Incorporating a Consistent Peer Editing Model across the Curriculum

Lisa M. Hill

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Education in Educational Leadership

Vancouver Island University
Nanaimo, British Columbia
May, 2015
Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to outline a three-pronged approach to a peer editing model that can be used across multiple grades and in any subject area where one of the outcomes is student production of quality writing. The model was developed after a review of the literature revealed that improvements in written expression could be achieved via three different types of peer editing: an oral conversation between partners, written comments from an editor, or a form filled out by the editor. None of the research looked at combining all three of these, but the benefits of doing so appear to be self-evident. As well, this three-pronged model, if implemented across both the curriculum and a range of grade levels, should help reinforce in students the qualities of effective writing in a consistent, thoughtful manner.
Acknowledgements

To my husband, Brett Hill, for his technical support and encouragement during the chaotic months it took me to complete this project. To my daughter, Jenna Miller, for her editing expertise and “hopscotch” analogy. To my son, Brendan Miller, for keeping my March Madness bracket up-to-date while I was busy writing chapter 5.
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... II

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. III

CHAPTER 1: PEER EDITING IN THE CLASSROOM .......................................................... 1
  Purpose .............................................................................................................................. 2
  Justification ...................................................................................................................... 3
  Terms and Definitions ..................................................................................................... 5
  Project Overview ............................................................................................................. 5

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ................................................................. 7
  Constructivism .................................................................................................................. 7
  Feedback ........................................................................................................................... 8
  Direct Instruction ........................................................................................................... 12
  Critical Thinking Skills ................................................................................................. 14

CHAPTER 3: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE ................................................................. 17
  The Framework ................................................................................................................ 18
  The Process ..................................................................................................................... 19
  The Pedagogy ................................................................................................................... 21
  The Application .............................................................................................................. 22

CHAPTER 4: A “HOPSCOTCH” APPROACH TO PEER EDITING ................................. 25
  Background ...................................................................................................................... 25
  Teaching Students How to Edit ...................................................................................... 26
  Stage 1: Reflection .......................................................................................................... 27
  Stage 2: Assessment ....................................................................................................... 28
  Stage 3: Debrief ............................................................................................................... 30
  Stage 4: Application ....................................................................................................... 31

CHAPTER 5: MOVING FORWARD ............................................................................... 32
  Limitations of the Design .............................................................................................. 32
  Design Implementation ................................................................................................. 34
  Potential Hurdles to Implementation ............................................................................ 36
  Areas for Further Research ......................................................................................... 37

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................... 39

APPENDIX A ..................................................................................................................... 43

APPENDIX B ..................................................................................................................... 44

APPENDIX C ..................................................................................................................... 45

APPENDIX D ..................................................................................................................... 46

APPENDIX E ..................................................................................................................... 47

APPENDIX F ..................................................................................................................... 50

APPENDIX G ..................................................................................................................... 52
Chapter 1: Peer Editing in the Classroom

Many studies have been conducted in an effort to identify effective strategies teachers can employ to improve the quality of their students’ writing. Of these strategies, editing, more specifically peer editing, has emerged as a particularly effective method. As Jay Simmons (2003) observes, peer editors report “that they [have] learned to be better evaluators of [others’] writing and, in the process, [have] improved as writers themselves” (p. 692). A survey of the literature on the efficacy of having students work on a peer’s text to help their partner identify and correct errors in form and content, highlights the value of including both a written and an oral component in this exercise. Research also indicates that students who experience a consistent approach to peer editing over multiple grades become more adept writers (Wooley et al., 2008).

I have incorporated a peer editing program into my practice for 26 years, and believe one that can be adapted by multiple teachers across several disciplines will strengthen the written expression of a student body as a whole. Currently, there is a great deal of variety in the amount of time and detail English teachers, those professionals traditionally tasked with instilling the values and skills of good writing, devote to this activity. Thus some students come into senior humanities courses lacking the experience necessary to polish their writing. This is particularly problematic in English 12, when 73% of a provincial exam worth 40% of a student’s final mark is based on the quality of the student’s written expression. Further, students doing writing assignments in non-English courses often dismiss the necessity of “writing well” because it’s “not English”. The goal of this paper is to describe a process by which teachers can implement a
successful peer editing program in any course whose outcomes require students to produce quality pieces of writing.

**Purpose**

“That’s not how we did it last year” or “I’m not good at this” are two common responses I get from students at the start of a course when I first bring up the topic of peer editing. One of my primary goals as a high school English teacher is to see every student who puts in effort come out of my class a better writer. While some students have a natural affinity for fluidity of expression, many do not; it is these students in particular who benefit from the feedback provided by a peer editor. However, it is also clear that even proficient writers gain something of value from the editing process, as Patchan et al. (2012) determined in their study examining the effect of ability pairings on strong versus weak writers.

Social Constructivism, the theory that an individual’s learning takes place because of his interactions in a group, supports the research indicating students experience growth in their writing skills both by editing others’ work and by having classmates edit their work. Given the collaborative nature of most classrooms today, the implementation of a peer editing program school-wide would be a natural extension of many teachers’ practice. Such a program should help improve the written expression of students across the curriculum, one of five goals identified in my district’s Accountability Contract with the Ministry of Education. Like the Greater Victoria School District, many districts across the province identify supporting literacy development as one of their key goals, so the peer editing model I outline in chapter four could be applied on a much wider scale than is described here.
Justification

After reviewing the literature and taking into account my own successful experiences incorporating peer editing into my classroom routine, I felt it was warranted to consider this question: What peer editing process could be created to provide a consistent experience for students, as well as a platform for teachers in a variety of subject areas, to facilitate the refinement of students’ written expression at Mt. Douglas Secondary? Developing a school-wide peer editing process that is consistent in its implementation and vocabulary would strengthen the connection between disciplines. If practiced by teachers of subjects other than English, students would learn that strong written communication skills are not only applicable, but necessary, in a wide variety of contexts, not just in the English classroom.

The education climate in British Columbia, at this point in time, is a challenging one. In 2002 the government removed teachers’ rights to bargain class size and composition. As a result, the student-load a full-time teacher of an academic high school subject became responsible for often topped 210 students over the course of a year. Providing students with detailed assessments and frequent opportunities to hone their writing skills became fraught with challenges, and many teachers had to cope with the added work load by cutting back on this practice. A well-designed peer editing program, however, should help alleviate some of this work load by shifting the onus for initial writing feedback onto students. Since research indicates that the vast majority of students, regardless of their innate ability with language, benefit from providing and receiving feedback from their classmates, the final draft of any paper that has gone through the peer editing process should possess fewer form and content errors and thus be
less time-consuming for a teacher to assess. When writing assignments become easier to assess, the number of opportunities for student practice might increase.

A key point identified in many studies on peer editing is the fact that students require direct instruction with regards to responding to their peers’ work in order to become effective peer editors. This means that before any peer editing exercises can be undertaken as a class, the teacher needs to design a practice session for her students and demonstrate *how* to be a peer editor. This would include marking up a sample text using the editing symbols she wishes them to incorporate when they assess their peer’s work, as well as modelling the differences between “form” and “content” comments and observations (see p. 5). Demonstrating the skills required in an effective editor would provide all students with an appropriate context in which to engage in this process; it would help decrease anxiety levels in students who believe they have little to offer their peers in terms of writing support; and it would provide all class members with a common vocabulary, resulting in greater clarity in editors’ observations.

The peer editing model I will be outlining benefits both students and teachers. First, students learn the value of quality written expression as a process rather than simply as a product. Regardless of the context, crafting one’s writing to achieve the greatest clarity possible in both form and content is a skill worth acquiring. Second, if practiced by a large enough cross-section of a school’s teaching staff, the connections between discrete subject areas are strengthened, emphasizing the skill transference possible between the humanities and the sciences, for example. Third, a school-wide peer editing program should increase the quality of student writing in general, making the task of assessment less onerous for teachers. Finally, providing a rationale for the
comments/observations one makes as an editor, as well as considering the merits of making the suggested changes as an author, teaches students to become better critical thinkers, regardless of the subject area. A process that benefits all stake-holders in an educational community could open the door to other collaborative approaches and cross-curricular connections.

Terms and Definitions

1) peer editing
   - one student’s constructive feedback on another’s work for the purpose of improving aspects of the form and content of his partner’s writing

2) written expression
   - the quality of the sentence and paragraph structure, together with the sophistication of the ideas expressed, demonstrated in a piece of writing

3) form
   - the variety and competency evident in the structure (sentence and paragraph) of a piece of writing

4) content
   - the level of insight and sophistication of the ideas presented and supported in a piece of writing

Project Overview

The peer editing model I have created involves a series of progressions for the editing pair. The entire process takes between 15 – 45 minutes to complete, depending on the length and complexity of the assignment they will be assessing. After learning how to peer edit during the first three weeks of class, they should gain confidence and
proficiency in this role over the course of the semester, as, ideally, the exercise would be repeated multiple times.

A key aspect of the process will involve them assessing their partner’s paper using an editing sheet containing specific criteria geared toward each type of assignment. Editors will use check marks, circled appropriate descriptors, and write summary comments to focus on the main strength or weakness of a particular aspect of the writing sample. This stage will allow editors to become familiar with the paper and to gain an initial sense of the extent of the revision the author could be expected to perform.

A second equally important phase will require editors to put editing symbols and written comments directly on the author’s rough copy to highlight errors in grammar and syntax, as well as to assess the quality of the argument presented. After both editors are finished, they will return the assignment to its author, who will then review the comments and write down a question or request for clarification he or she would like the editor to address.

The final, and arguably most valuable, phase of the process, will involve a conversation between the partners about the strengths and weaknesses of both pieces. During this conversation, editors could elaborate on their observations, answer any questions the author has, and focus on other issues with the paper not specifically identified during the first two phases of the process.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

A great deal of research has been conducted over the past 35 years exploring the impact of peer editing on student writing. In fact, many studies (Sadler, 1992; Sluijsmans, 2002; Min, 2008) have shown that students can be trained to be as effective, or even more effective, as teachers in providing constructive feedback, an important consideration to keep in mind when considering the size and composition of today’s typical high school classroom. A review of a cross-section of pertinent literature identified four major themes, ones that were instrumental in developing the peer editing model that will be discussed in chapter four.

Constructivism

Constructivism, as it relates to Piaget’s theory of human development (1954, 1970) and Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1978), is an appropriate framework for the integration of content-based pedagogical paradigms with language teaching and learning. Specifically, it supports Piaget’s notion that “learning is a developmental process…involv[ing] change, self-generation, and construction, each building on prior learning experiences” (Kaufman, 2004, p. 304). This theoretical approach to assessing the value of peer editing as it pertains to generating improvements in student writing also reinforces the observations of many researchers that students find more value in a peer editing exercise when they are both affectively and socially engaged (Diab, 2011; Topping, 2003; Yang, et al., 2006; Kaufman, 2004). Further, for both editors and authors, the potential anxiety created as a result of being evaluated by, or by evaluating, a classmate, could be out-weighed by the potential positive outcomes: direct involvement in the learning process, an increase in personal responsibility, more bonding with peers, and greater self-confidence (Topping and Ehly, 1998). The Constructivist focus on the
cognitive and social processes of knowledge acquisition supports the premise that peer editing is a valuable learning tool.

Like Piaget’s developmental theory, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory supports a Constructivist approach to learning as a social construct by demonstrating how new understanding is created through experiences that build on prior learning. The ZPD is “the distance between a learner’s actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978). A peer editing scenario, therefore, taps into both an editor’s and an author’s prior knowledge about writing, theoretically extending each student’s knowledge in the process. In addition, the “reading-as-the reader” (Holliway, 2004, p. 104) experience that is part of this exercise helps peer editors to experience a topic from another’s perspective, providing a better opportunity for them to understand how a reader would interpret their own text. Studies have shown that authors who have an opportunity to receive feedback from their peers are more likely to revise and improve the quality of their original text (Couzijn, 1999; Holliway and McCutchen, 2004).

Feedback

It seems reasonable to expect that students’ own writing will improve as a result of their peer editing experiences, in part because it is a process that actively engages them in evaluative and reflective activities (Zimmerman and Schunk, 1989). Indeed, albeit with some specific caveats, the vast majority of research in this area does support this premise. Pope (2005) found evidence to suggest that the peer editing process can increase the social pressure for students to perform as well as they are able on an assignment, knowing that their classmates will be reviewing it. Some students perceive
peer feedback to be more understandable and useful than teacher feedback because fellow students express their points in a similar manner (Topping, 2003), and thus it is easier to understand (Cho and MacArthur, 2010). This mirrors the observations of Gielen et al. (2010), who postulated that the “intellectual distance” (p. 145) between students and teachers can be great enough that teacher feedback might not be understood by some students.

A number of observational learning researchers (Braaksma et al., 2002, 2004; Couzijn, 1999; Zimmerman and Kitsantas, 2002) have focused on the contribution that observing the writing of others makes to the process of learning to write. The “learning-writing-by-reviewing” effect (Cho and MacArthur, 2010b) suggests that new knowledge in this situation is acquired because editors need to explain to the author what makes a piece of text “good” or “bad”; this is done by identifying problems with the form and/or content and then suggesting ways of correcting them. Asking editors to identify strengths and weaknesses in a peer’s writing, to explain why they have identified them as such, and then to make suggestions for improvement, helps students “generate, elaborate, and improve their knowledge of [effective] writing criteria” (Cho and Cho, 2010, p. 631).

Significantly, however, both Paulson et al. (2007) and Gielen et al. (2010) found that student feedback only has a positive impact if it is specific (i.e., “vary your use of transition words to avoid repetition”) rather than global (“interesting idea”). Their observations underscore the need for a carefully thought-out approach to the development of an effective peer editing model.

Studies looking at the efficacy of peer editing have identified specific types of feedback that play a role in the development of both the author’s and the editor’s writing
skills. These include the filling out of peer editing forms, written versus verbal comments, and various combinations thereof. All are more effective in improving the overall quality of a piece of student text than no feedback at all. However, just because authors receive helpful advice does not necessarily mean they will incorporate it when rewriting their first drafts. Gills and Simpson (2004) attempted to address this problem by asking students to respond to their editor’s feedback, but Gielen et al. (2010) found that authors tended to view this as extra “work”, which decreased their motivation to engage in peer editing at all. Clearly, a balance needs to be struck between teaching students how to provide specific feedback helpful to their peers and encouraging its implementation.

Several researchers have investigated the impact types of written comments have on the development of students’ writing skills. Cho and Cho (2010) coded the comments provided by the students in their study on the basis of whether they were ones of “evaluation” (i.e., commenting on a strength or weakness in the author’s text) or of “scope” (i.e., commenting on a surface, micro-meaning, or macro-meaning aspect of the author’s text). Evaluative comments are an indication of an editor’s ability to detect different types of writing problems (in both form and content), or to identify and explain positive attributes of an author’s text. Comments of scope are an indication of an editor’s understanding of the critical features of reviewing.

Addressing surface feature errors is a reference to the author’s writing mechanics; micro-meaning comments are those focused within a single paragraph; macro-meaning observations reference content across multiple paragraphs. Cho and Cho’s observations indicate that “strength” comments, whether these are connected to the author’s form or
content, may improve the editor’s understanding of what makes good writing. “Weakness” comments, on the other hand, may encourage reflection on the editor’s less effective writing strategies and help her learn what mistakes to avoid making in her own writing. Braaksma et al. (2004), Chi and Bassok (1989), Renkl et al. (1998), Sweller and Cooper (1985), Ohslon (1996) and Siefler (2002) are among the many other researchers who have also observed that peer editors can improve the quality of their own writing by making evaluative comments on another student’s text. In their 1992 study, Gick and McGarry further surmise that students who encounter writing problems they have already been exposed to as editors may be better equipped to avoid those errors in their own work.

Verbal feedback is another aspect of peer editing that researchers have studied in their efforts to determine the types of responses that are most likely to lead to improvements in student writing. Paulson et al. (2007), as part of their examination of student eye movements and the peer editing process, emphasize the socially constructed aspects of peer review highlighted in Vygotsky’s ZPD theory. In their assessment of Gere and Stevens’ (1985) research into the efficacy of written versus oral feedback, Paulson et al. reiterate that the key benefit of an oral response is its simplicity, as written feedback is a more time-consuming process. In addition, Gere and Stevens found that oral responses tend to encourage editors to make more specific, detailed comments about their authors’ texts. Paulson et al. also found this to be true, provided that writers specifically seek this level of detail from their editors. If authors do not engage in dialogue with their editors, a process that encourages both students to ask questions and make comments about the form and content of the text being reviewed, verbal feedback
then tends to encourage primarily global (i.e., “work on your punctuation”), rather than the more helpful specific (i.e., “you need to use apostrophes in your contractions”), feedback.

Having students fill out a peer editing form is a type of feedback designed to give an author a quick over-view of the strengths and weaknesses of his text. Eye-movement research indicates that readers “fixate” (a short pause during which readers “see” a word) problem areas of a text, such as ambiguous words, spelling errors, etc., more frequently and for longer periods of time than other parts of the text. In fact, Just and Carpenter (1980) determined that editors fixate 83% of the time on content words (containing semantic meaning) and 38% of the time on function words (containing syntactic meaning). Eye-movement technology is now able to indicate what sections of a text editors spend more time assessing. However, unless a peer editing form specifically directs them to address potential problems with the author’s content, “surface” errors (content words, punctuation, and syntax) receive far more editorial attention than the quality of the ideas being expressed. Gielen et al. (2010) assessed the value of using forms as an extension of the peer editing process after editors had provided authors with some initial feedback. In this situation, student writing improved more than that of those who did not have access to the extension activity. Thus while peer editing forms clearly have the potential to provide authors with valuable, meaningful assessment, like verbal feedback, to be effective they need to be carefully constructed to encourage specific, rather than global, observations.

**Direct Instruction**

In the context of Vygotsky’s ZPD theory, teachers play a critical role in student knowledge attainment via direct instruction and modeling of the peer editing process.
According to Kaufman (2004), “Constructivist experiences from both the Piagetian and Vygotskian perspectives create opportunities for learners to engage in hands-on, minds-on manipulation of raw data in the quest of identifying new and increasingly complex patterns, acquisition of novel concepts, and construction of new understandings” (p. 305). As applied to the peer editing process, this means that students engaged with a peer’s text have an opportunity to learn how to recognize variety in sentence structure and syntax, to assess the validity of the ideas being expressed in a classmate’s work, and to expand their knowledge of the interplay between form and content. For this to occur, however, students first need to be taught both what to look for when editing a peer’s text and how to communicate their observations to the author. For example, providing students with samples of previously edited work effectively highlights the difference between strong and weak writing, as well as facilitates their development of appropriate vocabulary for analyzing the quality of a peer’s assignment. Chi (1996) takes this idea even further, observing that editors need to be shown how to ask questions that prompt authors to think more deeply, rather than simply give them the correct answer. When a teacher discusses with students the criteria for assessment, and these are implemented by both writers and editors, students learn what constitutes high-quality writing.

For students to get the most benefit from their peer editing experience it is crucial that the teacher be very clear about the purpose of the activity. Its intent is to provide the author with constructive criticism, which, theoretically, should provide the student with enough specific detail regarding weaknesses in both form and content that she can then produce a better piece of revised writing. Some students (Amores, 1997) confuse “constructive criticism” with “negativity”, however, and are therefore reluctant to
indicate the weaknesses, either globally or specifically, in a peer’s text. Teaching students how to be objective in both the giving and receiving of feedback, as well as training authors to ask their editors questions designed to elicit specific suggestions from global comments, is important to do for the process as a whole to be effective. VanDeWeghe (2004) and Paulson et al. (2007) noted the tendency amongst editors to use “safety language” (i.e., “it’s good”) instead of taking ownership of their observations. When students understand the purpose of peer editing, critical analysis rather than personal criticism, this helps to alleviate the concerns of those who doubt their ability to be effective editors.

**Critical Thinking Skills**

While participating in peer editing activities is beneficial for students in terms of improving the quality of their written work, it also helps them learn to think more critically about the topic at hand. Based on a review of the work done by Van Lehn et al. (1995), Topping (1998) observed, “…peer assessment involves the [editor] in reviewing, summarizing, clarifying, giving feedback, diagnosing misconceived knowledge, identifying missing knowledge, and considering deviations from the [topic]” (p. 254). In other words, while assessing the form and content of another’s work, peer editors “learn by doing”, thereby increasing and formalizing their own knowledge of what constitutes good writing. Indeed, teaching both authors and editors how to ask questions of one another that involve the higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation increases students’ ability in general to ask intelligent, adaptive questions (Chi, 1996; Topping, 1998). It is also this type of thinking that allows for the formulation of specific, rather than general, observations about an author’s text, one of the goals of the peer editing process.
Training students how to develop questions that tap into the upper levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy is not easily accomplished in one unit of one subject area at one grade level. As VanDeWegh (2004) points out, it makes much more sense to integrate the teaching of these skills across grades and subject areas. Because the attainment of knowledge and skills at the lower levels of the taxonomy is a prerequisite for acquiring knowledge at the upper levels, a period of time longer than is available in a standard high school course is necessary for students to become proficient “questioners”, and thus competent peer editors. By implementing a cross-curricular approach to peer editing, students might improve their understanding of key concepts when asked to evaluate critically a peer’s text in a content-specific course. Research has also demonstrated the value of “writing to learn” assignments in non-Language Arts courses (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004), further supporting the idea of expanding the peer editing process across the curriculum.

In their 2008 study examining content-area literacy, Shanahan and Shanahan found that “strong early reading skills do not automatically develop into more complex skills that enable students” (p. 42) to be successful in specialized high school courses with their more advanced material and specialized vocabulary. They go on to discuss the need for “high school appropriate literacy skills”, as the lack of these impacts both students’ abilities to decode and understand challenging texts in senior humanities and science courses, as well as their abilities to critique their peers’ work, a process that can also build new learning. Implementing a cross-curricular approach to peer editing would demonstrate to students the importance of good writing regardless of the subject matter. For both editors and authors it can promote active rather than passive learning, as each
must justify his recommendations and/or rejections of specific suggestions for improvement in both written expression and course-specific content (Topping, 1998).

Regardless of the academic environment, the composition of peer editing partnerships has been the focus of numerous studies, both in terms of its impact on critical thinking skills and on improvements in written expression. Strjbos et al. (2010) found that anonymous assessments were useful for two reasons: they prevented authors from taking editors’ comments personally, and from rejecting comments from peers they considered to be less competent than themselves. Many more studies, however, found that as long as all students were taught how to be effective peer editors, the actual pairing of authors and editors was largely immaterial. Cho and Cho (2010) determined that regardless of a student’s innate ability, her own writing improved when she was able to identify the positive features (in both form and content) of a peer’s text across multiple paragraphs, as well as the errors within specific paragraphs. The higher the level of an editor’s writing skills, the more she tended to comment on the problems within and across another student’s paragraphs. However, all editors were able to identify the positive aspects of a text, regardless of the quality of their own written expression. Finally, irrespective of the composition of the author-editor partnership, authors who specifically directed their editors to assess a particular aspect of their text tended to demonstrate long-term improvements in their writing.
Chapter 3: From Theory to Practice

The research clearly indicates that peer editing has a positive impact on student writing. What is less clear, however, is which combination of peer editing activities is most useful to the majority of students. The model I am proposing will help create a consistent peer editing experience across the curriculum and over multiple grades, which should communicate to students the value that all teachers in the school, regardless of their subject area, place on written expression as a life skill. The reinforcement of this process in a “non-conventional” setting (as one of the requirements for a biology 11 paper, for example) by a science, rather than an English, teacher, could “legitimize” the peer editing process in the eyes of those students who value the sciences over the humanities.

In addition, the model I outline in chapter four, if implemented by most or all members of the English department in particular, supports a spiraling of the curriculum that can become more sophisticated in its implementation as students progress from grade to grade. It could be adjusted to use students’ prior knowledge about editing-specific vocabulary to construct new knowledge about good sentence or essay structure, without teachers having to re-teach the entire concept of peer editing from the beginning each year. As well, this peer editing process is designed to engage students with a variety of learning styles because it includes both oral and written components. It encourages accountability and self-reliance in both writers and editors, since the teacher no longer needs to be the writing “expert” after students gain experience and expertise in the editing process. By designing a model that takes into account both the social and cognitive aspects of learning, I hope to instill in students the value of writing as a process, not just
as a product, and in doing so help bring to fruition the Greater Victoria School District’s goal of improving “learning and achievement in Literacy…for each student[.]”

The Framework

To become a good writer takes years of practice. While it is natural to assume that the more opportunities a student is given to write the more proficient she will become, this is not always the case, particularly if the feedback she has received is infrequent or of too broad a nature to be helpful. However, as Eleanor Duckworth notes, “…students learn an enormous amount from each other” (p. 159); therefore, it makes sense to harness this knowledge by facilitating a process through which they can help one another expand their understanding of what makes an effective piece of writing. In addition, since students who engage socially and emotionally with their peers are more likely to learn how to improve their own work as a result of the peer editing process, by creating an environment specifically designed to encourage students to think about good writing, teachers will be able to provide opportunities for these students to receive more frequent, specific feedback.

In the studies I reviewed, no effort was made to create editing partnerships that took into account social and cognitive processes. In the model I am proposing, however, doing exactly this is what should help create a dynamic that affectively engages both author and editor. When students develop an emotional bond with their partners, their motivation to help their peer increases, benefitting both: the editor becomes more adept at identifying errors in form and considering the validity of an argument, while the author has an opportunity to correct the weaknesses in his paper prior to it being submitted for marking. Having the teacher establish the peer editing partnerships, rather than creating random pairings or allowing students to choose their own partners, ensures that students
are given an opportunity to experience a variety of writing styles during the course of a semester. This also helps mitigate the tendency that friends have of giving each other positive global comments, which, while affirming, do not necessarily help improve the writing skills of either the author or the editor.

Another advantage of having the teacher consider her class composition prior to beginning the first peer editing session addresses the reality of many Victoria-area classrooms today: the large number of ELL students. English-language proficiency in a typical high school class can span a huge spectrum of ability, ranging from that of recently-arrived international students struggling to communicate in general, to native English speakers writing at a post-secondary level. The advantage of such a mix is the exposure to a wide variety of experiences it gives to all students in the class. These experiences might provide an author with a perspective on the content of his piece that he had not considered before. Conversely, native English speakers have an opportunity to provide non-native speakers with grammatical assistance, a process that requires the more proficient writer be able to explain the reason for the error to the less able writer. Being in a position to adjust peer editing partnerships as the course progresses allows the teacher to connect individual students whom she feels have complementary skills to offer one another, engaging them both affectively and cognitively in order to create a positive editing experience.

The Process

The studies I reviewed focused on evaluating the merits of different types of peer feedback: verbal, written comments, and forms. A few looked at the potential benefits of combining two of these types, but none that I found had examined combining all three types of peer editing. Studies have indicated that the key advantage of employing oral
feedback is its simplicity; it is not as time-consuming to provide as written feedback and it tends to encourage more specific, detailed comments from editors, provided that authors prompt their editors for this information. To assist students with this type of focused oral debrief at the end of the editing process, students should begin by indicating on their rough copy one specific aspect of their work in particular they would like their editor to evaluate for them. The key to this is to teach authors to make very specific requests: “Have I used my semi-colons correctly?”, which requires the editor to understand the difference in function between a comma and a semi-colon, will yield far more helpful feedback than something like, “How is my grammar?”, which will likely elicit a less useful global response of “good” or “not bad”. Knowing in advance what the author has identified as a potential weakness in his paper could help an editor be more exacting in her evaluation, and should motivate the author to consider carefully whether or not to implement the suggested changes.

Prior to engaging in an oral debrief with their author, editors need to spend time assessing the strengths and weaknesses in the form and content of the paper they are reviewing. All studies looking at the efficacy of peer editing in general concur it does help students polish their writing skills, in part because of the immediacy of the feedback. Having an editor work directly on an author’s rough copy at the same time as she is filling in an editing sheet helps her focus on both the form and content of the paper. Editing sheets can be tailored to elicit specific observations about key criteria in the assignment, while still allowing the editor to work with the author’s text to provide him with suggestions for improving the quality of one or more of his points. The structured responses yielded by an editing sheet, the observations generated by the editor “reading
as the reader”, and the conversation about both at the end of the process provides the author with multiple streams of feedback after a single review. This three-pronged approach to peer editing appeals to a variety of learning styles and is therefore ideally suited to today’s classroom.

The Pedagogy

In my review of the literature, I did not come across a study that examined the benefits to be gained by extending a common peer editing model across subject areas. However, doing so is good pedagogy. It allows for a spiraling of the curriculum, in which students are trained to assess objectively both the form and content of a paper, regardless of the subject matter. The editing symbols for grade 9 students could focus on basic sentence errors such as run-ons and pronoun agreement, while those for grade 12s could include these basics as well as identifying more challenging grammatical errors such as dangling modifiers and faulty parallelism. It does not matter whether students are being asked to apply these assessment tools to a piece of creative writing or to a psychology 11 paper; students in all grades will know that the qualities of effective writing are relevant to both.

Most students tend to see the peer editing process as an activity relegated to their English class; however, the model I outline in chapter four is one that will be effective in any course with a written component. While the type of compositions students are asked to produce will vary from subject to subject, teachers’ expectations regarding the quality of these assignments would hopefully remain the same. Therefore, in order to create a consistent approach to peer editing within a school, it is important that teachers use a common vocabulary when they prepare their students for the first session of the course. For example, while the marketing 12 class might be peer editing their business plans for
the upcoming school clothing campaign, the marketing teacher will still be reviewing
with them the editing symbols used to indicate specific types of grammar errors, as well
as having pairs of students practice editing a sample business plan before assessing one
another’s. She would also demonstrate how to make comments directly on a person’s
rough copy, as well as show her students how to ask questions about the specifics of the
business plan if it is not fully addressing all aspects of the assignment’s criteria.

There is another advantage to be gained by extending the peer editing model I am
suggesting across the curriculum: doing so maximizes the opportunity for students to
internalize the qualities of effective writing. Just as every student has a unique learning
style, so, too, does every teacher have a unique teaching style. More often than not the
two will productively co-exist in the same classroom, but sometimes this is not the case,
for a variety of reasons. In this situation, if teachers from multiple subject areas are
reinforcing the school community’s expectations regarding good written communication,
a student who will not “buy into” the model as presented by his English teacher might see
the value of it when the same process is reviewed by his math teacher. What is important
is the opportunity for students to learn how to become better writers, not who is teaching
these skills.

The Application

Frequently, students equate peer editing with copy editing, assuming they are only
looking for errors in the author’s spelling, word choice, and grammar. While this is an
important part of the editing process, another equally important aspect is content
evaluation. Teaching students to be effective peer editors helps them learn how to ask
good questions, which is integral to the development of strong critical thinking skills.
The more opportunities students get to critique the work of their peers, the more practice
they will have in assessing the form and content of different types of writing. In turn, this will facilitate the transfer of the higher order thinking skills they learned to use while assessing the validity of a peer’s short story analysis to their evaluation of the conclusions drawn by another peer in his chemistry lab write-up. Using a peer editing model such as I describe in chapter four across subject areas and grades gives students more time and opportunity to become good peer editors, which promotes the development of critical thinking skills as well as effective writing skills.

One hindrance to providing students with more frequent opportunities to learn how to become better writers is the workload this creates for teachers. As the research shows, it is not just lots of practice that helps improve students’ written expression, but also the specific feedback identifying the strengths and weaknesses in their work that they receive. When students are taught how to become effective editors themselves, however, not only does the process of editing someone else’s paper assist them in internalizing the qualities of good writing, but the improvements they make to their own work after reviewing their editor’s suggestions should culminate in a product that is easier for their teacher to mark. If it becomes less time-consuming for teachers to assess their students’ writing, this in turn could result in an increase in the number of writing assignments some teachers are able to provide. As well, if it were typical for students to engage in a peer editing process only in their English classes, but this were to expand to include their socials, psychology, and criminology classes, the opportunities for students to think about, and produce, good quality writing would also rise dramatically.

I designed the peer editing model outlined in the next chapter because teaching students how to write well is a skill that transcends the English classroom. It will provide
consistency to the vocabulary and processes currently used on an ad hoc basis at Mt. Douglas, with the aim of eventually making the peer editing of written assignments the norm across the curriculum. In addition, since students exhibit a natural tendency to move from a critique of writing mechanics to an analysis of content issues, having them use a editing sheet and make comments directly on the author’s rough copy is a good fit for them, regardless of the type of writing they are assessing. As long as the purpose of peer editing is made clear to students (critical analysis, not personal criticism), and they understand that everyone, no matter his or her skill level, benefits from the process, most students should appreciate the opportunity to garner specific feedback on their written expression, whether it originates from their peers or their teachers.
Chapter 4: A “Hopscotch” Approach to Peer Editing

Background

Studies examining the impact of peer editing activities on student writing reveal that when teachers incorporate certain elements into this process, these tend to facilitate long-term improvements in students’ written expression. Specifically, employing a Constructivist framework when it comes to scaffolding learning, providing direct instruction in terms of how to edit a peer’s work, demonstrating multiple techniques for supplying feedback, and encouraging the development of students’ critical thinking skills create the foundation for a peer editing method that can be used across grades and subject areas. This model requires students to consider the observations of a partner in conjunction with their own reflections, moving from an internal to an external perspective at key points in the process, much like the ins and outs of a hopscotch game. (Appendix A).

I have endeavored to design a process that appeals to a variety of learning styles. I found Neil Fleming’s (1992) VARK (Visual, Aural, Read/write, Kinesthetic) method of categorizing students’ preferred modes of processing and communicating information to be an effective framework. According to Fleming’s research, visual learners gravitate towards charts, pictures, and diagrams, a fact I have addressed by incorporating the use of editing symbols into the review process. Since aural learners are auditory processors, the give-and-take between authors and editors in the oral debrief portion of my model will accommodate students who best learn this way. Those whose preferred mode of learning is read/write will have opportunities to engage in both these activities during the process I have developed, as it requires editors to make comments on both an editing form and on the author’s rough copy. Finally, for those students who are tactile learners, the act of
physically correcting errors on another’s paper should partially address their need for a “hands-on” approach to gaining new understanding.

Teachers in public schools have to accommodate a wide range of student ability. In addition, with many districts’ finances dependent upon the income generated by an ever-increasing international student population, many of today’s classrooms include a significant number of individuals whose first language is not English. This is definitely the case at Mt. Douglas Secondary, and it creates some strategic challenges when it comes to grouping students for various exercises. However, the research into peer editing thus far has indicated that a disparity in writing ability between partners is of little consequence, provided that both partners understand the mechanics of good editing. This information is significant because it allows teachers greater flexibility when it comes to creating editing partnerships for a particular assignment. Teachers can consider grouping students in ways that address their social and emotional needs, not just their academic ones. Partnerships that function particularly well can be used as models for successful author-editor collaborations, and effective editors can “mentor” less able ones when partners are reassigned during a subsequent activity.

**Teaching Students How to Edit**

Prior to the first classroom editing session, teachers need to show students how to review someone else’s work. This would include establishing and reviewing a set of editing symbols (Appendix B) that students will use to mark up each other’s texts. These should be the same set of symbols that the teacher uses in her marking, so their value as an instrument of feedback is continuously reinforced. In addition, teachers should discuss with the class the types of questions and comments effective editors write on an author’s rough copy in order to draw his attention to weaknesses in the text.
Emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between form and content is crucial, as good ideas have little impact unless they are clearly communicated. Learning to evaluate both aspects of a piece of writing helps students become better critical thinkers in general.

Once students are familiar with the symbols they will be expected to use, and the types of questions and/or comments they should consider including as part of their review, partners should be given a sample paragraph to co-edit (Appendix C). This will allow them to work through the process they will be completing the following class for a peer, without the pressure to “perform” that some might feel the first time the class does this activity. Students should be reminded to identify strengths and weaknesses in the writer’s form and content. If the teacher has previously introduced a rubric for assigning specific marks to a piece of writing, students could be encouraged to “grade” the practice assignment, and to provide a brief rationale for their mark, one that addresses key aspects of the rubric. When the class has completed this exercise, each set of partners will compare their initial edit to the sample (Appendix D) projected on the screen. The teacher can use this opportunity to highlight key errors that should have been caught in form and content, as well as to demonstrate the kinds of questions and/or comments an editor should feel comfortable leaving on the author’s text.

**Stage 1: Reflection**

Prior to exchanging papers with their editing partners, authors should be asked to identify one or two specific aspects of form and/or content they would like their editors to focus on for them, in addition to the more generalized edit they will receive. Doing this helps the author learn to assess her own work objectively and critically. She will probably already know from previous writing exercises what the weaknesses in her form tend to be. However, by encouraging authors to consider the appropriateness and/or level
of insight in the content of their work as well, teachers are training students to evaluate all aspects of their writing. As they develop a better awareness of the interplay between form and content in their own compositions, authors should become more attune to this aspect of their peer’s work, which in turn should further their understanding of effective writing in general. Asking authors to consider their own strengths and weaknesses as writers prior to having them embark on an evaluation of their partner’s writing, reinforces the concept of teaching students how to take their current knowledge of “good” writing and apply it to a new situation. The thinking that needs to occur during this activity can facilitate improvements in the editor’s own writing skills.

**Stage 2: Assessment**

The actual editing of papers involves two distinct yet related processes. Both are hands on activities that encourage the editor to “learn by doing.” Not only are students required to evaluate and suggest improvements to the author’s mechanics, but also to evaluate the validity and accuracy of his observations and conclusions. Partners should be seated close to one another in case one or both need to clarify some aspect of the other’s work during this stage of the editing process.

**Editing symbols.** Using the symbols reviewed in class, editors work through their author’s paper, indicating errors in form on the rough copy itself. In addition, to provide greater clarity editors are also encouraged to write brief observations and/or questions regarding both form and content. The author’s own knowledge of appropriate sentence structure, punctuation use, and paragraphing becomes the focus of this part of the exercise. For basic errors such as fragments and run-ons, editors can simply indicate where they have occurred. Being able to identify them means the student has internalized these concepts and recognizes that they are not representative of effective writing. For
more subtle mistakes in form such shifts in voice and diction errors, editors should be encouraged to question the author’s intention or to supply a corrected version of the sentence. To illustrate, many students use the “thesaurus” function in Word without being aware of the role context can play when it comes to choosing an appropriate alternative. An editor with a sophisticated vocabulary could supply the correct word the author is looking for, while an editor who is unsure what to suggest, but who recognizes the need for something different, could bring the author’s attention to the potential problem by leaving a comment to that effect on the rough copy.

The types of comments that editors leave for their partner can play an important role in improving the quality of writing of both author and editor. While the editing symbols are useful for indicating problems with form, evaluative comments, provided they are specific in their observations, help the author refine, clarify, or augment his argument, thus presumably improving the overall quality of her paper. At the same time, specific comments about the author’s content require the editor to justify his analysis of a particular point, forcing him to consider the qualities of strong writing and perhaps bringing those into play in his own work. For example, if the topic includes the directive to explain what makes a particular symbol effective in the story, but the author has simply identified and described the symbol, an editor should be able to recognize the weakness in the discussion and provide a comment to this effect and/or a suggestion for remediation.

**Editing sheet.** At the same time the editor is marking up the author’s rough copy with editing symbols and written comments/questions about the content, she is also filling in an editing sheet. This document can be customized to dovetail with particular
types of assignments, guiding editors in their assessments of specific skills the teacher is trying to reinforce in her students. Thus if the paper being edited is a literary essay, one of the editorial prompts might ask the editor to evaluate the quality of the author’s thesis statement (Appendix E). Alternately, if partners are reviewing each other’s descriptive compositions, editors might be asked to assess the effectiveness of the figurative language (Appendix F). Having students fill out an editing sheet while working directly with the author’s good copy encourages editors, particularly those who are lacking in experience or confidence, to move beyond surface errors such as sentence fragments or spelling mistakes and into more specific errors like under-developed arguments or the appropriateness of a particular quote.

Stage 3: Debrief

Once each partner has finished marking up the other’s rough copy and filling in the editing sheet, both are returned to the author, who reviews the observations of his editor. Authors should then be encouraged to jot down specific points they would like clarified and/or any questions they have for their editor, based on the editor’s work on their rough copy or notes made on the editing sheet. These will become the “talking points” for the oral debrief, the final stage in the editing process. The more specific the questions authors ask their editors, the more helpful the information they will receive, and the more likely the author is to make changes to her text.

To encourage an open exchange of questions and comments between authors and editors, especially the first time students engage in this process at the start of a course, it might be useful for the teacher to provide the class with a series of prompts (Appendix G) on the board. These guided questions are designed to elicit specific, rather than global,
feedback and, when augmented by the questions or requests for clarification that authors compile while reviewing their editor’s observations, should reinforce for the author the strengths and weaknesses of her paper. The oral debrief engages partners on both an intellectual and social level, permitting a relaxed, focused discussion about the qualities of good writing that would be challenging for a teacher to replicate were she trying to achieve the same goal with 30 students simultaneously.

**Stage 4: Application**

The first three stages of this peer editing model are designed to help students of all writing abilities extend their knowledge of what constitutes effective writing, both in form and content. After the oral debrief, students are asked to review their editor’s feedback once again in light of their recent discussion, and then to begin revising their rough drafts. Learning occurs both as a result of students being asked to explain their comments as editors and having to implement the required corrections as authors. However, there will always be those who are reluctant to spend the extra time necessary to improve their written work. As incentive, students can be instructed to hand in both the edited rough copy and the peer editing sheet along with their good copy. This will allow the teacher to track the changes made in form and content, shifts that could then become the focus of some of the teacher’s comments regarding the quality of the student’s writing.
Chapter 5: Moving Forward

To summarize, the three-pronged approach to peer editing that I have developed should help improve the quality of students’ written expression for a number of reasons. First, since it includes both verbal and written components, it addresses a variety of learning styles. Second, it encourages critical thinking skills by teaching students how to ask questions that will generate specific, rather than general, responses, as well as by requiring editors to explain the rationale behind some of their comments or suggestions. Third, it takes into account the role that affect can play in skill acquisition by providing a means for teachers to create editing partnerships that satisfy students’ social and cognitive needs. Once all students understand how to critically review form and content, the composition of the author-editor partnership can be based on criteria other than the writing proficiency of the individuals. This model can be adapted to suit any course whose outcomes involve some form of written expression.

Limitations of the Design

One limitation of this particular model is the time it requires, both for the implementation and for the process itself. Realistically, it takes one full period (80 minutes) to give students an overview of the process and the rationale behind it, to review the editing symbols, to demonstrate the difference between general and specific comments/questions, to have students practice editing a sample piece, and then to review it with them. This is a lot of information to cover in one session, and it would probably be accomplished more effectively if it were completed over two classes, rather than one. However, given the fact that teachers of many courses are all ready under a lot of pressure to cover a great deal of material within a specific timeframe, some may feel that
this is 80 minutes of instruction they cannot afford to cut from the delivery of their content.

After students have assessed the sample with a partner and are feeling reasonably comfortable with the process, the first “live” peer editing session will also take more time to complete than subsequent sessions: editors generally want to do a good job for their authors, and it takes some practice to become adept at working directly on an author’s rough copy while at the same time filling out an editing sheet. As well, partners are often self-conscious about the oral debrief component the first time they engage in it.

Providing them talking points on the board and directing them to address their author’s specific editing request are two ways the teacher can help facilitate this process. After students have completed the entire editing process once, successive ones will proceed more smoothly. In general, students can peer edit single paragraphs in 15 – 20 minutes, while essays will take 30 – 45 minutes, depending on the length and complexity of the topic.

Another potential issue with the model is, ironically, the inverse of one of its strengths. Some teachers of subjects other than English might not feel confident enough in their own writing or editing skills to make the editing process part of their course. However, if colleagues are willing to work collaboratively, as most are, this is not an insurmountable problem. The English department could prepare a brief handout explaining, with examples, the meaning of each symbol. As well, part of a school-based professional development day could be used to demonstrate the model in action, familiarizing all teachers with the process prior to its implementation in their own classrooms.
Another way to decrease the apprehension of teachers not really comfortable with assessing students’ writing is to decrease the scope of the peer review. The editing symbols, for example, that a teacher gives to his class to use when assessing someone else’s work, can be “customized” for particular subjects. To illustrate, it is acceptable to use the passive voice in a science lab write-up but not in a humanities essay, something with which a chemistry teacher would be familiar and would want her students to employ. This teacher could then choose to have her students focus on only a subset of the symbols that an English teacher would use, ones that are more relevant to her subject area, and thus ones with which she feels more comfortable explaining to her class.

Finally, student rough copy completion rates are a third possible limitation to the peer editing model I have described. Obviously, if many do not have their assignment ready to exchange with a classmate on the due date, this creates a problem. However, as long as the teacher has already created an environment where due dates are respected, this should not really be an issue. In addition, if students understand that an edited rough copy must be handed in with their good copy as part of the completed assignment, this should provide added incentive to have the first draft ready for the peer editing session. For those who are not ready to participate in the process, one of the benefits of instituting a school-wide peer editing model means that these students should be able to find a peer outside of class time who understands the process and can review the paper for them.

**Design Implementation**

For the implementation of a school-wide peer editing model to be successful, the majority of the English Department at Mt. Douglas would need to embrace this concept. Since many, if not most, of these teachers do some type of peer editing in their own classes, they will already be familiar with aspects of my design. At our department
meeting in April, 2015, I will explain the process I have developed and ask for their input in reviewing the editing symbols I plan to use. It might make sense at this point to develop two versions of the symbols: one for junior students and another for senior students. In May we have a school-based professional development day, so the department could use that afternoon to create the editing symbols sheets and do a simulation of the entire process.

Once I have the support of the English department, I will need to present my model to our administration for their approval to work towards a school-wide implementation. As a staff, we have already begun to explore the idea of adapting our timetable to encourage the development of Personal Learning Communities, so a cross-curricular peer editing proposal would tie into this very well. With administration’s support, and in conjunction with our Pro-D committee, I would plan a short workshop to show interested staff from a variety of departments how to incorporate my model into their courses. This would take place during the school-based professional development day scheduled for September, 2015. After this, I would make myself available as a support person for anyone who has questions about the process or who needs help with some aspect of its implementation.

It would be useful to hold a debriefing session with all the participating teachers prior to the Christmas break. At this session I would ask for feedback regarding what is working well for people and what, if anything, is causing problems. This would then allow us to brainstorm possible solutions to issues that were making the model less effective than it should be. I would also ask for volunteers to work with me to increase the number of teachers from other departments who are actively using the peer editing
model with their classes. Lastly, at our May, 2016 school-based professional day, I would summarize for the staff as a whole our experiences with the model across the curriculum, and invite those who are interested in implementing it, but have not yet done so, to join us.

**Potential Hurdles to Implementation**

While I am confident that English teachers and most social studies teachers will be amenable to trying my peer editing model in their classrooms, I think it is possible that fear of the unknown might prevent some teachers of other subject areas from incorporating it into their courses. Although this is not always the case, many science teachers are more comfortable dealing with numbers than with sentences and paragraphs. This could create a situation where a teacher feels the editing process itself is beyond his level of expertise, making him reluctant even to try it. However, a collaborative approach to implementation, such as I have described, would likely encourage many teachers in this position to put aside their inhibitions, knowing they have the support of their colleagues.

In addition to teachers who might feel out of their depth when it comes to teaching their students how to peer edit, there will also be those who have no interest in the process at all, and will therefore choose not to become involved. These might include teachers who already have a peer editing system that works for them, those who don’t see the point of peer editing in the first place, or those who feel it will take too much time away from the material they have to cover. To the first group, I would suggest that consistency in approach is something students look for and appreciate, as they no longer have to remember to do one thing in Ms. Y’s class and another in Mr. Z’s. As for the others, I would hope that if a school-wide model is as successful as I think it could be,
and that if teachers from multiple subject areas begin noticing improvements in students’ writing as a whole, this would encourage reluctant implementers to try the process at least once. When the majority of the staff demonstrates its belief in the value of peer editing as it pertains to making students more aware of the qualities of effective writing, students are more likely to believe this themselves.

**Areas for Further Research**

There are a number of offshoots to this peer editing design that would be interesting to investigate further. Given the realities of growing ELL numbers in today’s classrooms, what impact might this have on the composition of future editing partnerships? While the research indicates that disparities in writing skills do not impact the value of the editing process for either proficient or struggling writers, the increase in the number of ELL students with a very weak grasp of English placed regular classroom environments will be an even greater challenge for teachers in the future. Would it perhaps be in the best interest of all if those writing well below grade level were paired together, rather than partnering these students with those whose grasp of the language far exceeds their own?

The current trend in BC education is to enhance links between discrete courses rather than to view each one as a stand-alone entity. Implementing a cross-curricular, cross-grade peer editing model would fit right into this vision, as it stands at the crossroads of both reading and writing and of form and content. For example, the students in a history 12 class studying WWI could be the same students in an English 12 class reading *All Quiet on the Western Front*. A joint essay for these classes examining German offensive strategies in Eastern France in the context of key symbols developed by the
novelist would blend historical fact with literary analysis, and the subsequent peer editing process could be adapted to address key facets of both types of writing.

It might also be worth exploring the idea of having students peer edit each other’s work electronically, using Google Docs or the “Track Changes” function in Word, for instance. This could be done with all students in a computer lab at the same time, each working their way through their partner’s document on-screen and using the editing symbols and written comments/questions as per the model’s description. It would also be possible to use an editable on-line form as well, although it might be easier when it comes to the oral debrief if this part of the process were to remain on paper. Alternately, depending on the class, students could do the electronic editing (on the rough copy and the form) at home, send the results to their authors, and then do an oral debrief in class the following day. This format would require more work on the teacher’s part behind the scenes to keep everyone accountable and on-time, however.

Finally, the most intriguing possibility to explore in the future would be to facilitate an extension of this model into Mt. Douglas’ middle, and possibly elementary, feeder schools. Developing effective peer editors requires “a system-wide K-12 writing policy that includes direct instruction in a developmental model of response” (VanDeWegh, 2004, p. 99). By modifying the process to make it appropriate for the younger grades, students who remain within the Mt. Douglas family of schools for the duration of their educational career will have potentially experienced upwards of seven years of consistent peer editing, along with the learning that comes with this, by the time they graduate. Such a process is likely make a strong, positive contribution toward School District 61’s goal of improving student literacy.
References


Appendix A

The “Hopscotch” Approach to Peer Editing

Student 1

Reflection (individual)

Assessment (partner)

Review (individual)

Debrief (partner)

Application (individual)

Student 2

Reflection (individual)

Assessment (partner)

Review (individual)

Debrief (partner)

Application (individual)
### Appendix B

**Editing Symbols**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>new paragraph</td>
<td>“Hello,” Pat said. [NP]“Nice day,” I replied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-O</td>
<td>run-on sentence</td>
<td>Tim raced through his breakfast [R-O] he couldn’t afford to be late on his first day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRAG</td>
<td>sentence fragment</td>
<td>After they’d eaten the pizza. [FRAG]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWK</td>
<td>awkward</td>
<td>He adds in the contradiction of religious, which could get more interests from readers. [AWK]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PV</td>
<td>passive voice</td>
<td>The crowd cheered as the race was won by the host school. [PV]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>punctuation error</td>
<td>Sara did [P] however [P] eat all the cake. She didn’t leave any for us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>spelling error</td>
<td>I would like alot [SP] of ice cream.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>pronoun agreement</td>
<td>Everyone has to bring their [PA] own camera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV</td>
<td>subject-verb agreement</td>
<td>The box of apples are [SV] on the top shelf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VT</td>
<td>verb tense</td>
<td>He likes to eat his dinner and then took [VT] a nap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW</td>
<td>wrong word</td>
<td>Neither team wanted to loose [WW] the game.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Editing Practice

Use the editing symbols and brief written comments to correct all the mistakes you can find in this paragraph. When you've finished, give it a scale mark and write a sentence explaining why you gave it that mark.

In Eugenia Collier's short story "Marigolds" Lizabeth learns to be more understanding of other people. Early in the story Lizabeth shows she is a self-centered child when she childishly teases Miss Lottie during an attack on the old lady's beautiful marigolds, she confesses "I lost my head entirely." (7) As a child, Lizabeth does not think of the results of her actions or the effect of them on Miss Lottie. Instead she acts without thinking. Like someone without experience often does. Because Lizabeth has no experience of cruelty and believes selfishness is the only way to be happy; she has no compassion. Therefore, Lizabeth's teasing of Miss Lottie showed her lack of compassion. Suddenly, however, she understood the intent of the damage she has done. In Lizabeth's eyes, Miss Lottie transforms from a which to a "broken old woman" who had "dared to create beauty" in her poverty-stricken surroundings (9). After Lizabeth returns to completely destroy the marigolds, she sees Miss Lottie in this new way. For the first time Lizabeth feels shame and remorse for her actions. Finally, Lizabeth feels for someone else for the first time. When she changes from selfish to compassionate. She is able to stand and face Miss Lottie and look "beyond myself and into the depths of another human being. Due to the hagard look on Miss Lotties face, Lizabeth realizes that she has hurt another human being, and that all people suffer. From this new insight, she learns to be more understanding. In conclusion, Lizabeth illustrates one of lifes most important lessons as she moves from childhood innocence to adult reality.

Scale mark: ____

Reason: ________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
Appendix D

Corrected Version

In Eugenia Collier's short story "Marigolds", Lizabeth learns to be more understanding of other people. Early in the narrative, Lizabeth shows she is a self-centered child when she childishly teases Miss Lottie during an attack on the old lady's beautiful marigolds, she confesses "I lost my head entirely" (7). Since she is a child, Lizabeth does not think of the results of her actions or the effect of them on Miss Lottie. Instead, she acts without thinking. Like someone without experience often does. Because Lizabeth believes selfishness is the only way to be happy, she has no compassion. Therefore, Lizabeth's teasing of Miss Lottie showed her lack of compassion. One day, however, she understood the intent of the damage she has done. When this happens, Miss Lottie is transformed from a which into a "broken old woman" who had "dared to create beauty" (9) in her poverty-stricken surroundings. It is after Lizabeth returns to completely destroy the marigolds that she sees Miss Lottie in this new way. For the first time Lizabeth feels shame and remorse for her actions. Finally, Lizabeth feels for someone else for the first time. When she changes from selfish to compassionate, she is able to stand and face Miss Lottie and look "beyond herself and into the depths of another human being". Due to the haggard look on Miss Lottie's face, Lizabeth realizes that she has hurt another human being, and that all people suffer. From this new insight, she learns to be more understanding. In conclusion, Lizabeth illustrates one of life's most important lessons as she moves from childhood innocence to adult reality.

Scale mark: 4

Reason: Your examples are well-developed and you have appropriate topic and concluding sentences. Watch for repetition in your word choice and make sure that both sides of a semi-colon are complete thoughts.
Appendix E

Peer Editing Sheet – Expository Essay

Author: ________________________  Editor: ______________________

Introductory Paragraph
1) Put a check mark beside items that have been done correctly:
   a) it moves from general to more specific statements ___
   b) it is written in the present tense ___
   c) it is written in the third person ___
   d) the thesis statement clearly indicates a pattern of development ___
      (states the 3 elements discussed or provides a global descriptor)
   e) doesn’t refer to itself (“This essay will…”) ___
   f) minimum of 150 words ___

2) Identify one aspect that makes this paragraph effective and/or one aspect that needs to be strengthened. Give a specific reason for your observation.

First Body Paragraph
1) Put a check mark beside items that have been done correctly:
   a) specific examples from the source are used as evidence ___
   b) it is written in the present tense ___
   c) it is written in the third person ___
   d) contains a quote that fits smoothly into the paragraph ___
   e) the context of the quote is clear (who is speaking to whom under what circumstances) ___
   f) topic sentence reflects the thesis statement ___
   g) concluding sentence is appropriate ___
   h) minimum of 175 words ___

2) Identify one aspect that makes this paragraph effective and/or one aspect that needs to be strengthened. Give a specific reason for your observation.
Second Body Paragraph

1) Put a check mark beside items that have been done correctly:
   a) specific examples from the source are used as evidence  ___
   b) it is written in the present tense  ___
   c) it is written in the third person  ___
   d) contains a quote that fits smoothly into the paragraph  ___
   e) the context of the quote is clear (who is speaking to whom under what circumstances)  ___
   f) topic sentence reflects the thesis statement  ___
   g) concluding sentence is appropriate  ___
   h) minimum of 175 words  ___

2) Identify one aspect that makes this paragraph effective and/or one aspect that needs to be strengthened. Give a specific reason for your observation.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Third Body Paragraph

1) Put a check mark beside items that have been done correctly:
   a) specific examples from the source are used as evidence  ___
   b) it is written in the present tense  ___
   c) it is written in the third person  ___
   d) contains a quote that fits smoothly into the paragraph  ___
   e) the context of the quote is clear (who is speaking to whom under what circumstances)  ___
   f) topic sentence reflects the thesis statement  ___
   g) concluding sentence is appropriate  ___
   h) minimum of 175 words  ___

2) Identify one aspect that makes this paragraph effective and/or one aspect that needs to be strengthened. Give a specific reason for your observation.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Concluding Paragraph
1) Put a check mark beside items that have been done correctly:
   a) it sums up each of the points developed in the body ___
   b) it is written in the present tense ___
   c) it is written in the third person ___
   d) it does not include new information about the topic ___
   e) there is no repetitive information ___
   f) minimum of 150 words ___

2) Identify one aspect that makes this paragraph effective and/or one aspect that needs to be strengthened. Give a specific reason for your observation.

____________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Final Check List
• essay properly addresses the topic yes / no
• word choice is formal throughout yes / no
• tone is formal throughout yes / no
• transition words/phrases are effective yes / no

Provide a scale mark and a specific comment that justifies your assessment of the essay’s quality as a whole:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

For the Oral Debrief:
• Based on a review of my rough copy and editing sheet, a question or comment I have for my editor is…

• Corrections to make to my rough copy…
Appendix F

Peer Editing Sheet – Descriptive Composition

Author: ____________________________  Editor: ____________________________

I. Put a check mark beside the items that have been done properly. Add any necessary clarifying comments to the right.

   COMMENTS

1) This piece is composed of more than 1 paragraph. ___

2) It is written in the 1st or 3rd person (no “you”). ___

3) There is imagery connected to at least 3 of the 5 senses: sight, sound, taste, touch, smell (circle).

   ___

4) It is the appropriate length. ___
   (# of words in an average line X total # of lines)

5) It is NOT a narrative. ___

II. Assess the style:

1) The mood reflects the author’s intention
   a) completely   b) mostly   c) inconsistently

   If you circled (b) or (c), provide some specific direction for the author.

   ________________________________________________________________

   ________________________________________________________________

2) The information is conveyed in a factual manner
   a) consistently   b) inconsistently   c) not at all

   If you circled (b) or (c), provide some specific direction for the author.

   ________________________________________________________________

   ________________________________________________________________
3) The figures of speech (6) are original and appropriate
   a) all are  b) most are  c) few are (or missing)

If you circled (b) or (c), provide some specific direction for the author.

____________________________________________________________________________________________

4) The transition words in this piece are
   a) interesting and used appropriately  c) too few/missing/inappropriate
   b) appropriate but repetitive

If you circled (b) or (c), provide some specific direction for the author.

____________________________________________________________________________________________

5) At this point the composition is a ___ on the scale because

____________________________________________________________________________________________

Comments/questions I have for the oral debrief...

____________________________________________________________________________________________

Things to address before writing my good copy...
Appendix G

Oral Debrief Instructions

1) Before beginning the debrief, have partners return the editing sheets and read them over. Then each partner must record a question or comment he has regarding some aspect of the feedback he’s received. **Authors keep the editing sheet completed by their partner to record the oral feedback that is stage 3 of the process.**

2) Review the debriefing prompts on the board. Stress the conversational (give and take) format and the importance of taking down notes as a reminder of things to review / change on the rough copy before beginning the good copy.

3) The **goal** of the editor is **constructive criticism**. The **responsibility** of the author is to ask questions for clarification if something the editor suggests is unclear or confusing.

**Suggested Partner Debriefing Prompts (on the board)**

- I feel your piece is/isn’t on-topic for these reasons…
- In general there is/isn’t a good flow to your paragraph/essay because you…
- The greatest strength of this piece of writing is…because…
- One aspect of this piece of writing that needs some more work is…because…
- Address the author’s editing requests he/she recorded on his/her rough copy.
- Other helpful observations?