

Literacy Development Through Peer Reviews in a Freshman Composition Classroom

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The only source of knowledge sufficiently rich and reliable for learning about written language is the writing already done by others. In other words, one learns to write by reading. The act of writing is critical as one learns to write by reading; our desire to write provides an incentive and direction for learning about writing from reading. But the writing that anyone does must be vastly complemented by reading if it is to achieve anything like the creative and communicative power that written language offers.

Frank Smith (*Essays into Literacy*)

Introduction: reading and writing as related thought processes

Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics defines literacy as "the ability to read and write in a language" (Richards, 1985, p. 216). More specifically, functional literacy is defined as referring to the ability to use reading and writing skills "sufficiently well for the purposes and activities which normally require literacy in adult life or in a person's social position" (Richards, p. 216). However, the nature of the relationship of reading and writing is more complex than any definition can imply.

The development of literacy involves development of writing and reading as conjoined activities with shared cognitive processes that shape each other, and are affected by (and affect) the context in which they occur. Fitzgerald (1989) argues that writing and reading, or, more specifically, such subprocesses of writing and reading as revision in writing and critical reading are "highly related and draw on similar thought processes" (Fitzgerald, 1989, p. 42). Fitzgerald (1989) describes revision in writing and critical reading as dissonance resolution processes based on reciprocal dynamic, and interdependent relationship between writers, readers, and texts. More specifically, as Nystrand (1986) puts it, the writers "write on the premises of the reader" (Nystrand, 1986, p.46), taking the readers' expectations into account, and shaping their texts to meet such expectations of the audience. On the other hand, readers' goals, expectations, and beliefs can be influenced by the writers' goals, and readers "read on the premises of the writer" (Nystrand, 1986, p. 49). Boiarsky (1984), referring to work of such composition scholars as Murray and Graves, states that during parts of the revision process, "the writer ... stops to read" (Boiarsky, 1984, p. 65), and moves between thinking about the piece from the reader's perspective, to writing down the ideas and re-organizing them, to re-reading his/her text.

There are certain textual cues that help readers shape their expectations and facilitate the process of reading. For example, readers have different expectations when opening an encyclopedia than when reading a mystery novel, and such expectations of the type of information anticipated in a certain text and an expected genre are "influenced by past experience or prior knowledge" of these genres (Fitzgerald, 1989, p. 43). If during revision process the writers notice a potential mismatch (dissonance, in Fitzgerald's terms) between their own and readers' expectations and the actual text, they attempt to resolve this mismatch problem by making changes to the text and/or their goals in writing. On the other hand, during critical reading, the readers compare the text to their own goals and beliefs, and "to what they think the writers' goals are" (Fitzgerald, 1989, p. 44). If mismatches occur, readers try to resolve them by changing their expectations and goals in reading the text. This interrelationship between reading, writing, and thinking can be further supported by Vygotsky's (1962) work. Vygotsky (1962) establishes a basis for his theory of the relationship between thought and word, by suggesting that words give rise to thoughts, which, in turn, are expressed in words.

The concept of reading and writing as modes of learning in the college context led the researchers and teachers to develop the concept of "critical literacy", where reading and writing can be used in ways that surpass the functional and minimal literacy demands and allow the students to develop and use skills for analysis, synthesis and creative expression (Flower, 1989). The purpose of this paper is to provide a theoretical overview of the role of peer reviews as a means of integrating college reading and writing processes.

and discuss the results of three studies (two previously published, and one conducted by the author in her composition classes) examining various aspects of peer reviews in a composition classroom.

Integrating college reading and writing: a historic perspective

While the discussion centering around writing and reading as modes of learning is a relatively new one in education, the idea of the importance of integrated approach to teaching reading and writing has been expressed as early as the late 1800's (Quinn, 1995). As early as 1894, the National Education Association issued a report that stated that development of reading and writing skills were of equal value (Applebee, 1974). In 1897, Harvard admissions test asked the students to read and respond to a short essay. In 1907, MIT introduced courses that emphasized communicative uses of language and teaching reading and writing for learning (Quinn, 1995). However, for a number of political and economic reasons, this movement that was originally designed to promote integration led to separation of reading from writing

The following thirty years, the 30's, 40's and 50's, were a time when this trend of teaching reading and writing separately and in isolation from learning was reversed, and the first formal college writing across the curriculum programs emerged. Later, however, in 1965, the College Entrance Examination Board proposed a three part division of high school English into language, literature, and composition (Quinn, 1995). Teaching reading was not part of the curriculum, and such division created the image of teaching reading as a remedial occupation. This image was further reinforced by the federal Right to Read program in its focus on corrective attention to basic reading skills. However, despite these negative tendencies, some positive trends attempting to integrate reading and writing as modes of learning were starting to emerge.

In the 70's and 80's, important models of reading were developed. These models were based on "cognitive psychology, transformational-generative grammar and schema theory" (Quinn, 1995, p.303). Psycholinguistic models, such as Goodman's (1967) and Smith's (1971) viewed reading as a holistic activity, and emphasized the role of the reader in making sense of the text. Proponents of the whole language approach to teaching reading and writing emphasized active involvement of students into reading and writing processes (Goodman & Goodman, 1977; Smith, 1982), and de-emphasized teaching of discrete skills.

The concept of reading and writing as interactive, meaning-construction processes led the literacy researchers of the 80's to examine the reading-writing relationships further, and to construct process models of reading and writing (Pearson & Tierney, 1984; Shanahan & Lomax, 1986). In the mid-80's such researchers as Newell (1984), Langer (1986), and Langer and Applebee (1987) turned to the examination of reading and writing as modes of learning, and found that "reading with writing promotes knowledge transformation, extends and enriches students' engagement in learning, and encourages more thoughtful exploration and elaboration of ideas" (Quinn, 1995, p.305).

In the 90's, teachers and researchers have become increasingly aware of teaching reading and writing as means to acquire content knowledge and to develop academic writing skills. The idea of reading and writing as modes of learning is further fortified by the current social-constructivist theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1986).

Research on the reading-writing connection

The processes of reading and writing are closely linked and interdependent, neither can develop in isolation from the other, and none can develop before the other. As we write, we continuously re-read what has been written before to re-organize and re-focus our thoughts, we read what was written by others to shape the direction of our own thought and to find confirmations of our own ideas in writing of others, and to extend our thinking. Smith's description of the reading-writing relationship suggests that "the desire to write provides an incentive and direction for reading, and reading also acts as an incentive for writing" (DeFord, 79).

Goodman (1986) outlines the following principles for reading and writing:

- Readers construct meaning during reading
- Readers predict, select, confirm, and self-correct as they seek to make sense of print
- Writers include enough information and detail so what they write will be comprehensible to their readers. Effective writing makes sense for the intended audience. Efficient writing includes only enough for it to be comprehensible.
- Three language systems interact in written language: the graphophonics (sound and letter patterns), the syntactic (sentence patterns), and the semantic (meanings).

- Comprehension of meaning is always the goal of readers
- Expression of meaning is always what writers are trying to achieve
- Writers and readers are strongly limited by what they already know, writers in composing, readers in comprehending.

The following section of the paper will focus on research studies that emphasize the interrelationship between reading and writing processes, and, more specifically, describe two studies that focus on the use of peer reviews in a composition classroom as a task that helps the students establish a closer connection between reading, writing, and critical thinking skills development. The concluding part of the paper will present the results of a peer review study conducted by the author in her composition classes.

The effects of reading process on writing: a study with sixth-graders

Goffman (1994) conducted this study with of investigating the effects of questions on the summarization behaviors of sixth graders. Question treatments included taxonomy-based questions, story-focused questions based on causal chains, and no questions. Summaries were analyzed based on the criteria of importance; strategy type (reproductions, transformations, intrusions), text relevancy; accuracy; and brevity. Findings indicated that the approach students use in writing summaries may be influenced by the structure and length of the story, and that "interspersed story-focused questions may influence the selection and accuracy of information included in summary writing" (Goffman, 1994, p. 19). Goffman reports that on the importance measure, the subjects who read the shortest story included a higher percentage of the important units in their summaries than subjects who read the longer stories, suggesting that the difficulty in identifying information of relative importance to include in summaries increases in more complex text. In terms of the effect of questions, Goffman (1994) found that asking questions (specifically, causal chain questions) throughout the text has a facilitative effect on learning, increasing inclusion of accurate textual information in written summaries (Goffman, 1994).

Peer reviews as an interface between reading and writing

Peer reviews is one of the commonly used technique in a composition class that reflects the whole language view of reading and writing as interrelated activities. Peer reviews can be seen as a powerful learning tool incorporating reading and writing practice. Mittan (1989) writes that peer reviews provide students with an authentic audience, increase students' motivation for writing, enable students to receive different views on their writing; help students learn to read critically their own writing, and assist students in gaining confidence in their writing. Gillam (1990) argues that peer reviews benefit both the respondent and the writer, as reading peers' papers and responding to them offers the students a valuable opportunity to develop critical reading skills, and exercise "different order reading skills" (Gillam, 1990, p. 98) than those used by the students when reading professionally written texts, which the students assume to be flawless. Another advantage of peer reviews is in the opportunity to develop metalanguage useful for thinking and talking about writing (Gillam, 1990).

A peer review study conducted by Kate Mandelsdorf examines the students' opinions on the usefulness of peer reviews in an ESL composition classroom. The subjects of the study were first-semester freshman ESL students of various language backgrounds. All teachers used peer reviews after the first draft, using similar review sheets that asked the students to evaluate content, organization, development, unity, and clarity. At the end of the semester, all students were asked to answer the following questions: "Do you find it useful to have your classmates read your papers and give suggestions for revision? What kinds of suggestions do you often receive from your classmates? What kind of suggestions are most helpful to you? In general, do you find the peer-review process valuable?" (Mandelsdorf, 1992, pp. 275-276).

The results of the study indicated that most students and teachers perceived peer reviews as a beneficial technique that helped the students revise their papers. The students named content and organization as the main areas that were improved after peer reviews. More specifically, the students noted that peer reviews led them to consider different ideas about their topics and helped them to develop and clarify these ideas. These comments suggest that peer reviews can make students more aware of the needs and expectation of their audience, helping them to meet the demands of the writing classroom which their peers are reflecting to them. At the same time, many of the students believe that peer reviews had neither helped them to be responsible for their improvement, nor to be confident in their ability to critique a text. A partial solution to that problem would be to provide more training and guidance for the students in analyzing each other's texts and writing peer reviews.

Peer reviews in English Composition 101 and ESL Composition 107 classes

Goals of the research and the research problem

The purpose of this study is two-fold. The general purpose is to take a closer look at the place of peer reviews in a composition classroom, and the more specific purpose is to analyze the students' views on the effectiveness of peer reviews in a freshman composition class (101 and 107).

Research context

Research was conducted in 101 and 107 freshman composition classes. 101 class is the first part of freshman year composition sequence for native speakers of English that is aimed at teaching the students to read critically and to express thoughts through different types of essays -- from expository writing on a personal issue to argumentative essays on a topic of social interest. The course also includes a rhetorical analysis of a newspaper/magazine article and a contextual essay that involves a discussion of an issue from various perspectives. The peer review data used in this study is based on contextual essay peer reviews. 107 is a similar course intended for international students (non-native speakers of English), some of whom have taken English classes at CESL before enrolling in the University, while others have only had English classes in their own countries.

Research question and field techniques

The research question addressed in this study is as follows:

From the students' perspective, are peer reviews an effective tool to promote thoughtful reading, to help the students generate "language about language and to help the students develop confidence in their capacity to learn from one another and for themselves (Gillam, 1990, p.99)?

To answer this question, the students were asked to respond to a number of questions regarding their views on peer reviews (see Appendix). These answers were a part of in-class peer review session.

Role of the ethnographer/researcher

In this study, the role of the researcher was that of a participant observer and, even more importantly, that of a classroom teacher. While there may be certain confounding variables related to such dual role of teacher and researcher (such as the issue of students' openness and willingness to give honest answers), I believe that the advantages outweigh the possible drawbacks. Teachers (as opposed to outside researchers) are able to "observe activities in the classroom on the regular basis" (Hawisher and Pemberton, 1991, p. 79) and gain insights that outsiders do not have. As teachers conducting research, we are able to notice subtle changes in the classroom dynamics and "discover the reasons why these changes occur" (Hawisher and Pemberton, 1991, p. 79). Classroom teachers have the unique opportunities for close observations, detailed case studies, and longitudinal research that can ultimately lead to better teaching and learning.

The Effectiveness of Peer Reviews: Theoretical Framework and Students' Opinions.

A recent return of peer groups in the composition classroom was initiated by work of such teachers and researchers as Peter Elbow, Ken Macrorie, and Donald Murray who pointed out the effectiveness of student interaction for improving the quality of writing and developing the students' skills as critical readers and independent thinkers. I believe that peer group work and peer reviews in a writing class are helpful both to the reader and the writer, as they help foster critical reading skills that are not generally used by freshman students when reading professionally written texts (as they take their quality for granted). Gillam (1978) states that there are three main benefits of peer reviews: (1) they promote a "'thoughtful' reading, one in which the reader reads like 'a writer composing a text'" (Gillam, 1990, p.99); (2) they help the students generate "language about language, creating a vernacular to be internalized for the members' future use" (Gillam, 1990, p.99); and (3) they help the students "to develop confidence in their capacity to learn from one another and for themselves" (Gillam, 1990, p.99).

The purpose of this section of the paper is to analyze each of these three points in terms of theory and the students' responses.

Promoting Thoughtful Reading

Gillam's point that peer reviews "promote a 'thoughtful' reading, one in which the reader reads like 'a writer composing a

text" (Gillam, 1990, p.99) implies that there are different types of reading processes. The one we will be discussing in this section is reading for writing. Let us begin our discussion with the definition of critical reading provided by Fitzgerald :

Critical reading refers to the criticism of one's own thinking and the writer's thinking during meaning construction when reading. As individuals read, they compare the actual text to their goals, beliefs, and expectations for the text, and they consider their own goals and the text in relation to what they think the writers' goals are. ... if readers experience no mismatches (i.e. there is consonance), then they generally continue reading. If mismatches occur (dissonance), then readers make decisions about the source(s) of dissonance, how it might be resolved, and/or which of their own goals, beliefs, and expectations might be changed. Finally, critical readers do not change the printed text, but they might change their understanding of it, their own goals, beliefs, and expectations. (Fitzgerald, 1989, p. 44)

If we follow this definition and view critical reading and/or revision in writing as a dissonance-resolution process between the author's goals and the audience's goals, then we need to turn to the issue of relationship between the reader and the writer, and try to analyze the effectiveness of a specific piece of writing from the point of view of a given audience. As Fitzgerald (1989, p. 42) puts it, "we write on the premises of the reader, i.e. writers learn that readers expect information to be sequenced in certain logical or commonly accepted ways, so writers' goals for their texts take those reader expectation into account, and they try to fashion their texts to meet or readers' expectations (42)". This statement implies that the process of directing a text towards a specific audience involves critical reading (and revision) skills which means that the students need to be able to use these skills in order to shape their texts for a given audience and purpose.

For us as teachers, it is important to raise the students' awareness of writing as a skill "integral to the process of becoming a critical thinker" (Kauffmann, 1996, p.400) in order to make the writing-revising process effective. In other words, "the processes used to read and write effectively are similar and ... the skills used by good readers can be transferred to their writing projects" (Kauffmann, 1996, p.398) . This idea assumes active readers, those who assert meaning into the text and "in the process of reading actually revise their own hypotheses about the text" (Kauffmann, 1996, p.399) . Looking at this issue from a more practical perspective and analyzing its classroom implications and possibilities, it is important to note that "instructors can encourage an awareness of writing as decision making by asking students to reflect on the choices they made while composing, and to consider the reasons behind their choices" (Marting, 1991, p. 128).

One of the ways to promote such awareness and to improve students' critical reading skills is through peer reviews. As Marting (1991) puts it, "having students assess their performance as readers-writers is not only crucial to the success of the class but also valuable as a building block for them to understand their own writing" (Marting, 1991, p. 130). Peer reviews are an effective way to emphasize the reading-writing connection and to teach the students to "not only read and respond to their classmates' work, but evaluate their performance as critical readers" (Marting, 1991, p.131).

Do Peer Reviews Help Promote Thoughtful Reading? The Students' Opinions.

I was quite happy to learn that most of my students view peer review sessions as a useful activity that helps them develop as better writers and as critical thinkers. More specifically, in this section I was interested in finding out whether the students believe that peer reviews promote thoughtful reading, and what they understand as "thoughtful reading".

101 students:

1. The reader attempts to tell what the author really meant by what he or she wrote.
2. I think peer reviews create a different writer. Normally, when we read, we don't consider if the authors are convincing or not. We are simply convinced or not convinced. Reading for peer reviews opens our minds to the writer and his/her position.
3. I agree that peer reviews promote "thoughtful reading" because you need to be aware of what the writer is saying throughout the paper. To the writer, the reader says the things that need to be improved, and to the reader, the writer brings a deeper understanding of writing, critical thinking skills.
4. They promote "thoughtful reading" because the reader is thinking about what the writer might say next, and gets into the paper.
5. I do "thoughtful reading" when peer editing others' papers. It's harder to do 'thoughtful reading' on your own paper.
6. "Thoughtful reading" means that the reader reads the paper like a writer, analyzing the piece.
7. When I read a paper, I think in a lot of ways I try to become the writer and see things from the writer's point of view.

107 students:

1. Peer reviews do promote thoughtful reading because you cannot only read as you usually do. You do a kind of rhetorical analysis each time. I think I compare what I read with how i would have composed it.
2. If you read like a writer composing a text, you will think more about it.
3. Peer reviews promote "thoughtful reading". I would like to agree with the point as I believe that reading a passage enables us to see beyond that text if we step into the author's world. The only way to visit the author's text is to read it with your mind, your thoughts, your interpretation. In that way, we could be there when the composition was written, you will feel that you are just like a stranger in "show", and that the author treats you as invisible. This is a good way to open up your imagination and thus benefit in writing your own work later.

Generating Language about Language

The second advantage of peer reviews discussed by Gillam (1990) is that "they help the students generate 'language about language', creating a vernacular to be internalized for members' future use" (Gillam, 1990, p. 98). "Language about language", or metalanguage, is defined by Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics as "the language used to analyze or describe a language". "Rhetorical effectiveness", "reading like a writer", "it draws the reader in", "show not tell" and "use more support" are all examples of metalanguage that helps us create a framework for thinking about and talking about various elements of the composition process, as well as its product. This is the language that professional writers and composition teachers use to discuss writing. However, most freshman college students are not familiar enough with all these terms.

What are some of the ways to develop that metalanguage? One would be through teachers' comments on essays. As a composition teacher, I try to make a clear connection between the terms we discuss in class and the ones I use for comments on students' papers. However, I try to avoid personal comments on whether I liked or disliked a piece of writing. I believe that such comments will not help the students develop metalanguage, but will only further develop an all too common concept that evaluation of writing is a subjective enterprise that is not guided by any objective criteria or factors. In their study of teachers' comments in a college writing class, Connors & Lunsford (1993) found similar approach on the part of a number of composition teachers: "teacherly 'voice' in a commentary is a rare thing" (Connors & Lunsford, 1993, p.219). They also note that "many of the comments seemed to speak to the student from empyrean heights, delivering judgments in an apparently disinterested way" (Connors & Lunsford, 1993, p. 219). However, their explanation of this phenomenon suggested by Connors and Lunsford (1993) is the unwillingness of the teachers to "engage powerfully with content-based student assertions or to pass anything except 'professional' judgments on the student writing they were examining" (Connors & Lunsford, 1993, p. 215).

As a composition teacher, I believe that another way to help the students develop "language about language" that they can use in discussing their essays is through peer reviews. How do the students understand metalanguage development? Do they see the value of peer reviews for metalanguage development?

1. Talking about language can make understanding easier.
2. The writer and reader create a language in a language.
3. Students learn from the other students' writings and create a language they all understand.
4. I agree that peer reviews generate 'language about language', meaning that the reader and the writer both learn how to effectively communicate their thoughts, feelings, and findings.
5. By concentrating on the strengths and weaknesses of papers, we better understand and grasp writing. At the same time we develop vocabulary words for writing.
6. Peer reviews help us talk about the way the author talked. It's like doing little rhetorical analyses.

As we can see, some students discussed metalanguage development, while others commented on the development of the appropriate and effective language for writing.

Developing Confidence

According to Gillam (1990), peer reviews help the students "develop confidence in their ability to learn from one another and for themselves" (Gillam, 1990, p.99). I believe that "responding to their classmates writing is not just a way to fill a class period; rather reading can help develop students' critical awareness of nonfiction prose" (Marting, 1991, p.130). I also believe in the importance and value of peer reviews for both the reader and the writer. Even if the students find it hard to make useful comments on each other's papers, especially in the beginning of the semester, it is still a good exercise for development of their own critical reading skills.

It also helps the students understand their own writing.

Once again, the reading-writing connection cannot be overemphasized -- and the best way to reinforce is not only asking the students to read and respond to their classmates' work, but evaluate their own performance as critical readers. "How would you describe yourself as a critiquer of your classmates' paper? What do you do well and not so well?" (Marting, 1991, p.129) -- this is one of the questions included in a peer review in the composition class taught by the author of the article. I believe that it is very important to ask the students to reflect on their skills not only as writers but as reviewers, as it makes the students believe that their comments count and, in turn, make them become better readers and better writers.

"How would you describe yourself as a critiquer of your classmates' paper? What do you do well and not so well?"(Marting, 1991, p.129) -- this question makes the students believe that their comments count, as it "addresses the importance of being a participant in the composition classroom by looking at one's contributions in peer groups" (Marting, 1991, p.130). Below are some of the answers my students gave when addressing this question:

1. I am good at helping develop ideas but weak at checking spelling/grammar.
2. I tend to keep an open mind when I read other peoples' papers in order to critically review them. I feel that I am good at giving examples of suggested changes and making smooth transitions in order to make the paper more organized and flow smoothly.
3. I can be honest but sometimes don't know exactly what it is that needs improvement.
4. I don't get involved enough and usually gloss over important details while getting the bigger picture.
5. I can find spelling and grammar mistakes well, I don't look into things in depth well.
6. I look at grammar as well as arguments. I think I am good at questioning, but I am not so good at pointing them in a direction.
7. I don't give negative comments that much because people don't tend to take criticism well.

Peer critique, in pairs and in groups, is not only a widely-employed alternative to marginal commenting, but an essential counter-strategy which emphasizes "multiplicity, plurality, and independent choice" (Heller, 1989, p. 212). As students become more comfortable with the group dynamic, "they experience the revision process "less as a debilitating loss of authorial ground than as an empowering assimilation of the concurrent tensions which define centrality precisely by challenging it" (Heller, 1989, p. 212).

Students' comments:

1. Critiquing makes us look at our peers as colleagues instead of just friends.
2. If you see what someone else is doing, you can get a better feel of how to tackle the assignment. Also, if they point out what worked and didn't work, the writer knows which direction to go and gains confidence.
3. It offers a non-discouraging way to help revise papers.
4. A student may consider a peer as a better source of information because of the like of interests between peers.
5. When you feel more comfortable looking over other's work, you know what you are looking for and because of this you know what you must include in your own essay.
6. The students benefit both as a writer and a reader.

Conclusion

In planning composition instruction, the teachers need to be aware of the long term goal of teaching reading and writing as modes of learning aimed at the acquisition of content, discourse knowledge, and academic literacy practices. To reach this goal, composition (and language) instruction must offer the students a multitude of opportunities that can help them understand the different forms and functions of reading in the learning context. The role of college composition (and language) teachers then is to "facilitate and formulate dialogs with and among students about reading and writing as modes of learning in college" (Quinn, 1995, p. 310) that can help the students develop their critical thinking skills, as well as writing and reading abilities.

When asked to express her opinion about her peer reviews, one of my 107 students commented: "They are helpful, because we are in the same class learning and sharing and by working and doing together we become stronger helping each other". I believe that this statement summarizes the general effectiveness of peer reviews, and their role in helping the students develop as independent thinkers, critical readers and thoughtful writers.

The purpose of this study was to provide a brief analysis of students' opinions about the effectiveness of peer reviews and to show

the close connection that exists between reading and writing. I believe that by studying the reading-writing connection we will learn to appreciate how reading and writing work together as "tools for information storage and retrieval, discovery and logical thought, communication, and self-indulgence" (Tierney and Leys, 1986, p.26). This paper is my own first step towards practical understanding and implementation of the reading and writing connection through peer reviews in a freshman composition class.

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Appendix

Students' Comments During Peer Reviews

1) What is your general impression of the paper?

I included this question to provide a starting point for further analysis. Obviously, this question calls for a very general comment, such as:

- 101 Students:
 - I thought the ideas were presented well, and the paper stays right on track.
 - I think the essay has definite possibilities, but some of the ideas need to be narrowed down a little more.
 - I feel it's going somewhere on the right track -- I just don't know where.
 - The paper is generally effective. It shows both sides of the issue. However, it seems like you use interviews mostly -- you may need to find more references to books (library research)
- 107 Students:
 - My first impression was that the essay was well-written, with a lot of good points.
 - The focus was clear.
 - The essay contained a lot of information and my general impression is that it might be somehow more organized. Maybe it will be enough to use headlines so the reader can follow the structure easier.
 - Interesting issue that you compare these two cultures. From your analysis it makes sense that the Jewish community was more successful than the Italian because they focused more on education and career.
 - He describes both sides which make up the controversy well. Also, he gives enough information (background) concerning his topic (Internet).
 - It's good because he let me know more about the habit of smoking.

2) What are two main strengths of the essay?

- 101 Students:

I think this question was hard for the students to answer (or they didn't think enough about it). A lot of their answers seem to gloss over the surface:

- Many facts and examples
- Interesting statistics, a lot of interviews
- The essay is honest and research is good
- Credibility and good stats
- Ethos, good support of your points

Some students gave somewhat more specific answers (still could be improved, in time, probably):

- The survey -- questioning people about their feelings about this debate from all perspectives, organization -- the paper flows really well, your transitions into each paragraph are done very well,
- One strength is the fact that you gave many different views of why suicide occurs. Another strength is the quotes in the beginning and end of the paper. It leaves the audience feeling like they should be more aware of the situation.
- The arguments follow each other, giving the reader both sides; the student interviews are interesting

- 107 Students:

- Reasoning based on real-life situation in relation to scientific proof.
- Strengths of the essay is that you give examples of how the Italian community were thinking and what they found important in their lives.
- The first main strength concerns how smoking in public affects people's health, that's why the number of smokers is decreasing; on the other hand, some heavy smokers think smoking can give them comfort. So comparison is very effective. Also some data shows audience the truth. Also the explanation of chemical reactions which can influence human body is good.
- Two main strengths of the essay: (1) explanation of "occidental"; (2) personal experience.
- That many different voices are expressed -- journalists, policemen, the author's own and others. The author is expressing the development of his own ideas which also makes the reader feel engaged with the issue.
- Subject of the essay and word choice.
- He discusses this issue from various points (views). He uses appropriate examples.

3) Two main weaknesses?

- 101 Students:

- Some of the sentence structures are a little weak, causing the reader to go over them again to make sure they have the right idea.
- the survey -- I was lost until the next paragraph when I figured out YOU conducted the survey. Maybe you should explain that a bit more. You have a lot of great material on military, but seem to not address the gay activist side as well.
- Maybe too much history; basically you present just one side.
- Does not have a main thesis statement. By not having the thesis statement, you only present one side of the issue.
- Don't divide the paper into two different segments -- combine the parts more.
- It seems that it is a little choppy
- Organization and sentence structure
- Spelling and grammar

- 107 Students:

- Lack of his own research.
- It seems to be just focused on negative aspects. Lack of information from people who are for smoking.
- Grammar.
- We only learn about the opinions of the well-educated people. What does the average American think about this issue? I also found it difficult to see where you used your own thoughts and where you quoted others' opinions.
- Be more descriptive, try to paraphrase more.
- I would like to know more about your interest in the issue. How did you come to think about writing it and do you think this is still an important factor for a country's success or failure? Are there any other opinions on this subject?
- Too radical when conveying opinions.

6) Is the introduction effective? Does it draw the reader in? Why or why not? Is the author's interest in the issue clear?

- 101 Students:
 - Her first sentence catches the reader's eye. I felt she "drew me in".
 - Intro is good, but a little long. Question was asked a little late and that was not as effective, I think.
 - It is effective because it draws the reader in by giving specific facts about problems caused by alcohol.
 - It is effective and gives a clear summary of what is to come.
 - The intro is broad and draws you to the rest of the paper with its unanswered questions. The issue is clear, but could be more concise.
 - The introduction is effective because it begins with a quote that immediately draws the reader to the issue.
 - I liked how you showed in the introduction that the subject was important to you.
- 107 Students:
 - Introduction draws the reader in by pointing out two conflicting causal explanations of criminality.
 - The introduction could be more effective with a statement of the author's interest in the issue and how it fits in time. When was this happening: in the beginning of the century? Is it still an important factor? Maybe, the introduction could start with a more controversial question, like: Is it nature or nurture that makes one group more successful than the other?
 - The introduction is effective, as it tells the audience the main question of the paper -- if smoking in public should be legal or not.
 - The introduction is very effective, and it draws the reader in because the reader knows what the author is going to discuss in the main part of the essay.
 - The introduction is a question which draws the reader in immediately. Then the author presents the two main approaches in the second paragraph regarding the specific question.

10) Is the conclusion effective? Does it leave the reader thinking about the issue?

- 101 Students:
 - I don't like when he says "such relationships should be kept in cyberspace" -- that sounds too opinionated.
 - It didn't really leave me thinking about the issue, I was kind of glad to be finished. It was long, at some points drawn out.
 - The conclusion is effective because she has a quote which leaves the audience thinking about the issue.
 - Yes, it's very effective but doesn't pose any more questions about the issue to make the reader think more.
 - The conclusion is effective, it leaves the reader to decide on the issue at hand.
 - The conclusion needs to provide a little better overview of the preceding paper.
- 107 Students:
 - The conclusion needs some work! The last question was not good!
 - The conclusion is neutral and parallel with the essay, even though it doesn't really make me (the reader) want to think more deeply about it. And, there is a new issue that was introduced which I think is not needed.
 - No conclusion yet!
 - Not very effective. The author seems to support one side.
 - The conclusion is effective, but if you included more information, it would be better. For people who do not smoke, the conclusion is clear. But people who do smoke could feel a bit uncomfortable.