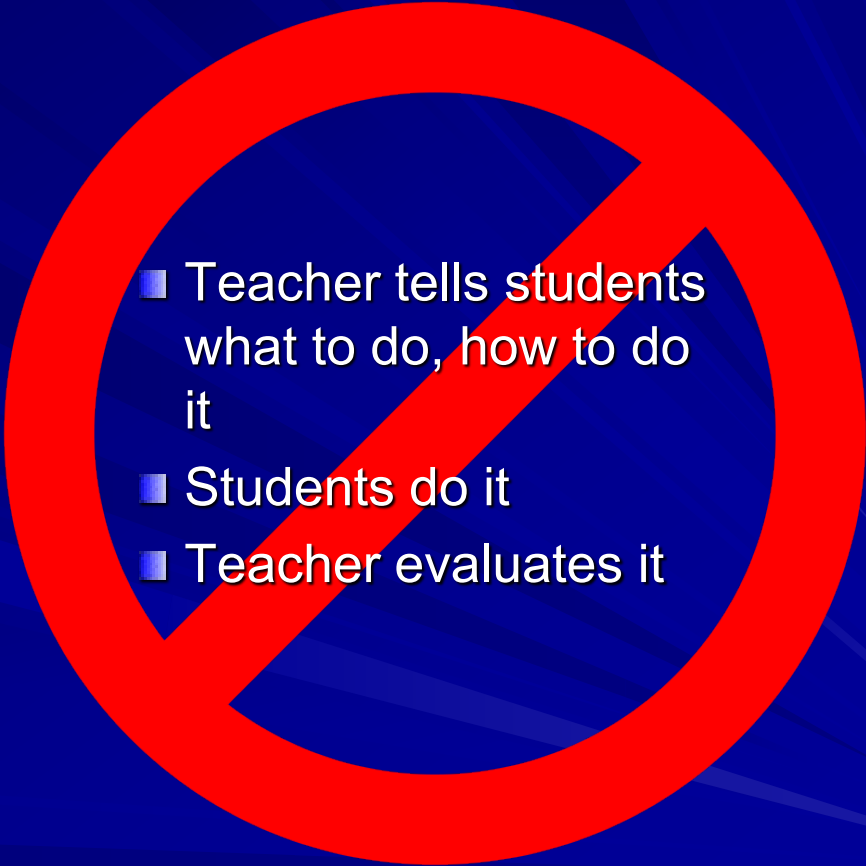
- Develops critical and analytical thinking
- Reinforces the skills and content needed for the project being assessed
- Increases and diversifies the audience
- Increases the amount (person-hours) of evaluation of each student's project
- Saves grading time, allowing teachers time to engage students more strategically

Problems with Peer Assessment

- Is it valid, reliable, and fair?
- It is time consuming. Is it worth it?
- Practical obstacles among students
 - Lack of motivation (esp. in required courses)
 - Desire to “help” friends
 - Ideas about “equality”
 - Social pressure from peers
 - Confusion about the process
 - Lack of understanding, expertise – feel unqualified
 - Little justification provided for grades awarded

Deeper “Problem” with Peer Assessment

- Challenges culture of traditional education
 - Decenters the teacher
 - Teacher is no longer the “arbiter of good”
 - Can be uncomfortable for both students and teachers

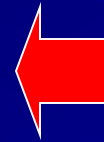
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- Teacher tells students what to do, how to do it
 - Students do it
 - Teacher evaluates it

The Perfect Storm

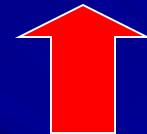
- Building critical and analytical skills into the whole project
- Practical techniques to address obstacles

Building critical and analytical skills into the whole project

- (RGS/CHAT approach)
- Analyzing the genre
 - Collect examples of a _____
 - What is a (“good”) _____ like?
 - Why is it that way? Who is involved? Where does it go? What does it do? ...
- Composing a text in that genre
- Self evaluation of my text
 - Does it match my analysis?



Peer group
assesses
process and
product



Teacher
encourages
careful,
serious
assessment

Practical techniques to address obstacles

- Lessening, diffusing social pressure on students
 - Making the assessment anonymous (for both assessors and authors)
 - Doing the assessment across sections
 - Having students evaluate projects individually (for homework) before the group evaluates them
- Encouraging learning from peers; creating positive peer pressure to work seriously
 - Having students do the assessment in groups with a diversity of ability levels
 - Using Google docs collaboratively – grading group members can see each others' comments on the projects they are evaluating and respond to them

Practical techniques to address obstacles

- Facilitating and building better discernment in evaluation
 - Having students grade multiple projects with a range of quality
 - Using the words Amazing, Good, Adequate, Poor for assessment (not the letter grades A, B, C, D)
 - Requiring students to provide justification for ratings awarded (annotations on the projects, brief summary notes on the grading charts, letters to the authors)
 - Having students and groups rank the projects they grade (best to worst)

Practical techniques to address obstacles

- Supporting students in a difficult task
 - Developing (with students) clear criteria for the project and for the assessment
 - Having a clear process for the assessment – step by step instructions, yet not making the process too tedious
 - Giving students intuitive tools, e.g. individual and group evaluation charts
 - Using a similar system / process repeatedly throughout the semester
 - Being transparent about my involvement in the process – how I will review student assessment (e.g. “teacher use only” parts of forms)

Practical techniques to address obstacles

- Reassuring students uncomfortable with peer assessment
 - Explicitly mentioning the pedagogical value of peer assessment and discussing its validity and reliability
 - Emphasizing to students that I will review the projects and the evaluations and may, with good reason, tweak or change student ratings
 - Allowing students to appeal grades (with justification)
- Providing extrinsic motivation
 - Awarding a significantly weighted grade for the assessment work (based on quality and quantity of comments, charts, discussion, justification of ratings, etc.)

Example Project

■ *This I Believe* essay project

- “In this short project we will practice the process of analyzing a genre, composing a text in that genre, and evaluating our text against our analysis. While there are many ways to “do” this analysis and composing, for this project we will follow the process outlined in my *Analyzing Genres and Composing Texts* document. The genre / text for this project is the *This I Believe* essay. See <http://thisibelieve.org/>”
- Involved individual work and review and discussion with other students
- Criteria for each part (analysis, composing, self-evaluation) were provided and discussed

Example Evaluation Process

- Students submitted the projects on Google Docs
- Based on previous grades, I created grading groups of varied ability.
- I anonymized the projects and distributed them to the grading groups using Google Docs.
- I provided evaluation instructions and individual and group evaluation forms (see PDFs)
- Students evaluated the projects individually first (annotating the projects in Google Docs), then in their grading groups
- I reviewed and graded the individual and group evaluations – which involved a brief review of the projects

Some Good Results

- Overall, I found the evaluations to be “accurate” – the students mostly awarded the same grade as I would (the average of the grades awarded was 83%). I also noticed that there was a good degree of agreement among the students.
- I was impressed at the analytical and critical depth of the discussions during the group grading sessions.
- I was similarly impressed with the quality of the comments and letters written by the students to their peers
- Specific examples:

Examples of Student Evaluation

Our group ranked your essay as adequate. We based our decision on a few exemplary aspects of your essay and several of the lacking aspects of your essay.

In part one, we feel like you could have gone more in depth on the genre analysis, but you did supply a good overall description of the TIB genre. It also would have helped you to have more specific examples, perhaps including examples from essays that you read. Referring back to your statement that the genre should not include any exciting or enjoyable features, we thought the exact opposite. TIB first originated to inspire, and a way of doing that is entertaining your audience. We did like how you described the formality of the genre by saying that an essay should not be written like a speech.

Examples of Student Evaluation

In part 1 of your project, you supplied a good, concise, accurate description of the context of the genre. You included many examples and explained how each one followed the genre. We liked that you included a precaution noting that the writers weren't restricted to the proposed guidelines. In general, it was a very well written and concise summary of the genre. It was enjoyable to read a fluid summary with good word choice in it. The only thing we can thought may improve the summary of the genre would be including the history and trajectory of it.

Examples of Student Evaluation

In part 2, we felt you did a very good job of making your essay. We liked how you told the story about the conversation you had with your sister; you really explained when it was exactly that you came to realize that you had this belief. The only thing we felt you should change is the part in the last paragraph where you your belief being “wrong or ridiculous”. We thought that this comment brought down the overall effectiveness of your essay.

Discussion

- Is it valid, reliable, and fair? (all citations below relate to English composition)
 - Huge discussion – What do they mean? Who decides? Do we want them? See, e.g. Colombini and McBride (2012)
 - Straighter answer – Yes, reliable (with training) Bird (2011) - 76% correspondence between teacher rating and student rating (on 7 point scale)
 - Yes, focus on the learning with community-based assessment (and rubric development) (Inoue, 2004; Elbow, 2006)
 - My experience – yes, but not for everything. I was less impressed with the group peer grading with a project that was more sophisticated and involved more new and varied content. (APGdb project)

Bird, R. (2011). Peer Evaluation in the Composition Classroom. Presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Atlanta, GA.

Colombini, C. B., & McBride, M. (2012). "Storming and norming": Exploring the value of group development models in addressing conflict in communal writing assessment. *Assessing Writing*, 17(4), 191–207. doi:10.1016/j.asw.2012.05.002

Elbow, P. (2006). Do we need a single standard of value for institutional assessment? An essay response to Asao Inoue's "community-based assessment pedagogy". *Assessing Writing*, 11(2), 81–99. doi:10.1016/j.asw.2006.07.003

Inoue, A. B. (2004). Community-based assessment pedagogy. *Assessing Writing*, 9(3), 208–238. doi:10.1016/j.asw.2004.12.001

Discussion

- It is time consuming. Is it worth it?
 - More class time, but develops more versatile skill set (when used appropriately)
- Practical obstacles are reduced with smart, careful implementation
- Educational culture? Instead of either/or, how about both/and?

Your comments, ideas ...

Thank you!

Further comments, ideas?

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