In this issue of CDTL Brief, colleagues from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences discuss various aspects of peer teaching and learning, including their experiences in using Peer Editing and Peer Reviews in their classrooms, as well as the challenges they faced when they applied these pedagogical tools to foster active, student-centred learning.

Moving Beyond Student Presentations: Peer Teaching

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Being a firm believer in independent collaborative learning, I invited students to adopt the role of “peer teachers” on a new English Language module (EL3204 “Discourse Structure”) that I offered for the first time, last year.

I explained the rationale for this experiment to students using a “meal” metaphor. In the traditional “guest-host” model, the host is responsible for planning, preparing and serving the meal as appetizingly as possible. In contrast, at a potluck meal, everyone contributes a dish, making for a less onerous and richly-varied meal.

The students clearly understood the metaphor and the benefits to be gained from adopting the potluck model in our class. Instead of being limited by the teacher’s preferred learning style, they could enjoy a variety of teaching-learning styles and formats, by taking turns, adopting the role of “peer teacher”.

I began by asking students to form affinity groups comprising five members each, during the first seminar. Next, in order to give them some time to get to know one another, I volunteered to facilitate the first five seminars. In Week 6, instead of our usual seminar, students had “dedicated time” to meet and discuss their teaching objectives and learning strategies in readiness for the second half of the semester. In Weeks 7 through 11, two affinity groups adopted the role of peer teachers, running the seminar for roughly an hour each, on either side of the 15-minute class break (leaving roughly 15 minutes at the end of class to tie up any loose ends).

As “peer teachers”, affinity groups were responsible for explicitly articulating two to three key learning objectives, and preparing the learning resources (materials and activities) to achieve these objectives. As I explained to students, their goal was not to “tell” the class what they as “teachers” knew, but to help the class discover this knowledge for themselves.

I should highlight that some peer teachers kept calling their task a presentation, a genre that our students are familiar with, given their prior educational experiences. It took me several iterations to successfully explain the difference between ‘presentations’ and ‘discussion facilitation’. In presentations, the spotlight tends to be on the presenter who dispenses “useful” information. The audience typically learns by listening. In contrast, discussion facilitation is “other-centred”. Granted, it may encompass a

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The Use of Peer Review as a Pedagogical Tool in a New Media Ethics Module

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Over the last years, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), particularly CNM, has seen a slow yet steady rise in the use of peer review in the classroom. This is mostly due to the increasing emphasis in our Faculty on student-centred and “bottom-up” teaching and learning. Many of my colleagues see peer review as a valid exercise for training their students on how to engage in the constructive criticism of each others’ work, as well as in sounding out possible areas of trouble and disagreement within their project groups. Despite the obvious teaching and learning merits of the peer review, I have always been sceptical of its application in the undergraduate classroom setting.

The source of this scepticism is threefold. Firstly, I have doubts as to the extent students, who are still in the midst of mastering their own argumentative writing skills, can be sufficiently critical and discerning of their classmate’s written work. On top of this, many students tend to shy away from being perceived as overly “negative” towards their peers. Secondly, I worry about the potential conflicts of interest which may arise when students assess a fellow classmate’s work; in particular, I am doubtful as to whether a student would provide accurate constructive criticism because she may feel that by doing so, she is giving her peer an unfair advantage over herself—an example of the various degrees of egoism and altruism that unavoidably come into play when it comes to in-class peer reviews. Finally, I think it is crucial to embed the peer review into the module not only as a superficial pedagogical exercise, but to connect it as closely to that module’s content as possible. In other words, the peer review must be appropriate not only in terms of its practical application towards assessment in the classroom, but also in terms of illustrating or enabling the discussion of core theories and concepts taught in the module.

In light of the second concern over the issues of ethical egoism and altruism, as well as the third requirement of ensuring that the peer review is intimately connected to the course content, I decided to put my scepticism to the test by introducing peer review in my honours module NM4204 “Ethics in Communications and New Media”. This module focuses on critical thinking, moral self-awareness and responsible action in the face of complex and ambiguous situations in the information age. Debate in this module largely builds on key texts and concepts from ethical theory and the philosophy of technology. Introducing peer review in NM4204 hence allowed me to link the objectives of the exercise to the module’s teaching of skills as well as its content. Students not only learn how to provide their fellow classmates with another perspective (besides mine) on their moral argument and in doing so improve their own methods of moral argumentation as well as their peer’s moral line of reasoning, they will also learn how to reflect on their own beliefs and assumptions through the “mirror” of a peer’s position on the issue. Furthermore, students will have the opportunity to experience the effects of a written moral engagement with their peers, besides the regular face-to-face verbal engagement in class; in other words, they get to experience how the argumentative technology or medium makes a difference in terms of the ethics of academic debate and criticism.

The students were each required to review one of their classmates’ midterm essays in about 80–100 words. Their peers could then use these remarks to enhance their final essays if they wanted to. I assigned the reviews randomly. In
order to make the introduction of peer review in this module as fair as possible in light of the students’ various conflicting interests, I decided that the exercise would count towards only 5% of the reviewers’ final grades. I also decided not to have the review influence the peers’ midterm grades to prevent the exercise from being only about the scoring of marks. When explaining the purpose of the peer review in class, I especially stressed the fact that the reviewers had a moral duty to their classmates to do the review properly. Since the reviews were to be posted openly on the IVLE forum, this appeal to ethical altruism could then ideally work hand in hand with the in-class peer pressure to perform the review properly. To help students structure their reviews, I provided three additional guiding questions:

1. What do you feel is or are the essay’s greatest strength(s)?

2. What do you think is the strongest objection or counter-argument to the essay’s moral argument(s)?

3. What does your reaction to the essay tell you about your own convictions or assumptions?

The foremost aim of these questions was to ensure that students do not become fixated on commenting about the superficial details, but to focus instead on the larger argument and structure as well as their own position vis-à-vis the moral dilemma presented in the essay. Also, the questions were meant to point students towards the aim of the review, namely to facilitate a “re–vision”—in other words, to help their peers work through the merits and shortcomings of the (moral) vision purported by their essays.

All my initial reservations and scepticism notwithstanding, the outcomes of this peer review experiment were overwhelmingly positive. The exercise enjoyed full class participation, and the reviews were of a surprisingly high quality, with many of the postings far exceeding the 80–100 non-binding word limit. The criticisms and suggestions focused almost exclusively on the “deeper” and more important issues of form and content in the essays, and many students added a few self-reflexive lines at the end of their reviews. In a brief classroom discussion after all the reviews had been submitted, many expressed appreciation towards their fellow classmates for providing such engaged constructive criticism, as well as a general appreciation for being able to read their peers’ essays. Furthermore, they expressed an additional awareness of the difference the medium made in the way their criticisms were expressed. For instance, many commented that, while the distancing effect of the online written form gave them more time to think of the best way to formulate their suggestions, it also lacked access to bodily cues such as intonation, hand gestures, and facial expressions, which are available in a face–to–face oral setting. Finally, several students ended up incorporating or at times even rebutting their peers’ views and suggestions in their final essays. These positive results convinced me that peer review can certainly be a valuable tool when it is adequately connected to a module’s pedagogy in terms of the module’s skills and theories.

Nonetheless, some concerns about peer reviews still remain. For instance, it may be better to assign students based on the similarity in essay topics. Also, to ensure that the final essays receive a fair assessment, I may require everyone to use the reviewers’ comments in their final essays one way or the other. It may also be better to make the word limit binding so that reviews do not differ too much in length. Finally, almost all students mentioned that the 5% weightage was too little for the amount of effort they have put in to writing the reviews. However, increasing the percentage of marks for the exercise may diminish its emphasis on the guiding principles of moral altruism and duty students have to display towards their peers, in favour of simple marks scoring. Yet, I would suggest that this ethical scenario is more complex. This is because, while the practice of altruism is of course already never purely altruistic, this dilemma also encompasses my own moral duty as a teacher to provide fair assessment to my students. After all, the module is situated in an institution where marks and grades provide the moral justification for the continued on pg 9...
Peer Editing as a Learning Tool for Writing for the Media

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The following brief arose from my project for my PDP-T practicum, and was experimentation in instructional planning for me.

Writing skills for communication management

The designers of NM3219 “Writing for Communication Management” wanted to build the writing skills of communication management students and expand their understanding of the power and challenge of writing effectively for different internal and external stakeholders.

The NM3219 curriculum

Students write for a gamut of public relations communications for internal and external publics: pitches to the media, news releases, backgrounders, fact sheets, speeches, public relations (PR) plans, biographies, responses for question-and-answer (Q&A) sessions, and more.

By the end of the course, students should be able to

• Understand the scope and responsibilities of a PR professional’s remit, as well as
• Execute basic PR writing and projects which are rhetorically appropriate for the target audience.

The module involves extensive research, with an emphasis on persuasive writing. Students get hands-on experience in tracking issues, drafting PR plans and crafting messages for crisis communication.

The learning cycle

Assessment is continuous throughout the semester (100% CA). All assignment and lab exercises are based on the lectures. Each lecture gives students the information needed to execute the exercises in the labs in the week that follows, as well as for the group and individual assignments in the semester.

Lab exercises are completed in class with the teacher reviewing the pieces as students write. Submission of completed tutorial exercises is optional and no grade is given for lab work. CAs are individually completed and submitted usually within a week that they are issued.

Whether it is lab exercises during the tutorial or take-home individual assignments, students develop ideas and outlines, write and edit their work on their own. Little attention is given to the writing process of inventing, composing, and revising of in-class and take-home assignments (OWL Purdue Writing Lab).

Aim of this PDP-T project

In my goal to develop stronger writers, I focused on an important aspect in process writing—peer editing. Peer editing, a useful exercise for learner-writers (Goldstein & Carr, 1996), seldom happens in or out of our NM3219 classes, due to time constraints and lack of teacher guidance and enforcement. A quick check with students informed me that if they even looked at one another’s papers before the submission deadline at all, it was usually ad-hoc, expedient and sporadically carried out.

Yet, editing in the writing process emulates the recursive process that effective writers go through in order to polish their ideas and language. Preparing and improving more than one draft of writing has been shown to lead to higher performance (Goldstein & and Carr, 1996).
In my writing classes, students make logical and grammatical errors. Many have problems with putting across their points and arguments in Standard English. A possible cause could be the writers’ lack of vigilance in reviewing their work. A possible solution could be to use peer editing to increase students’ awareness of coherence and lexico-grammatical features in their writing.

I had thought that collaborative learning in peer editing could raise students’ consciousness of the organisational disconnects and language glitches in their writing, and eventually sharpen their writing ability. Working in pairs had been shown to foster ideas, problem-solving, motivation and relationship-building—all of which can help a class succeed (Kobernak & Pei, 2009).

The teaching experiment

After a lecture on pitching to the media where we discussed the theoretical concepts, principles, techniques and mechanics of developing pitch letters to the media, students embarked on the “inventing-composing-revising” cycle constitutive of process writing (OWL Purdue Writing Lab) in the tutorial and out of class.

To find out whether peer editing was indeed helpful, I co-opted 47 students (out of a total of 96 in that cohort) to review one another’s pitches to the media for (a) content and (b) language.

Their task was to write a five- to six-paragraph story proposal to an editor of their choice, inviting the media to cover a certain aspect of a given event or product. The students had to employ the rhetorical strategies we had discussed in class. They chose from an event or product—the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO Summit 2009, the launch of Apple’s iPhone 3G in Singapore or on Northlight School. They studied the event or product they chose and derived a story angle which they thought would interest any of these media—The New Paper, Channel NewsAsia, CNBC, CNET Asia and BBC World Radio.

They wrote their first drafts in class and continued working on subsequent drafts out of class. They then showed their completed proposal to a writing partner in class to review for content, that is, the tenability of their story idea and how effectively the idea was developed. They then cleaned up the copy based on comments given during the peer review. The students went on to the next round of peer review, this time for language. Now they looked for the apt use of rhetorical strategies. After they had refreshed their copy based on comments from the second round of peer review, the students submitted a third draft for the instructor to mark.

At the end of the two second rounds of review, the students shared what they learnt as editors and how the exercise had helped them become more sentient writers.

The exercise came about as an addition to the stipulated number of CAs in that semester.

Results

In their first drafts submitted to one another, students made the mistakes that had been pointed out to them at the lecture, tutorial and in earlier assignments. They did not seem to be aware of these errors in their drafts. However, they were able to point out the errors when reviewing one another’s work.

The excerpts below were adapted from some of the students’ suggestions to their writing partners. These excerpts support my findings on the learning benefits of peer editing, which include:

- **Heightened awareness of genre differences and of the importance of framing and a compelling news point.** For instance, students were finally clear about the difference between a press release and a pitch letter to the media.

The exercise also triggered thinking and discussion among the students of story angles and frames, the cornerstones of making news stories. They highlighted these points in the following excerpts:

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Examples of comments given by students to their writing partners

1. "You might want to talk about possible reasons for children dropping out of school and how Northlight helps them; "about how the school gives financial help e.g. free shuttle from Kallang MRT and subsidized school fees".

2. "Pitching a story to a media can be easily mistaken as a press release (at least for inexperienced people like us) and that quotes by a credible person is better and more impactful. However, seeing that this is a pitch letter, [and not a press release], should we have provided direct quotes of opinion leaders?"

3. "I learnt that using hard facts will lend credibility to the story and may give the editor more reason to follow up on it."

4. "I learnt that the ‘so-what’ element is important to support your lead and adds value to editors (and therefore higher chance of story taken)".

5. "The angle that you have used is okay but can be better if you look at it in a different way. I feel that instead of saying Northlight can help these students; you can say that these “hopeless” students are actually given another chance in this society."

6. "I have learnt that the lead is very important to keep the reader reading on. Always try to see the story in different perspectives to find the best angle that will best capture the attention of the target audience of the media you are pitching to."

Examples of comments given by students to their writing partners

1. "Related and seem to be repetitive. So I feel that [these two paragraphs] should either keep the quote or the first paragraph."

2. "A very good flow from the introduction to going into the main content. I learnt the importance of coherence and the need to grab the attention of the audience/editor. Which I otherwise would not be able (sic) to learn from my own piece [of writing]."

3. "I suggested a shift in the organisation but after re-reading, I realized that if your focus is on the big names that will grace the event, the part that talks about what will be discussed at the Summit could always come later."

4. "However, this pitch comes across more like a news article that you have written. Not so much of a “Hey come to my event to see what’s going to happen” kind of a feeling."

5. "[This sentence] doesn’t really related (sic) to your previous sentence."

6. "I have a problem trying to draw a connection between the lead paragraph and the concluding paragraph, I am not sure of the news pitch angle and what [the] TNP writer, is to write about. The story will be better angled with students from NLS sharing how they feel they are different from others from the mainstream education."

7. "Overall thoughtful organisation and the content is very good. Good choice on the parent anecdote."

8. "Personally, I think the most interesting part (the story of Paul) should be shifted to the front to capture attention. Pitch letter evident and ideas are nicely weaved together."

• **Raised consciousness of coherence in writing**, which comes across clearly in the following excerpts:

Examples of comments given by students to their writing partners

1. "Personalise [the] letter. “Specify new features”. “Try to sell this part more: add details about the launch, name who the performers are, venue, time, date”. “Tell him how the launch will bring a new experience for customers.”

2. "This already means that appointments are made based on demonstrated talent and ability."

3. "It is good to do some background research (definitely a plus point!)."

• **Enhanced problem-solving skills**, as shown in these excerpts:
“... it’s always good to give [a] more targeted insight as to how the facts will and should appeal to audiences. After all, reporters are lazy and want to be spoon-fed...”

“Maybe say something like this [the story of Paul] is an inspiration to others?”

“I suggest Yahoo or MSN sites as they offer a wide range of categories for the three stories. Some of your ideas may need statistical data...”

Two students also shared their problem-solving process:

“We are stuck finding a good angle. Something that is unusual and interesting is hard to dig from an event like APEC CEO Summit. Most of traditional angles will be covered by reporters: global convention, key figures, key issues, etc. Therefore how can we draw attention of reports? Besides exclusiveness, what else can we offer? OR is it a story of possible shopping trip of Hu Jintao or Obama in Orchard making a story?”

Examples of comments given by students to their writing partners

1 “Writing [should] cater to the right audience”. [The writer] could have broaden (sic) scope more, be slightly more specific in paragraph 2.”

2 “I think your ideas are quite well-developed. I feel that the letter would be quite effective in persuading the editor to feature the iPhone 3G on CNET Asia as you did give a lot of reasons and evidence to show that readers would be interested in this topic. I have realized that it is important to include more reasons as to why the editor should feature our story on his so that it will be more easy to entice [them] to do a feature on the issue.”

3 “I think on the overall you switch between the first person and the third person when you address the editor. Just need to decide whether you want to speak as NLS and stick to that decision. I think for an angle like this, I’d recommend a personal touch.”

4 “How does this [paragraph] related to the audience? WIIFM [What–is-it-in-for-me]?”

5 “I learned how to capture the essence of the story in a succinct manner. The paragraph in the body should be replete with visual details.”

- Orienting students to produce audience-centred writing, as shown in these excerpts:

- Increased students’ sensitivity to tone and register, an observation which is highlighted in the following excerpts:

Examples of comments given by students to their writing partners

1 “I realize we cannot keep on repeating the same words (e.g. I believe) as it will bore the editor. Synonyms can be used to replace these words. Sentences should also not be too long as they may confuse the editor when the sentence has much information in it”

2 “On the whole, a very good read. Succinct vocabulary and good content.”

3 “The grammar and your organisation looks (sic) fine. The few yellow highlights are alternatives, which I thought would be better.”

4 “Word choice needs to be more succinct and not flowery but more impactful. [You] don’t have much time to sell you story, so you need to sell hard.”

5 “The pitch was confident, convincing, with just the right amount of the “Apple attitude”. I learnt that part form (sic) attempting to sell the story idea to the editor, a media relations officer needs to do in the company’s ‘voice’. I would not have written my pitch letter for the APEC CEO Summit in this tone, but I feel that Weiliang captured the Apple personality in this letter and the Apple personality is what makes it the tech product to feature.” [italics commentator’s own]

6 “Your letter tone is very conversational. It helps to grab the attention of bored editors who are sieving through a lot of pitch letters.”

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Examples of comments given by students to their writing partners

1. “Sentence structure can be too long at times and certain parts can be ambiguous however, ideas are concise and clear. Format used is also formal and appropriate.”

2. “Structure is evident and coherent. Just to improve further, work on the points I mentioned above.”

3. “The letter could have been more coherent with slight change in the chronology of details.”

4. “This pitch letter is infused with passive voice. The use of active voice would have been more impactful.”

5. “Sentences can have more impact if they are shorter and concise. Repetition of phrases or words can cause reader to lose interest. Trying a variety of words will do the opposite.”

The experiment provided me these learning points:

a. Writing and editing are best carried out separately

b. Writers benefit from distance in time and perspective

c. Peer editing sharpens students’ awareness of logical and lexico-grammatical weaknesses in writing

d. Peer editing helps writers produce cleaner, more concise, coherent and persuasive copy

e. If carried out regularly enough in the course of the semester, peer editing can become an essential practice for a young professional writer to adopt.

Limitations

The experiment also uncovered some limitations to peer editing, such as:

• Few revisions for higher-order concerns. Students tended to ‘edit’ at sentence-level (lower-order concerns). Only a few were able to successfully edit for higher-order concerns at the ideational and organisational levels of a text. Nonetheless, many still endeavoured to revise one another’s work at higher- and lower-order levels.

• “Blind leading the blind” phenomenon. There was also the situation of “the blind leading the blind” where students did not know what was wrong nor how to fix the problem themselves, let alone how to advise their peers. However, they edited their friends’ drafts anyway because they ‘had to’ by instruction.

• Lack of “real-world” knowledge and work experience. In this particular exercise, peer editing privileged those with relevant work experience. As the majority of students had no prior “real world” experience of pitching stories to the media, it was difficult for them to understand why a story idea would not be accepted and how it could have been more suitably packaged for publication or broadcast.

• Time constraints. Stemming from the constraints of time, the biggest challenge would be motivating students to see the rationale behind taking on the entire cycle of “inventing-composing-revising” in their writing process and instilling in them a habit of consulting their peers as part of their editing process.

Incorporating what I discovered into my teaching

Moving forward, I would like to introduce peer editing at the start of term and ensure it is practised during class throughout the semester. Hopefully, the practice will rub off on students and motivate them to review one another’s drafts outside class. I would also like to furnish students with review and editing tools.

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Sharing my reflections

Two things NUS colleagues may be interested to know based on my experience:

• Learning from peers—with peer editing being a way—reinforces teaching points.

• The teacher shows the way, in the sense that she needs to show exactly how she wants something done—through samples of good writing and through demonstrating the process. Demonstrations and illustrations are good ways of enabling students to adopt good writing practices.

Conclusions

Students tend to make the very mistakes they have been ‘warned’ about. On the other hand, they are acutely aware of these errors when they review one another’s copy. They point out each other’s mistakes even as they fail to see their own.

Hence, the teacher has to regularly dedicate a substantial part of her class time to peer editing if she wants to foster this best practice. This will be more feasible when the course takes on a seminar format. (From January 2011, NM3219 will abandon the “two-hour lecture, two-hour lab” format and run weekly three-hour seminars instead.)

In addition, I shall incorporate the following to better prepare my students for peer editing:

• Discourse analysis of good writing. I have found discourse analysis of sample texts to be another effective teaching strategy: deconstructing a text to unveil its rhetorical techniques and ideas yields valuable take-aways for learner-writers.

• (More) demonstrations of revising for higher-order concerns and editing for lower-order concerns.

References


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Restructuring Writing Assignments to Develop Students’ Critical Thinking Skills

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As one of the major goals of higher education, developing students’ critical thinking skills is a top priority among educators in NUS and it is aligned with the University’s mission, which emphasises the importance of nurturing “thinking individuals”. NUS President Professor Tan Chorh Chuan also highlighted the importance of educating thinking individuals in his speech delivered at this year’s University Awards in May 2010. He urged faculty members to nurture students who possess “a questioning mind capable of critical thinking, zest for knowledge and discovery, effectiveness in cross-cultural and cross disciplinary settings, a spirit of enterprise and good communication skills” (Tan, 2010). He correctly suggested that collectively, and as individuals, teachers should have “a true and deep commitment to such an educational philosophy and outcome” and to “challenge our students, to take them out of their “comfort zone” both intellectually and as individuals” (Tan, 2010). It is indeed true that the University also contributes to our students’ intellectual development, which is occurring rapidly at this stage of their lives. There are two essential elements of this process where the University can help directly: the collection and ordering of relevant information, and the ability to analyse and reflect on the content. These elements are related to ability and can be developed, or learnt, by every student at the University if the academic staff also play their part and “lead by example”.

However, directed interaction among the students themselves can also contribute towards the goals outlined by the President. Institutionalising a peer review process in which students get feedback from other students as well as their course instructor provides more opportunities for them to re-examine the research agenda and reconstruct their arguments. The central questions we must consider are:

- To what extent does a peer review exercise motivate students to work on their essays; and
- How and to what extent does individual consultation, together with students’ feedback, help their revision process?

In my seminar-style module JS3223 “Japan and the Asia-Pacific Region”, students are instructed to take on a writing assignment. Within this project, student self-development is enhanced by getting them to do a structured analysis of the writing assignment in a systematic way.
Students need to:

1. submit a research proposal including the title and the assignment’s objective, research question(s) and relevant literature (subject to course instructor’s approval) in Week 3;

2. draft an essay and submit it by Week 6;

3. write a feedback paper on the essay(s) the course instructor has allocated to each student in Week 7;

4. discuss the content of the feedback on their own essays with a course instructor in Week 8;

5. revise their essay carefully;

6. submit the final essay in Week 12, together with a note on the revisions they made.

After the students have completed all these assignments, I examined their submissions for improvements in their writing and also conducted a survey on the peer review exercise. The findings suggest that the exercise provides students with more opportunities of improving aspects of their written work, especially in terms of logic, structure and clarity. Getting feedback from other students was particularly helpful in raising their awareness of the readers’ point of view and of the need to clarify the meaning of the key concepts and structure.

However, some students were dissatisfied with the comments from their peers, saying that the readers did not read their assignments carefully or that they misunderstood the author’s intentions. Moreover, there was also a risk that students would take the feedback too seriously and make some cosmetic changes without a sense of direction. It is therefore vital for a course instructor to guide students in the development and ultimate use of feedback, especially if it offers inappropriate criticism. This time, I allocated 15- to 20-minute consultations to each student so that we could discuss strategies to improve their assignments.

This peer review exercise not only benefits the students, who learn how to improve their writing and thinking skills; it is also a useful way for teachers to assess their own efforts and teaching outcomes. The constant interactions with students allowed me to evaluate their individual progress more effectively, and also dramatically lowered the occurrence of plagiarism in my class. However, the downside of this system is that it is extremely time consuming, since the teacher needs to read the first draft, followed by the feedback paper and then the final paper. One possible solution is for the teacher to select one paper as a sample and uses it in class to as a template for the rest of the class to follow as part of the peer review process. By doing so, it gives students the opportunity to be exposed to various angles and perspectives regarding the topic. They will also learn that the writing process is not simply about the collection of information but is also about the development of their critical thinking skills.

Reference

brief presentation, but the main goal is to engender active experiential learning by inviting as much quality input as possible from the class (learning by doing).

Perhaps because the class comprised mostly third- and fourth-year students, i.e., senior undergraduates ready for something new, all ten affinity groups rose to the challenge of peer teaching with great energy and enthusiasm. Each week, peer teachers uploaded learning materials to the IVLE Workbin a day before the seminar, and “food for thought” questions to encourage further discussion of the topic on the IVLE forum after the seminar.

To ensure that we had a log of ongoing learning, affinity groups also took turns uploading weekly IVLE learning logs (i) highlighting the concepts and skills they had found most useful or stimulating; (ii) raising further questions about the issues discussed; and, (iii) providing constructive feedback to the peer teachers on the teaching-learning methods and materials used.

At the end of the semester, I held an informal debrief during the final seminar, asking students for feedback both on the content (“What ‘one thing’ will you take away from this module?”) and the teaching-learning methodology used. Ninety eight percent of the students said that they had learnt the most about the topic they had “taught”. As all teachers know, we learn best when we have to teach others—a “truth” I wanted my students to discover for themselves. In keeping with the ethos of the potluck meal, students also said that they had enjoyed the huge variety of learning materials, formats and teaching styles employed by the different groups of peer teachers. Given the generally positive response, my goal is to incorporate peer teaching as a central ingredient in other modules that I teach, in a continued bid to encourage students to take ownership of their learning.