

Liberating Dialogue in Peer Review: Applying Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process to the Writing Classroom

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As applied to a class of first-year college writers, the Critical Response Process provides valuable guidance in peer review. Lerman's technique advances the conversational pedagogy of collaborative learning, especially in peer review of student writing. It addresses issues of guidance, ownership and communication that are common to the performing arts and writing classes. Using the Critical Response Process enables students to adopt an active role in group critique, and a critical stance toward their own work. It motivates them to assume ownership of their writing and gives them an audience with which to discuss it.

Teaching Writing is Teaching Conversation

Peer review has long been considered a core element of the process-oriented writing classroom. The National Conference of Teachers of English (NCTE) views peer review as a primary source of learning, and includes the following statement in its Position Statement on Teaching Composition:

Students should be encouraged to comment on each other's writing, as well as receiving frequent, prompt, individualized attention from the teacher. Reading what others have written, speaking about one's responses to their writing and listening to the responses of others are important activities in the writing classroom. Textbooks and other instructional resources should be of secondary importance (NCTE 2).

Students who receive concrete suggestions use them to revise and teachers introduce peer review early, sometimes even in middle school (Neubert and McNelis, "Peer Response" 52).
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Sociologists have demonstrated empirically through regression analysis that active participation in peer review leads to improved writing skills (Althausser and Darnall 23).

The practice of peer review, however, shows a history of problems. Teachers encounter considerable frustration getting students to provide effective commentary on each other's writing (Bishop 14; Randsell 32; Neubert and McNelis, "Peer Response" 52). Students tend to give "false impressions of the essay's strengths," or even elect not to attend class when their work is being peer reviewed (Randsell 33). In the online classroom, peer commentary "left much to be desired", because the "comments typically found in the peer reviews were generally uncritical" (Althausser and Darnall 24). Despite their espousals of collaborative learning, teachers often shy away from group work, citing time pressures, concerns that students will just socialize, and feelings of guilt when they are "not actually teaching" (Roskelly 141). A survey of teachers found that many considered peer review to be additional work with marginal results (Belcher 108).

Attempts to address these shortcomings in peer review have led to an emphasis on guiding students through peer review, by providing them with highly detailed checklists and worksheets. Without real guidance, so the notion goes, student groups cannot function.

Students divided into groups to examine drafts and to "discuss" their paper, but who lack specific guidelines, will founder. ...The risk is great that, without clear guidelines, students will just pat each other on the back, attack each other counterproductively, or fall silent (Wiener 136).

This need for specificity has given rise to the widespread use of a variety of templates in peer review (Damashek 5; Walvoord 42; Elbow 122; Gleason 3; Healey 24; Roskelly 141; Neubert and McNelis, "Improving Writing"). As a result, the practice of peer review has taken on a distinctive "fill in the blanks" aspect. Typically, the peer review worksheet asks students to respond

to whether or not the author has provided a clear thesis, whether or not the paper's organization is effective, and so on.

Stepping back from a checklist, Peter Elbow proposes that participants generate two separate types of questions, "reader-based" and "criterion-based" (240-51). Reader-based questions are intended to elicit from an audience a sort of "running movie" of the emotional and intellectual reaction to a written piece. Criterion-based questions then allow students to adopt and use objective (teacher-generated) criteria in assessing written work. Elbow suggests that reader-based questions should precede criterion-based questions and he suggests that peer dialogue can be improved by shifting from one type of question to the other (242, 251).

There is a separate thread of difficulty in peer review, relating to the sense of ownership and authority in student writers. The reluctance to offer up work for peer review, meaningfully respond to it, and then use those responses, is symptomatic of an ownership-based "habit of mind" (Spiegelman 234). Asking peers to comment on work, and by doing so collaborate in its creation, violates a culturally based concept that the writer owns her work, that it is a product of her labor. Students are conflicted about how to preserve this ownership while also engaging in peer review (Spiegelman 234). Failure to pay attention to ownership issues and make them explicit impedes collaboration (Spiegelman 238). Indeed, it seems curious that such an obvious issue does not provide even more difficulty. If a writer submits her work to be "diagnosed" and then repaired" by others, how much of it remains her own?¹ Aren't students disowning their work when they allow others to fix problems or suggest changes during peer review?

The combination of these tendencies in peer review decrease the role of the author to that of a "paint by number" composer, responsible only for including all of the required elements set by the teacher in the correct order and proportion. Peer commentators are relegated to deputy inspectors whose role it is to determine whether or not the writing includes these elements. The teacher becomes a sort of ghostly presence, hovering at the periphery, seeing that students stay on subject. As for the issue of authorship and ownership, there seems to

be little that one can do besides make students aware of this conflict between collaboration and ownership (Spiegelman 251).

This evolution of peer review contradicts the fundamental principles of collaborative learning by diminishing each side of the exchange, and the teacher as well. With demoted participants and a long checklist of criteria, peer review begins to resemble a mock event. What is happening is merely a depiction of what is supposed to happen, going through the paces for the benefit of the hovering teacher. No one commits to the exchange. No one intends to offer any real commentary, for fear of alienating others in the group and besides, the group needs to complete the checklist. No one intends to take any commentary to heart and actually use it, because that would be conceding ownership. There are moments when peer review seems a charade.

How can teachers reinvigorate or “liberate” the dialogue of peer review and also avoid having student authors surrender their sense of ownership in their work? It may be that returning to the early pedagogy of collaborative learning would “realign” peer review as conversation. The importance of conversation in the writing classroom was first enunciated by Kenneth Bruffee in his seminal paper “Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind.” In a remarkable conjunction of disciplines, Bruffee’s analysis makes direct links between the psychology of human development and the pedagogy of writing. He draws direct parallels between public conversation and reflective thought:

To think well as individuals we must learn to think well collectively—that is, we must learn to converse well. The first steps to learning to think better, therefore are learning to converse better and learning to establish and maintain the sorts of social context, the sorts of community life that foster the sorts of conversation members of the community value (640).

Classrooms can be adapted to conform to these lines of relationship. The key to this matrix of connections between

teaching and writing and thinking is conversation in the classroom:

If thought is internalized public and social talk, then writing of all kinds is internalized social talk made public and social again. If thought is internalized conversation, then writing is internalized conversation re-externalized (641).

Bruffee extrapolates that the qualities inherent in a person's conversation also determine the qualities of that person's writing (639). Bruffee sees writing as a social act, as the externalization of reflective thinking. He therefore advocates improving writing by improving conversation:

[O]ur task must involve engaging students in conversation among themselves at as many points in both the writing and the reading process as possible, and ... we should strive to ensure that student's conversation about what they read and write is similar in as many ways as possible to the way we would like them eventually to read and write. The way they talk with each other determines the way they will think and the way they will write (642).

This sounds very much like what the NCTE endorses by placing classroom dialogue at a primary position. By enhancing conversation in the classroom, among students and between teachers and students, teachers enhance their writing pedagogy through a series of social and active transactions. In peer review, with multiple participants and multiple roles at play, these transactions become less dualistic, more shared, more complex. In peer review, one student (the author) reads written work, and the others (responders) listen and read the same written work. Discussion follows, sometimes with notes, and sometimes revision follows these notes. Conversation is at the very axis of thinking and writing.

If indeed, teaching writing is teaching conversation, then how do we improve the conversation? It seems not enough to

merely set the stage and encourage students to talk. Certainly some measure of guidance is necessary, and also some recognition of the ownership inherent in written work. Since conversation is a public event and a form of performance, it seems natural enough to look to the performing arts for some improvements in this area. Fortunately, Liz Lerman, a modern choreographer and teacher has articulated a methodology for peer review that guides participants and also dignifies the artist/author.

The Genesis of the Critical Response Process

“Turn discomfort into inquiry.”

—Liz Lerman

Liz Lerman's work on deepening peer group feedback seems an organic outgrowth of her philosophy of dance and group work. Her troupe, the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange emphasizes the give-and-take between dancers and audience members. Using performers of all ages, the Dance Exchange creates dance out of interactions with various communities, from chamber musicians to dockworkers. A recent project called “Hallelujah” sought expressions of praise from 27 different communities and used them to create dance. The Dance Exchange describes itself as collaborative in all of its activities: “An artist-driven organization, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange employs a collaborative approach to dance-making, administration, and implementation” (Lerman and Borstel frontispiece). Another unusual feature of the Dance Exchange's work is the inclusion and use of spoken text in its performances.²

Lerman has coined a term for her anti-hierarchical approach: “hiking the horizontal” (“Toward a Process”). This egalitarian way of thinking and working allows her to find mutuality and common experience in dance and performance. To her “hiking the horizontal” is slippery and dangerous (Crossing Paths). She has also described her view of communication as making use of “permeable membranes”

which permit both sides of an exchange (dancer/audience; teacher/student) to participate in communication of substance.

Perhaps as a result of her collaborative and anti-hierarchical frame of mind, Lerman experienced a great deal of discomfort when engaged in traditional dance critique. For her, feedback sessions often "failed to move beyond cheerleading to any kind of useful comment" or became at the opposite extreme, "brutal and not very helpful." Lerman also found it uncomfortable to remain silent when receiving feedback, all the while "writing private letters in my mind but never sending them" (Lerman and Borstel 6). As a teacher and choreographer, Lerman disliked being asked to generate critical judgment about work she was unfamiliar with, finding that it even poisoned her enthusiasm to look at new work (Lerman and Borstel 6). Another primary concern was the legitimacy of imposing her own agenda and taste on her students. Was her teaching really the service of her students or was she "just trying to create clones" of herself (Lerman and Borstel 6)?

As a choreographer, Lerman found that revising her work at the direction of others seemed to deplete her sense of ownership in her own work. She recounts a story in which she added a visual prop (a ball of string) to a dance after a famous New York director suggested that she do so. The reaction?

People loved it. Critics loved it. And what they loved about it was the very thing she had fixed. I always felt that I should put an asterisk in the program and explain that the device that made it work was not my idea (Lerman and Borstel 43).

Even though the device had worked magnificently, Lerman felt that she had been "cheated" of an opportunity. Was the work still her own? What if instead of a specific suggestion, the responder had provided a set of questions?

Out of Lerman's exploration into her discomfort with the traditional methodology of feedback came an idea: Why not return control to the artist in the process? What about allowing the artist to ask questions? If questions from the artist deepen the dialogue, could critique be directed toward answering those

questions while reserving the right to revise and edit to the artist? She observed that

[T]he more I made public my own questions about the work, my work, the more willing I was to hear other people's reactions to it. Of equal value to those reactions was the process happening on my side of the conversation: I found that if I could just talk about the messes that are an inevitable part of creating new work-talk out loud and listen to myself- I would hear an unexpected way out of an artistic dilemma and new information that could help me make the piece stronger, such as a unifying metaphor or a new idea about structure (Lerman and Borstel 7).

Out of this process, Lerman derived two "preconditions" to meaningful dialogue in group work: 1) we as artists must be open to suggestion, and interested in revising the work; 2) we as critics must intend the betterment of the work, and the artist. Out of these ideas, public questioning, open discussion and a "social compact" between artist and peer, came the Critical Response Process.

Lerman and her collaborator John Borstel have deliberately opened the architecture of the Critical Response Process, making it adaptable to a variety of settings. Together they have published *Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process: A Method for Getting Useful Feedback on Anything You make, From Dance to Dessert*,³ a colorful and practical guide to using the Critical Response Process. Organized around a metaphor of cooking, the text includes core suggestions, analytical thinking about dialogue, and graphic representations of the content and sequence of the Process. There are useful demonstrations of fundamental principles, examples of key elements and an entire chapter on variations for educational, artistic and social settings.

The Critical Response Process has been implemented in group work in dance, music, theater, literature, educational assessment, interpretative museum programming and on and on, with great enthusiasm. At Columbia College, it is used to

guide midterm assessment of freshman seminar (Zubizarreta). At the Round House Theatre in Silver Spring, Maryland, it is used to guide post-performance discussions with the audience. It is being used in ever-widening circles in the performing arts, and in educational settings, and it has been the subject of an academic treatise (Williams). Curiously, there appears to be no documented application to a writing class.

The Choreography of Lerman's Critical Response Process

The Critical Response Process separates peer review into four separate stages that are sequenced and balanced so that the artist and the responders have an opportunity to discuss the work in a neutral and mutual way. These four "steps" are arranged to lay the groundwork for meaningful discussion between the artists and the group, including reactions to both content and form. Facilitators moderate the discussion, enforcing the sequence and separation of these four steps.

The first step, entitled "Statements of Meaning", arises out of the ordinary and natural desire of both the artist and the group to "address the communicative power of the work just presented" (Lerman and Borstel 19). The facilitator asks responders, "What was stimulating, compelling, interesting, surprising, memorable, evocative about the work you've just seen (Lerman and Borstel 30)?⁴ The facilitator has the option to either call on those who offer responses, or ask each responder in turn to provide comment. This step permits all those with something to say to express themselves, and a facilitator may even need to limit a responder who has more than enough to say. Responders are also encouraged to signal assent rather than restating a point, by "head-nodding, gentle 'um-hms,'" or even two-handed finger snapping, which encourages new comments (Lerman and Borstel 33).

In the second step, "Artist's Questions", the artist poses questions about the piece to the responders, often with the help of the facilitator. The Critical Response Process works

best when the questions are neither overly broad nor too pointed (Lerman and Borstel 20). Overly broad questions, such as "How is the overall tone of the piece?" or "Can this section be expanded?" can "shut down" the Critical Response Process, in particular where responders who are "most insistent about expressing their own opinions dominate." (Lerman and Borstel 20). Overly specific questions, on the other hand, can "amount to an opinion poll." (Lerman and Borstel 20). Navigating this area is a function for the facilitator. (Lerman and Borstel 20).

Third, the Critical Response Process calls for "Neutral Questions" from the responders. This step reverses the dialogue and now permits the responders to question the artist, to seek information or facts about the piece (Lerman and Borstel 20). The purpose of these questions (to derive facts and information) drives the central governing quality of the questions: they must be neutral. A question like "why are there so many conflicting characters?" would be considered non-neutral, but could be reformulated into: "how do these characters form a complete world?"⁵ This formation of neutral questions is not easy for all responders, since it requires them to identify and eliminate "embedded opinions" (Lerman and Borstel 21). Lerman and Borstel therefore suggest that the facilitator provide a "work session" when introducing the Critical Response Process, in which responders practice re-formulating non-neutral questions into neutral questions.

The fourth and final fourth step consists of "Permissioned Opinions." Here the responders are entitled to express their opinions to the artists, but with an important protocol. The responders must first "name the topic of the opinion and ask the artist for permission to state it." (Lerman and Borstel 22). The artist may have a variety of reasons for denying permission (irrelevant, already heard it, not interested in outside comment, rehearsal costumes will be changed in performance). But most commonly the artist does grant permission, because the groundwork for this moment has been laid by the Critical Response Process (Lerman and Borstel 22). This very formality is what

serves to maintain the Critical Response Process's dynamic of dialogue through an exchange that keeps both speakers focused and listening. The step may seem formal, but often the formality, discipline and structure inherent in the Critical Response Process make it safe for people to go into a more challenging dialogue (Lerman and Borstel 22).

Formal courtesy seems to permit honesty and encourage a deeper dialogue.

These are the core steps of the Critical Response Process.⁶ Although describing it makes it seem complicated, people find that it flows without great difficulty. According to Lerman and Borstel, both keeping the steps separate and following the prescribed sequence are crucial to the success of a session—just as they would be crucial to the success of a dance.

Applying Critical Response to First-Year Composition

"It's better than a red pen and less intimidating."
—Marymount EN101 student.

EN101 is a course taught to all first-year students at Marymount University. The class undertakes four substantial writing assignments during the semester, and takes a midterm and a final exam. There were twenty students in my section, which met twice per week for one hour and fifteen minutes. The course uses a compilation of essays about the first decade of the 20th century and a standard composition/rhetoric textbook.

My class used the Critical Response Process throughout the semester, in a variety of exercises. These included: 1) peer review of topic ideas for a large research paper; 2) peer workshop of a theater review from *The Washington Post*; 3) peer review of my submission of their first assignment (a summary); 4) peer review of drafts of each of their four assigned papers; 5) peer

evaluation of assigned individual presentations; and 6) a full-class peer workshop of a student research paper.

I tried to vary the variables: written/oral; group/tutor; teacher/teacherless. I also collected information from the class on a set of subjects about their writing process and their attitudes about it, through a survey. The class engaged in peer review both with and without written guidelines. I tasked the facilitators in one session with recording the elements of the Critical Review Process and these reports seemed to keep the group focused, as well as validating that the group was engaging in real substantive review.

The class first separated itself by seat location for their peer review groups. They nominated facilitators who were typically the most vocal and confident learners in their groups.⁷ Later in the semester, I reshuffled the groups for the research project, organized by subject areas (science; the home; health and diet). Sometimes, if a student showed up at class with nothing to peer review, she became a facilitator.

We also did several whole-class peer workshops, both early and late in the semester. With me pretending to be the author, we critiqued a review of a local theater production from *The Washington Post*. This allowed me to model author's questions and ease the notion of negativity by subjecting myself to their criticism. I also generated a draft of their first assignment, into which I had deliberately inserted both grammatical and substance errors. This became a sort of "grade the teacher" game, which certainly felt like "hiking the horizontal," particularly when they found an error that I had not deliberately inserted.

One moment stands out. A student advised her colleague that although the content of his paper was clearly divided into a set of distinct topics, that separation was not evident in the writing. She named the sub-topics, suggested how to arrange them, and provided some thoughts on transition. The tone and the content of the suggestion had a distinctly different flavor. It was substantive, not particularly polite, but respectful, and it was lengthy. It seemed to partake of the nature of "abnormal discourse" (Bruffee 647).

This level of honest critique seemed to exemplify the advantages of Critical Response Process. The student had already engaged in dialogue with her colleague before offering a suggestion, which her colleague had expressly agreed to hear and consider. The manner in which it was done preserved good will, and impressed the other members of the group as an important comment. The suggestion was not derived from a set of guidelines or a checklist, which gave it an enhanced character. The student/responder even seemed to feel like a teacher, and showed great care in articulating the suggestion. The student/author seemed grateful and encouraged by the suggestion—now there was at least one certain way to improve the paper and hence the grade. He even asked for clarification of one of the sub-topics, and took notes.

Peer Review Guidelines—Written or Not?

“Having the questions written out makes it much easier.”

—Marymount EN101 student

Providing students with an overly detailed set of criteria for peer review smacks of doing students' work for them. How to spot issues in written text and suggest revisions is a large part of what they are learning. Detailed roadmaps also detract from the sense of ownership that students should have in their work, because they are asked to hold their work up for diagnosis, as if it is somehow in need of a “cure.” On the other hand, making explicit and visible the actual goals of peer review provides a sense of direction. If guidance in this area is not disposed of but rather simplified, students seem to “own” their comments, rather than merely trying to locate what they have been asked to find.

Initially, I resisted providing any form of written guidelines, out of an interest to see if the students would operate without one. Gradually, however, I saw that students expressed frustration in formulating criteria and questions. I also

observed that people converse differently when they all have the same set of documents in front of them. It makes them feel like they are all equipped to discuss, that they are all "on the same page."

In light of a discussion with John Borstel of the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, I drew up a summary of the process, some examples of questions, an outline for authors to record useful feedback, and a simple set of guidelines for what to look for (see Appendix). I included a small written lecture on "statements of meaning" and the goals of the writing exercise, in particular the goals of Project IV. Borstel also suggested putting the goals of the exercise on the blackboard along with the titles of the four steps of the Critical Response Process.

Getting written responses from facilitators and having peers exchange mark-ups and comment sheet does have further benefits—it provides a reference for the student in revision, motivates them to perform (since it could be graded), and it provides the teacher with a means to assess student progress in peer review. But none of this is to suggest that checklists and detailed roadmaps are necessary except as a means of providing early guidance. My experience indicates that as groups work with each other, they become less and less dependent on filling in a checklist and more able to derive their own questions and comments. If the conversation slows or halts, the facilitator is there to step in.

Teaching Composition is (Still) Hard Work

Lerman's Critical Response Process encourages students that need encouragement, and provides a leading role for those who need less guidance. It allows students to model teaching behaviors, both in critique and in acting as facilitators. It responds to the need for guidance and for structure, and it preserves the critical sense of ownership that student writers can both experience and enhance. Students of composition also respond well to the Critical Response Process because it is socially rewarding. In some ways, having students encounter

this form of teaching in their college careers makes it more accessible to them. They are already engaged in a series of adaptations, both social and educational. This becomes just one more new experience.

There is an added advantage to using the Critical Response Process in the writing classroom, which derives from teaching about its fundamentals and practice. Teaching the substance of the Critical Response Process educates students in a theory of meaningful discourse. It teaches them how to differentiate between opinion and inquiry. It allows the class to concentrate on how students talk to each other and how teachers talk to students and vice versa. In its second and third steps (Artist's Questions and Neutral Questions), the Critical Response Process gives valuable practice in articulating issues and seeking solutions in the same way that great teachers do—by leading, not pushing their own agendas. If conversation is a critical element in education, then how it is conducted deserves a place in the curriculum.

Students also adopt a “creative” and “artistic” way of thinking about their writing—even expository writing. At first, composition is an attempt to create a viable “product”, something that will meet the requirements of the assignment and get a good grade. It is a commodity that they would not produce if it were not required of them. With the Critical Response Process, composition takes on a different purpose. Students begin to experience an actual audience. For perhaps the first time in an academic setting they “perform” their work by reading it aloud to the group. They begin to perceive an alternative aim of writing—to have an effect on a reader. This is a critical leap in the process of learning how to write as a social act, composing text for public effect. This change in perspective enables students to enter the “academic club” rather than alienating them from it (Rose 141, Roskelly 141). Using the Critical Response Process in a college writing class enhances the possibility that this first audience is genuinely interested in helping, equipped with guidance on how to do so, and facilitated by someone who is capable but will not grade them, much less grade them publicly.

Finally, Critical Response Process can also teach students a valuable skill in conversation itself, not just in talking about writing. This is the ability to look underneath a question or statement to receive a (sometime negative) critical opinion and rephrase it as a neutral question. Lerman describes this process as "internalizing the Process":

Sometimes I can use the Process backwards. I am in a conversation, and I hear something about my work that I could perceive as negative. No permission asked, just opinion stated. In that moment, I have some choices, including to feel bad, angry or vengeful, or just to sulk. But lately I have used the moment to ask myself "what if this person had asked me a neutral question in order to get me thinking about the problem they are perceiving? What would that neutral question have been?" Then I go about answering the criticism as though I had heard the neutral question. Usually I learn a lot this way (52).

This is very high-level thinking, designed to eliminate the "letters that are not sent" (Lerman and Borstel 6), and replace them with letters that *can* be sent. This is one very critical skill that truly communicative teachers possess—the skill to see behind a question or a comment to find both an opinion and an inquiry.

Lerman's technique is not traditional peer review. In traditional peer review, the author is largely silent after reading the piece, and is unable to decline suggestions. There is typically no place for recognizing the effect of a piece, although Peter Elbow has recognized the need for this form of "content-based" review (240-51). Lerman's technique emphasizes the role of the author/artist in the exchange, as the person most interested in the exchange, and as the person uniquely entitled to accept or reject the judgments and suggestions of the group. Second, it requires the consent of the artist before an unsolicited "fix-it" can be offered. Third, it ensures that responses and questions about the work precede any opinions or suggestions. In these ways, it tilts the balance of power in

the direction of the student author. Restructuring peer review around these elements allows students to experience learning in a sociological framework. These differences are critical to the success of peer review and they are consistent with the core principles of collaborative learning.

Student writers are swimming in new waters. They are forming relationships in many directions, with their colleagues, with their institution, with their careers, and with their teachers. In the college writing classroom, there are great advantages to including sociological and dialogic processes like the Critical Response Process. Doing so can provide college writers with a means of comprehending and using a more heuristic mode of inquiry into writing. They will achieve a level of comfort and ownership in their writing, and with luck they will find themselves in a real discourse community, presumably the first of many they will discover during their college career and beyond.

Notes

1. This raises the possibility that the pedagogy of collaborative learning needs to be released from its medical origin, the teams of student doctors that first engaged in collaborative diagnosis and treatment in M. L. J. Abercrombie's seminal work on the subject, *Anatomy of Judgment* (Bruffee 636).

2. In 2002, Lerman was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship for her contribution to the world of dance and community arts.

3. This text, as well as information about training in the Critical Response Process, can be obtained from the Dance Exchange at: 7117 Maple Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912 (301) 270-6700; www.danceexchange.org.

4. Lerman and Borstel initially required all comments to be positive, and labeled the step "Affirmation." They have now pulled back from this requirement, so that all comments do not need to begin with "I liked...." (Lerman and Borstel 19). Instead, responders are urged to "define and express their reactions" through both broad pronouncements and specific details about the work.

5. Other examples are provided in the text (33).

6. After these steps, a facilitator can also initiate or allow a discussion about the subject matter of the work, thus providing the artist with an opportunity to gain audience opinions and reactions to the subject matter of the work. An artist can also revise while the group is still in place, offering changes to the text in response to the comments and opinions. In a formal setting, a facilitator can also ask the artist about next steps and whether she would appreciate more feedback outside the session, and thank the participants. These "further steps" are in addition to the core steps.

7. But not always. Some of these negotiations produced genuinely funny moments, like when one student (jokingly) told another: "Of course you have to be the facilitator. You're the only boy in the group, you idiot."

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Appendix—Critical Response Process

Peer Review Guidelines

Each group picks a facilitator. The facilitator keeps the group on track from step to step, and notes interesting responses or questions. Each author reads their work, and the responders underline the text that they think needs work with a squiggly line and the text that they like with a straight line. Then the group proceeds through steps 1-4 of CRP.

At the end of each session, the responders provide their notes to the author, who can then ask questions to make sure he or she knows what the notes mean. If responders run out of space on the page for notes, they continue on the other side of the page.

Then the author takes the notes and uses them to revise the piece. If the author agrees with the response, then it gets used and a check mark is placed next to the note, and the author somehow indicates what was done to respond to the note. "I added a paragraph on tires and axles." If not, then an x mark and an explanation "I decided that instead of placing the section on asphalt at the end, I would incorporate it into the section on safety and roads."

The author passes in all three pieces—the first draft, the revision notes and the final draft. The intent of this exercise is not to use all the revision notes, but to make use of the responses, either by adding or deleting text, or by considering and rejecting the response. Everything is done with a purpose. Grading will be based on complete consideration of the revisions.

Authors are of course, not restricted to the response notes for their final draft. If a revision is based on a response, however, it is useful to tie them together. "See also the section on wheels, where I realized, based on the response on safety, that more was needed about tire pressure."

Useful Terms for the Process:

Thesis (Beginning/End)

Structure

Support

Syntax

Reasoning

Evidence

Description

Comparisons

Narrative

Transitions

Definitions

Stages of the Critical Response Process

Statements of Meaning

First, the responders look for aspects of the work that spark their interest, or remind them of other ideas and facts that have intrigued them in the past. "This reminds me of . . . I never knew that . . . I didn't realize that . . ."

Author's Questions

The author then solicits the opinion of the responders about issues and problems that she is facing in writing the piece. "How is the first paragraph . . . Where can I bring in . . . Do you think I should . . ." Responders provide specific suggestions.

Neutral Questions

The responders then react to the writing by asking questions that are intended to direct attention to areas that they found problematic, or that they feel are promising. "How did you want to have the reader feel about this part . . . What do you think connects this idea to that one . . . What did you want the reader to understand about . . ."

Permissioned Opinions

Finally, there is room for opinions, but ask permission first. "Do you want to hear about how to fix . . . Would you like to hear my opinion about the transitions in this piece . . . I have a way of tying this idea to that one; do you want to hear it . . ."

Carroll Hauptle is a practicing business attorney and grants-writer in Northern Virginia, where he has taught courses in rhetoric and composition at George Mason University and Marymount University. He wishes to express his gratitude to John Borstel and Liz Lerman of the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange for their valuable assistance and to Dr. Marguerite Rippy of Marymount for her steady guidance.

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