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# Social Media and Peer Review: Edmodo in the Composition Classroom

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Social Media and Peer Review: Edmodo in the Composition Classroom

By

Mark Gardner

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Professional Writing in the Department of  
English

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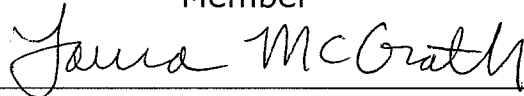
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College of Humanities & Social Sciences  
Kennesaw State University  
Kennesaw, Georgia  
Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of  
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Has been approved by the committee  
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At the (month and year) graduation  
*May 2013*  
Capstone committee:



Member



Member

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***"Writing is at once two steps away from conversation and a return to conversation. We converse; we internalize conversation as thought; and then by writing, we re-immense conversation in its external, social medium...The point, therefore, is that writing always has its roots deep in the acquired ability to carry on the social symbolic exchange we call conversation" (551) – Kenneth Bruffee in "Collaborative Learning and the "Conversation of Mankind"***

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Social network sites (or SNSs) have created a rebirth of written communication throughout the last decade. These networks are defined by Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (211). According to the database *Pew Internet*, which is sponsored by the American Life Project, in 2012 eighty-six percent of adults aged 18-29 used SNSs to communicate each day (Duggan and Brenner). These demographics point to a shift in the amount of writing college students do every day. Students are usually the first to make the distinction between writing an essay for class and writing on SNSs, an act that they may not even recognize as writing. Composition studies has overlooked the importance of understanding how students’ written communication over SNSs impacts their quality of writing. Instructors have been wary about incorporating SNSs into the composition classrooms in part because of the privacy concerns and also the informality that is associated with the language in use on different networks. In *Writing Technology: Studies on the Materiality of Literacy*, Christina Haas lists the “cultural myths” that academic discourse has created around technology. She argues that instructors view technology as a(n):

- 1) “Transparent” tool that can only be effective in making tasks “easier and faster”

2) “All-powerful” tool that is uncontrollable to the degree that “if we have some concerns...we might as well accept them”

3) Tool to “keep up with as it changes” and something that (instructors) are not responsible for. (21).

These are examples of reasons educators have hesitated to embrace technology, specifically SNSs, in the composition classroom. Educators are missing an opportunity to integrate these familiar programs to further study how students communicate through writing on SNSs as well as how effective the writing can be for communicating ideas.

This deliberate omission has created a wide gap in research within the field of composition. Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison allude to the “vast uncharted waters” of research related to various uses of technology in the composition classroom (224). They use the article “Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship” to summarize the brief, yet detailed, history of SNSs from the early stages of programs like SixDegrees and LiveJournal to the modern uses of Facebook and YouTube. This information is presented as an anthology of SNSs’ evolution so that researchers can begin to quantify and qualify the effective uses of these communicative networks. Boyd and Ellison called on instructors and researchers to increase the amount of research on SNSs as pedagogical tools, but questions still remain as to how instructors could achieve this moving forward. Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch’s article titled “Virtual Peer Review: Teaching and Learning about Writing in Online Environments” provided this pedagogical link. Breuch expresses the “curious(ness)” (2) of educators’ apprehension when integrating online communicative networks into the writing classroom because online peer review is based on the same communicative purpose as face-to-face (FtF) peer review. However, as she points out, the transition to online involves a pedagogical shift due to the new

type of permanent collaboration that students can keep record of. The fact that comments are now being exclusively recorded, as opposed to being verbally spoken, provides an opportunity for instructors to discuss concepts of ownership and authorship with students related to writing over digital networks. According to Breuch, the idea of implementing SNS writing into an academic setting is thought of as “abnormal discourse” because it “pushes the boundaries of what is accepted” (Breuch 56). Both Breuch and Boyd and Ellison call on compositionists to stretch the boundaries of how to implement new technologies like SNS effectively into the classroom. While the lack of research shows that Haas’s “cultural myths” still ring true today, it is important for instructors to embrace this change in written communication so that future online networks can be shaped by educational and pedagogical standards.

This thesis project will investigate the relevancy of SNSs as communication tools for peer review. This investigation is essential to further the field of composition studies given the fact that students use SNSs to communicate every day and will most likely be required to communicate in some form of an online environment for future employment opportunities. The traditional FtF peer review activity model needs to be updated to one that can utilize online networks like SNSs so that students can practice writing over these online mediums. Social constructivist pedagogical activities like peer review are effective uses of social media and communication technologies in the composition classroom and students may find it is easier to perform peer review functions when there is no FtF social context for their partners during an activity. This case study will investigate SNSs as pedagogically appropriate peer review tools in the composition classroom.

### Why Peer Review?

Peer review activities have become a staple in the composition classroom over the last

half century with the impact of social constructivist theorists like Lev Vygotsky who suggested that learning to write is an act that is directly related to students' involvement in and understanding of different and new social contexts (Fiore and Elsasser 88). The idea that truly propelled peer review into the composition classroom was the fact that these social interactions were cognitive exercises that forced students to focus on the task and process of writing within a social environment, thus creating social process theory in the field of composition pedagogy, which used peer review activities as a way to incorporate these social interactions into the composition classroom. In his essay "Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind," Kenneth Bruffee references Newcomb and Wilson's study on the "educative value of peer review" written in 1966. Bruffee summarizes their findings by explaining how students' work tended to improve when students received help from their peer tutors. The social exercise of peer review allowed for both the tutor and tutee to learn different methods of writing through the process of providing and receiving feedback. Bruffee says, "peers offering help...learned from the students they helped and from the activity of helping itself" (548). This "non traditional" method of instruction took larger steps forward as social process theories evolved.

Collaborative, social activities became an important inclusion in the composition classroom, but theorists like Bruce McComiskey are responsible for adding a rhetorical influence to social process theories in composition studies. In *Teaching Composition as a Social Process*, McComiskey explains that social process composition pedagogies "treat critical writing as rhetorical inquiry and political intervention into the cultural forces that construct our subjectives" (3). From this he defines social process theories as pedagogical methods of "contextualiz[ing] the writing process [to focus] on ways in which cultural forces, such as social narratives and ideologies, influence the act of composing" (3). He derives the term "social process rhetorical



inquiry theory” to combat “post-process” theorists like Thomas Kent who argued that process pedagogy is too immersed in the ideological system to truly reflect a freeing, natural mode of writing process. McComiskey’s new model for process instruction allows students to focus their “rhetorical attention...on the discourses and institutions that most profoundly impact their own lives” (56). It is within these familiar contexts where students have the ability to relate the writing they do for composition classes to the social writing they do outside of the classroom. While peer review remains an important part of the writing process because of this social link, McComiskey would argue that the effectiveness depends on how the activity is presented to students. He states, “while I agree that a piece of writing is ‘never finished,’ I also believe that, finished or not, most writing is read, is intended to be read, so writers must then be able to account for the ways in which texts are not only produced but also distributed and consumed within specific communities” (54). While the social interactions of peer review have merit, the rhetorical inquiry phase of peer review is essential to encourage students to play the part of the audience and reflect on their peer’s piece of writing as if they were the intended receivers. McComiskey highlights the necessity for students to understand how the audience plays a part in interpreting the writing and encourages instructors to enact this interpretation as part of their writing process instruction. Once instructors began utilizing this understanding of audience awareness, students were truly able to benefit from peer review because it gave students the confidence and authority needed to provide effective feedback to their partners. Students were no longer only reading an assignment from the standpoint of being an inexperienced student writer but as the essay’s intended audience.

The history of peer review activities has been well documented, allowing for social process theories to evolve alongside the peer review model in composition pedagogy. The

integration of communication technology has taken a very different path toward inclusion in academic discourse. As peer review activities have evolved, communication technologies have quickly grown into possible tools to help facilitate these types of social, communicative activities.

### The Evolution of Technology and Peer Review

Given the growth of communicative technologies over the few decades, researchers have studied the implications of switching a peer review activity to an online program. Overall, researchers believe that transitioning a traditional FtF peer review to an online medium has many benefits both for the students and the instructors. Joseph Walther states in his article “Computer-Mediated Communication: Impersonal, Interpersonal, and Hyperpersonal Interaction” the pedagogical belief that computer-mediated-communication (or CMC) brings a “democratizing” nature to online interaction (7). Although SNSs encompass some forms of CMC, early CMC technologies like email and course management systems were the first mediums to aid an online peer review activity. Walther describes the key difference in CMC and FtF interactions, such as peer review, as having to do with the “rate of social information exchange” between the two communication styles (10). CMC presents a way for people to “shift attention from [their] need to maintain simultaneous expressive and sensory systems and devote it instead to language selection” (22). Walther’s understanding of writing over online networks could be seen as a positive addition to a peer review activity where students’ main task is to focus on their interpretations of how effective the texts are at making a point. Without attention to the language in use, peer review becomes an exercise in social etiquette where peers pay more attention to agreed upon social interactions within the classroom than their peers’ writing.

Students are much more likely to worry how their peers will respond to feedback when peer review activities are done FtF.

Many instructors have researched the effectiveness of using CMC as a peer review tool long before SNSs were invented. One of CMC's earliest stages began with email discussions between students. Ellen Strenski, Caley O'Dwyer Feagin, and Jonathan Singer had their students respond to peer essays through an email program. These researchers discussed the benefit of this method of email communication: it allowed the students to focus on one person's paper and not an entire group's. Their conclusion was that email "elicits superior response to student drafts" through "more detailed, effective reviews...using full sentences, thus discouraging the superficial fiddling with line editing or grammar mistakes that often marks in-class efforts" (192-193). They also described how peer review can relate to CMC related practices like "promotion of computer literacy, social interaction and community-building, student-centered learning, and pre-professional writing practice" (193). This research shows that email programs are an effective use of CMC for a peer review activity due to the overall influences that online writing can have on the communication process.

Other instructors have used technological programs built specifically for a classroom activity where students communicate with each other. Beth L. Hewett discusses her use of a program called "CONNECT" that gave students an online discussion board to provide peer feedback to each other. To further her study, Hewett then recorded other students during an oral peer discussion of essays and finally compared the two mediums of interactions. She describes the oral discussions as being more "global" and "abstract" than the CMC written comments, which she labeled as focusing more on "writing issues and group management" (266). Hewett summarizes that revision from the CMC discussion included "more frequent direct use of peer

ideas, whereas revision from the oral talk included more frequent intertextual (imitative and indirect) and self-generated idea use” (267). Overall, her case study shows that the medium in which students share comments not only affects the discussion, but also the revision outcomes (266-267). Hewett showed some uneasiness related to the program itself, saying that the format in which comments were displayed was very confusing for students. This was not uncommon for CMC before SNSs became the norm for online communication. Many people, especially people not technologically savvy, had trouble maneuvering around digital forums that may have seemed foreign to them.

Peer review exercises have had a growing relationship with communication technology and from past research we can understand how CMC affects peer review comments. Now, any “older” form of CMC has been added as a function on many social networks. For example, while email began as a stand-alone communication tool, it has now been developed as a messaging function of many SNSs like Facebook. Unfortunately, peer review research did not make the transition from general CMC to a specific SNS program, thus creating a gap in understanding of how CMC has developed with the advent of SNSs. Research has proven that CMC is a viable option for peer review, and that researchers must keep up with ever-evolving technological trends so that students can continue to see the correlations between the writing they do online and in the classroom. Without this evolution of research on the effectiveness of SNSs as peer review tools, students will continue to use these platforms without guidance or standards, allowing for written communication exercises, like peer review, to be further disassociated from the written, social communicative nature of SNSs.

### Why Social Network Sites?

Social network sites have developed into a communication tool with the potential to

provide encouragement to students from a variety of backgrounds and social situations, making SNSs a natural choice to facilitate a peer review activity. People use SNSs to receive support over common issues whether they are health related or related to other personal matters and as writing can be understood as a personal process, students may find that communicating with fellow students over SNSs may make giving and receiving comments much easier. These online support groups help people deal with “anxiety and uncertainty” that they might be feeling and cause people to be “highly motivated by social comparison needs to seek out others (that are alike), but prefer to do this online...because of the anonymity afforded by (these) groups” (Bargh and McKenna 583). Students who may be anxious about sharing their writing with other people may find SNSs helpful for discussing similar issues that they are struggling with. It also helps that SNSs involve “communication that transgresses socially constructed boundaries” because it supports “the active, rather than the passive, consumption of information” (Tune and Oguz 94). This active use of information is related to students’ ability to understand the conversations on SNSs and how to appropriately respond to people over the program. This link can assist instructors in making the writing that students do outside of the classroom feel similar to the writing that they do during class. Students should actively participate in a peer review activity the same way that they participate in conversations on SNSs. It is imperative to use the educational setting to help students see the connection of writing on SNSs and writing to provide feedback to their peer review partners. Such activities prepare students to incorporate writing effectively on SNSs in other environments like at a place of employment or an online political forum. These contexts require our students to be both comfortable within SNSs and effective in communicating ideas.

While composition studies has little research on the topic of the specific use of SNSs for

peer review, there has been research development related to how people communicate using different online communication networks. The idea of “social cues” is often discussed when the topic of online communication arises. Researchers have argued that online networks provide students a “reduced-cue” environment, which can help interactions focus mainly on “message production” (Baym 127; Bargh and McKenna 586; Walther 6). FtF interactions rely heavily on “non-verbal features of communication such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and potentially interpersonal features such as physical attractiveness, skin color, gender, etc.” (Bargh and McKenna 577). All of these communication identifiers are absent with online communication, which allows people to focus only on the text of the message. Joseph Walther concludes that there is “less social information per message” in CMC because of the lack of these cues (10). This social information can take away from the “linguistic code as the sole channel for relational communication” (10) and has a “deindividuating effect on individuals involved, producing behavior that is...less socially regulated than usual” (Bargh and McKenna 578). This helps provide students with a comfortable amount of anonymity in a digital space, which can help them achieve effective social interactions during a peer review activity. My specific peer review activity utilized this idea of anonymity because the students were paired with students from a different class. In doing this, my students were able to practice effective communication techniques over a SNS with peer review because they could not rely on a FtF relationship within the classroom. SNSs provide a “safer” environment where peer reviewers feel supported through the writing forums as more “anonymous” writing partners. With anonymity comes some students’ ability to provide effective feedback with only the context of the assignment and the peer’s essay to guide the conversation.

A variety of logistical benefits for both students and instructors have evolved through

CMC mediation of peer review. Frank Tuzi and other researchers have discussed the benefit that students can experience in online peer reviews because students will no longer be able to use the excuse that they lost their papers (Tuzi 220; Sullivan et al. 117-118). Furthermore, online peer reviews also give instructors more freedom to maintain a paperless classroom by reducing the “bundles of papers” that come with a FtF peer review (Tuzi 220). These are small issues that may not seem to have much weight in relationship to the effectiveness of online peer review activities, but nevertheless these play a big role in reducing the stress of a peer review activity day in the classroom. Past research points to a number of benefits that both students and instructors can gain from implementing a peer review through an online medium. Elaine DiGiorganni and Girija Nagaswami discuss basic elements of how CMC is effective both for students and instructors. These benefits for students include: staying more focused and remaining on task as well as having an online place where these comments are recorded so they can refer back to them (268). The benefits for instructors are related to assessing the peer review activities: “[Instructors] can monitor students’ interaction much more closely” because they have access to the interactions; instructors can “redirect” students to more specific comments and “critical and analytical negotiations;” and “(Instructors) can also...train peer dyads individually, and assess the impact of peer review on their revised drafts” (268). Logistical benefits like these showcase the versatility of how instructors can manipulate different rules for peer review activities to match the context of each specific classroom.

While traditional classroom settings have begun to incorporate these CMC ideas into writing instruction, research has been done on L2 classrooms that have used CMC to facilitate peer review activities. Within these instances, researchers have found that programs like chat and email have worked very well to allow L2 students to practice communicating in the language

that they are learning. Sullivan and Pratt describe that during FtF discussions students would focus their comments mainly on “personal narratives and short interjections of agreement or repetition...[whereas, over the network]...the responses followed a pattern that consisted of a positive comment about the essay followed by one or more suggestions for revision” (qtd. in Pennington 414). Ruth Roux-Rodriguez comments that email and chat were beneficial for her L2 students because “participants focused mainly on content and organization when they provided feedback to their peers” (147), and were able to “use peer response to add content to and polish the language of their texts...The uses they perceived had to do with their learning about writing” (173-174). Other research has been done that discusses technology and peer review specifically for L2 instruction that I believe instructors can be apply to all students. Tuzi describes that feedback for L2 students over an online network resulted “in more revisions than feedback from the writing center or oral feedback” (229). The reasons that Tuzi provides in discussing these advantages for L2 students using an online network for peer review are:

- 1) “The instructor can read and send comments from any Internet location and provide specific written comments to each student without consuming class time;
  - 2) The expanded audience also allows L2 writer to receive input from many other people and gain a clearer picture of their audience and their own writing weaknesses; and
  - 3) The ability to read other writer’s drafts thereby providing opportunities for L2 writers to learn from the writing styles of others and incorporate them into their own writing.”
- (232)

This list of advantages is very similar to the advantages afforded to L1 students as well. Tuzi and other researchers believe that CMC peer review activities magnify these benefits even more so for L2 students given the fact that they are learning to work within a new language system.



When assessing the validity of classroom pedagogical tools like SNSs, it is very easy to see how students would benefit from the inclusion of this mode of writing, especially to facilitate a peer review activity. Students are more likely to communicate openly on these networks given that the social context required for a FtF peer review activity is absent for a SNS peer review activity. Peer review in the classroom can provide students with social anxiety related to the perceived intelligence level, physical attractiveness, and non-verbal gestures of the students around them. In the remaining section of this chapter, I describe necessary steps instructors should take when considering which SNS platform to include.

### Selecting the Right SNS: A Look at Edmodo

The site that I used for this project is called Edmodo and is a social media platform tailored specifically for educational use, providing educators with a safe digital environment to communicate with students. Instructors must be aware of the different SNSs that are available to them and choose a program that will work best in their classes. There are several topics that instructors should be aware of when selecting a SNS for peer review activity. The following section details several areas of concern that instructors should use to evaluate the effectiveness of a SNS. I also will discuss my choice of using Edmodo for my peer review activity and how the program effectively handles each of these areas of concern.

#### *Privacy Settings*

When selecting a SNS to use in the classroom, instructors should be mindful of each site's privacy settings. With recent legal cases being brought against sites like Facebook and Twitter in regards to who owns the rights to the content that is provided on a SNS profile or "News Feed," instructors should learn the privacy settings of each SNS that intend on using in the classroom. SNSs that have detailed privacy settings are going to be easiest to implement as

part of the class. These sites will also create a comfortable collaborative space if students and instructors feel that their work is "safe" from a larger public forum.

When specifically designing a peer review activity using a SNS, instructors should consider how "public" they want their students' writing to be and choose a program based on this criteria. For example, blog websites like Wordpress give students a larger audience to collaborate with given the fact that these sites are usually open to the internet public. For peer review activities, students may be hesitant sharing rough drafts of essays in a larger public forum. Some SNS can provide instructors with a way of controlling the intended audience of a piece of writing. For the sake of my peer review activity, I chose to use the educationally-based SNS Edmodo to facilitate my peer review activity because of the strict security settings.

Edmodo was designed specifically to give instructors an online network to communicate with their students for a classroom setting. When instructors begin a "group" on Edmodo, they are given a password that students must use in order to gain access to the group. Every comment, document, and discussion post is kept private for only group members, and instructors are given full reign over deciding how the students can interact with each other through the platform. Given that Edmodo was designed by educators for the purpose of being utilized in an academic setting, the privacy settings are very easy to find and easy to understand how they relate to instructors and students specifically.

### *Recognizable Interface*

Instructors may also be weary of choosing an online program that is challenging for students to learn in small amount of time. While instructors should be aware that all technological inclusion should be accompanied by a form of instruction so that students can understand how to use the program. For peer review activities, these days of instruction might

be more effective before the actual peer review day in class so that students have the ability to learn the program before they have to submit their rough drafts for peer review day. Even if an instructor believes that students are technologically capable or learning new programs, it might also benefit instructors to look at SNSs that utilize familiar functions to the sites that they use outside of the classroom.

Keeping in mind what McComiskey states about comfortable writing environments, Edmodo has a similar look and similar functions as Facebook. Some of these functions include uploading files, messaging, user profiles, etc., thus creating a recognizable and comfortable digital space for students to work during a peer review activity. With Edmodo students have the ability to pick up the functions of the site very easily, which was extremely helpful when it came to planning these peer review days for class. It is easiest to explain how students include the two different sets of comments for each paper during peer review. On Edmodo, like Facebook, any action that is posted to the group's "news feed" and has the ability to have comments added to them. On Facebook, users will comment on their friends' pictures or statuses. On Edmodo, my students are able to use that same knowledge and leave "replies" to the newly uploaded revised version of their peer review partner's essays. These comments appear right underneath the uploaded essay and create a perfect digital space for further dialogue with peer review partners.

By choosing a site like Edmodo, students spent less time learning the logistics of the program and more time using the program for peer review. Whatever SNS instructors decide to use for peer review, the process of having the students learn the program is something to keep in mind when planning for the activity.

### *Educational Support Community*

The last element that instructors should be aware of when choosing a SNS for a peer

review activity is how each site provides help for instructors who have questions. The use of a strong support community is important when working with SNSs because instructors need a physical person available to them if they should need any help clarifying any use of site. Support communities can be anything similar to an interactive message board, a live-chat feature with tech supporters, or simply a hotline telephone number to call. As long as instructors have the ability to ask a qualified human being questions about the specific site, they will be able to use the support community to fall back on when a problem arises.

Edmodo includes a very active educational support community. With instructive webinars and community forums, educators are able to communicate with Edmodo employees and other educators about different ways of using the platform. One extremely helpful tool is the “Support Community”. This is a separate “wall” dedicated to current and prospective educators to ask questions regarding the various uses of the site. Multiple instructors will post questions each day regarding a different problem related to Edmodo use and within minutes, an employee or other user will reply with direct responses to their question. The questions range from issues regarding how to connect to other educators worldwide to how to set up private groups for students to join. Edmodo also schedules monthly webinars that deal with topics such as “20 Ways to Use Edmodo,” “Getting Started in Edmodo,” and “Creating Global Networks with Edmodo.” These are beneficial for instructors planning on integrating Edmodo as a digital tool in their classroom.

Each of these factors discussed provides an important area for instructors to consider when deciding what SNS will work best for their peer review activity. SNSs like Edmodo give instructors a medium that can facilitate peer review activities in FYC. Each of the elements described above provide instructors with a new way of approaching a traditional composition pedagogical exercise like peer review. By implementing SNSs to highlight tactful

communication styles within a peer review activity, instructors are able to focus students' abilities to use of online networks to engage with the civil discourse around them on other, more personal networks like Facebook or Twitter.

## **Chapter 2: Methods**

### Research Methodology

I decided to perform a case study due to the lack of research in the field of composition studies related to SNSs as effective peer review tools in the classroom. This case study involves an analysis of the different types of comments that students made during a peer review activity; an electronic survey completed at the end of the semester allowing students to reflect on the usefulness of the activity; and a face-to-face interview with a small sample of students to receive detailed responses from students regarding the activity so that I can compare responses from the survey and interview. In *Strategies For Empirical Research in Writing*, Mary Sue MacNealy defines a case study as an investigation of a hypothesis in order to “systematically collect information about an event [or] situation...for the purpose of exploring, describing, and/or explaining aspects not previously known or considered” (199). MacNealy provides a basic understanding of this research method by pointing out that results from this study cannot be generalized because the information is very situational. The end goal of my case study is to provide foundational ideas and data related to students’ interactions during a virtual peer review activity and reflections on the activity afterwards.

According to Robert K. Yin in his fourth edition of *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, the need for case studies comes from the “desire to understand complex social phenomena” (4). In the introduction chapter of his book, Yin discusses the difference between case study research and other methods. He concludes that a case study is meant for “examining contemporary events” and that it should include a “full variety of evidence...beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study” (11). In addition to the different types of evidence, he also adds that other research method forms such as participant-observation studies

could include some form of “informal manipulation” (11) of research data or analysis. These descriptions of this methodology set up my peer review activity nicely given that the case study method allows me to incorporate several types of results to add to my investigation and thus will cover a large area of research that is needed to understand how SNSs influence a peer review activity.

In these texts, MacNealy and Yin also discuss case studies’ ability to approach a situation from a holistic viewpoint that is completely dependent on the situation’s context. I think most studies of classroom activities are best suited for case studies because of this idea and my case study is no different. Each classroom presents a different context because no grouping of students is going to be exactly the same from class to class. Students will respond differently to activities from section to section, semester to semester, and year to year. Other methods of research related to pedagogical practices thus becomes challenging for instructors to relate to. Yin states that the methods of a case study are not meant to be replicated but built upon for future studies. The goal of my case study will not be to encourage instructors to implement my strategies, but instead to understand why I made the choices I did and create their own activities suited for the classrooms that they have.

One example of a specific context that my particular case study relies upon is a composition classroom setting where students have a computer available to them. This is the case for my students at Kennesaw State University, where the case study was performed but a lot of composition teachers at other universities may not have the same technology available to classrooms. The case study method allowed me to study the situation of my specific technologically-facilitated composition classroom and create an analysis of how students responded to activities where technology acts as the primary pedagogical aid. There are multiple

ways of implementing SNS writing practices as part of a peer review process and because my activity is so specific, I chose to perform a case study to gather results related to this topic. In the following sections, I will present the specific methods I used to investigate Edmodo as a viable peer review tool as well as data from this research in order to draw conclusions about the overall effectiveness of my peer review activity using SNSs.

### Participants

This case study was conducted using two first year composition (FYC) sections of students at Kennesaw State University. A total of forty students gave me permission to code the different peer review comments students made to each other. The students' participation in the peer review activity was mandatory, but their involvement in the case study was on a volunteer basis and required no additional work from the students outside of the classroom. Each of the forty students also participated in a survey (Appendix A) at the end of the semester in which they were asked to reflect on their experiences with peer review throughout the entire semester. Out of this sample of forty students, nine students also volunteered to take part in a face-to-face interview (Appendix B) that included similar reflection questions to the survey. The interviews were one at a time and held in a private conference room on campus.

### The Peer Review Activity

This section will explain the educational role of the peer review Assignment Sheet and the Workshop Guide and discuss how my instructional overview of these documents helped introduce the students to my standards of participation for a peer review activity. The first step I took in implementing this peer review activity was to introduce the activity a day before the actual peer review day in class. This extra day allowed me to introduce the Assignment Sheet (Appendix C) and the Workshop Guide (Appendix D) to the students ahead of time. From these



documents, we defined and discussed many characteristics of peer review that students eventually could use in the peer review process. We then reflected on the positive and negative features of any past peer review activities that the students had participated in. Finally, I enrolled the students in Edmodo and encouraged them to familiarize themselves with the communication techniques that the site offers. Each of these steps was vital to helping the students understand the peer review activity and provided the chance for meaningful discussion related to different characteristics of the activity.

I have found that students also need organized and specific instructions that outline the instructor's expectations for participation for any activity. The Assignment Sheet and Workshop Guide are two documents that provide this information to the students, but in very different ways. The Assignment Sheet offered students specific logistical information about the activity whereas the Workshop Guide presented content-related information that directs students to appropriate types of peer review comments. Both of these documents were designed to empower students to provide effective feedback for their peer review partners, which is an important step because students (especially first year composition students) have trouble seeing themselves as any type of authority over different elements of the writing process. For example, the Workshop Guide provided students with a list of different writing elements to watch for in their peers' writing. The guide listed terms that students should be familiar with when peer reviewing, but also gave examples of reflection questions related to each term. Students were able to use this information when choosing the correct vocabulary to make use of in their comments.

In order to implement a peer review activity effectively in a FYC classroom, instructors must actively engage with students throughout the process of introducing the activity. By providing an instructional day before the activity, I was able to encourage plenty of discussion

with students related to the act of reviewing their peers' writing. This extra day allowed students time to get used to both the peer review facilitation program (in this case, Edmodo) as well as the overall expectations that I, the instructor, set forth for them. The actual day of peer review included very little logistical or instructional information. Instead, I encouraged students to use their time in class for leaving thoughtful and helpful peer review comments. Students should not feel as if they are being rushed through the peer review process and so should be given as much time in class as possible to work.

### Peer Review Workshop Challenges

As many instructors can attest, implementing new strategies for classroom activities can have several challenges associated with the implementation in the classroom. By incorporating SNSs into my classrooms for peer review, I was able to pair students from one first year composition section to another section so that there was an increased chance that students would not know their peer review partner. I hypothesized that this anonymity would provide students the ability to speak honestly about their partners' writing without being apprehensive about their potential reaction. While this method of peer review highlights the previously mentioned benefit of anonymous CMC, it also came with several challenges due to the lack of experience I had with anonymous peer review. One such challenge has been the unexpectedness of what happened on the actual peer review days in class. The previous class meetings leading up to the peer review day were somewhat "predictable" days with discussions over the format and Edmodo as well as encouraging students to give helpful feedback on peers' essays. But when the actual peer review day happened, it was difficult to prepare for how the students would respond to new challenges like different lengths of rough drafts and peer review time management.

The first challenging aspect of beginning this peer review format was organizing the peer review groups ahead of time. I created a spreadsheet where twenty-six students from each section were broken into six groups of three and two groups of four. These groups were labeled Groups 1-8, and I kept these groups constant for the entire semester. For the first peer review day, I matched the groups from both sections as peer review partners. The most challenging and time consuming part was arranging the order of the group members because it was obvious that students would go down the list in the order their partners were listed. I wanted to make sure that each student had a chance to get at least two peer comments. The following table shows how I set up the peer review partners:

Section 9	Section 20
Student A	Student D Student E Student F
Student B	Student E Student F Student D
Student C	Student F Student D Student E

Because of the time constraints that come with teaching 75-minute classes, I knew I could count on each student to get through at least two peer essays. It was important that I made sure that students D, E, and F had the chance to be in the top two for two out of the three students' peer review order. This way each student could be reviewed no fewer than twice.

The groups of four presented a bigger challenge because of the even number. The following table shows the different approach to a group of four students that I needed to take:

Section 9	Section 20
Student A	Student E Student F Student G

Student B	Student F Student E Student H
Student C	Student G Student H Student E
Student D	Student H Student G Student F

With this formula, I was able to assure that each student's work was reviewed at least twice. This took a lot of concentration and organization, but once I understood the formula, it became much easier to manage which groups were reviewing each other. There were, however, many variables that threw this formula off, for example, if a student did not come to class to do the peer review or if a student did not submit a rough draft. Also the varying lengths of rough drafts dictated how much time each student would spend on each essay. These variables required my attention throughout the peer review activity, and I quickly figured out how to keep record of the students who were not going to get at least two peer reviews completed on their papers. I would then assign these essays to students who had a peer review partner who did not turn in a paper. I was able to instruct those students who had been assigned an essay that was only two paragraphs in length to review additional essays left over from some of the other students.

The other variable that was difficult to prepare for was how long each student would need to complete a peer review session. It became very clear to me that some students were quicker than others at accomplishing the peer review standards that the assignment sheet set out for them, and thus the students who were slower at giving feedback would not be able to get through as many peer reviews. For those students who were not able to get through two peer review sessions in one class, I allowed them time in the next class period to finish up. This meant that I needed to find an activity for the other students who were able to finish, so I encouraged the

students to respond to the peer comments that they had received in the previous class meeting. In these online dialogues, students were instructed to reflect and respond to the comments on Edmodo, much as they would had they been face-to-face with their peer review partners. Students were able to ask questions about confusing comments and explain choices that they had made that their peer review partners had questioned. Each of these conversations happened in the Edmodo comment section so that students would retain and strengthen their relationship with peers using the online program.

### Discourse Analysis Process

The next step in investigating students' peer review comments over the SNS Edmodo was to choose the coding process my case study would take. I began with the coding categories that Martin Guardado and Ling Shi defined in their article "ESL Students' Experiences of Online Peer Feedback". I opted for this method over generating my own categories because the authors laid out an effective organizational pattern around these categories that I knew would help my coding process. The categories are framed around what specifically the comments were made in regards to. Guardado and Shi utilized the following categories as a part of their case study on peer review: "Introduction," "Thesis Statement," "Support," "Topic Sentence," "Unity," "Coherence," "Content," "Conclusion," "Grammar/Editing," "Personal Reaction," and "General" (450). Although I do believe these to be a good representation of different types of peer review comments, I found myself modifying certain categories to better fit the vocabulary that we used in our classroom. For example, I included any comments that students made about an argument's "logic" into the "Support" category, due to the fact that I used the word "logic" so often when referring to how the essay supports its claims. I also included formatting issues within the "Grammar/Editing" category because grammar and format come from similar

regimented “rules” laid out by someone other than myself. Finally, I included any comments about “vague” sentences under the “Coherence” category because we discussed in class how un-specific details can hurt the audience’s understanding of a sentence.

It was also important to track which comments were considered “positive reinforcement” comments and which were more “negative” or “constructive criticism” comments.

Differentiating between these two subsections of comments allowed me to see which categories included more positive comments and which categories included negative comments more often. With this particular type of data, I was able to understand how students understood each of these categories in relationship to writing. To accomplish the organized task of coding, I pasted all of the peer review comments on one Microsoft Word document and used the Format Painter tool to color code each sentence into one of the categories. I also underlined each instance of a positive comment so that I could differentiate between the positive and negative comments.

While a large part of my study surrounds what types of comments students make, it is also important to study how the students respond to a peer review activity such as this. Both the survey (Appendix A) and the interview (Appendix B) portion of the case study focused on quantifying student reactions to multiple instances of this peer review activity, and because of that, many of the questions on the survey were similar to those of the interview. This was deliberate so that I could use the survey to gain an overall idea of how the activity was received, and the interview to give me longer and more specific responses to the questions. The interview was an audio-recorded face-to-face interview using the program Audacity. I then transcribed the dialogue from the recording so that I could see a text version of their answers. I hypothesized that the responses from the survey would match those of the interview and give me specific reasons and details as to why students answered how they did on the survey. Part of my

discourse analysis works to investigate the overlap in answers from survey to interview. Any discrepancies that I found between responses on the interview and the survey give me a chance to understand why the students answered differently. Also during the interview, I took notes related to nonverbal cues that students used during the process, and because my case study investigated student responses, this seemed like a necessary step in analyzing the thought process of the students during the interview.

As my case study continued to develop, I felt the need to provide a summary of how I executed this activity and survey in my own classes. Guardado and Shi instruct that an effective online peer review activity “need(s) to be organized carefully to maximize its positive effect” and that training students how to give effective peer review comments is an important step in the process of classroom integration (458). Taking this into account, it seemed relevant to include specifics on how I used class time to implement the activity.

While juggling the case study variables, I also thought it was important to stay aware of what the students were writing in their peer comments. Even though the peer review was entirely online, I wanted to make sure that they only worked on the activity while in class so that I could supervise the interactions. I spent a good portion of the peer review days answering questions from students on how to word their comments to peers. I paused the activity so that every student could look at how their partners addressed the audience, and we, as a class, were able to discuss actual examples from the student papers. The benefit of this exercise was that we had the ability to discuss a piece of student writing without singling out the student in the same class. These discussions also helped me reiterate that the students should be aware of similar characteristics of the sample student’s writing in their own drafts. Throughout my involvement with the students, I could see the benefit of making this an in-class peer review activity instead of

having them do it from a personal computer as homework. The results from my case study show, among many other things, that managing these logistical details related to the activity is an important step in transitioning students to brand new technological platforms like Edmodo.



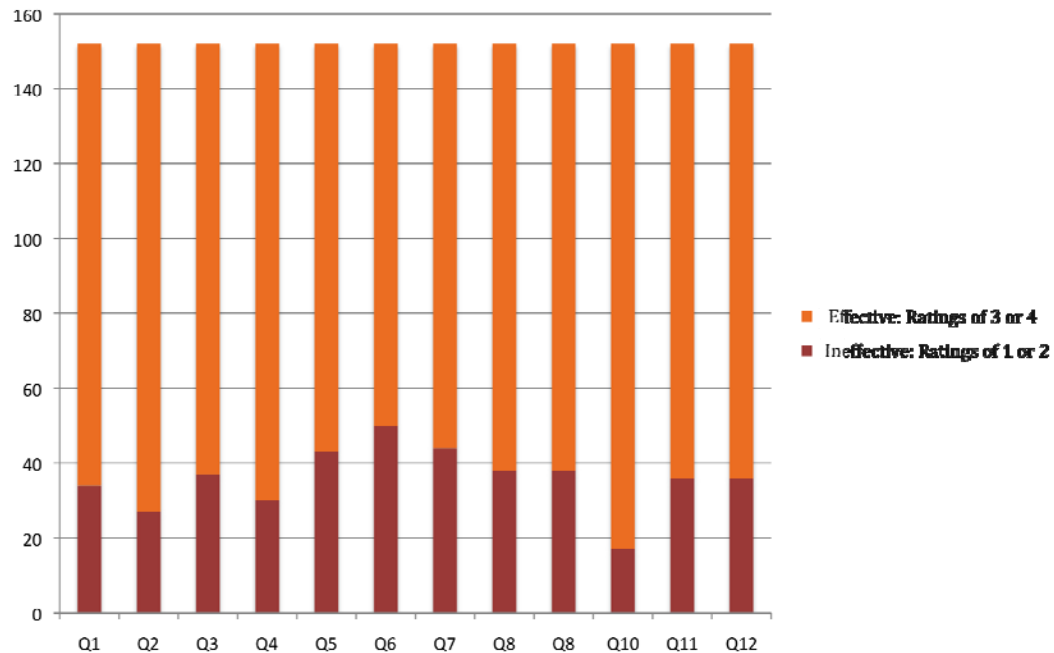
## **Chapter 3: Results**

### **Survey and Interview**

Overall, the students responded very well to the peer review activity using Edmodo. Not only did their comments cover a wide spectrum of topics, but the surveys and interviews also showed that the overwhelming majority of students felt that the peer review was successful in helping with revision. While I used the surveys to ask broader questions to the entire group of students, the dialogue from the interviews provided me with more specific answers to help me understand why students answered the way they did on the survey. Below on Figure 1 you can see the mainly positive reactions that students had to the peer review activity. In this section I will explore each of the survey questions (Appendix A) in depth and use the interview responses to gauge why students answered the way that they did on the survey.

Figure 1 provides a good place to begin when looking at the results of this case study because it shows how the students rated the activity overall. Each question on the survey (Appendix A) was worth up to 4 points; rankings of 1 or 2 meant that students found that particular aspect of the activity “not effective” and ratings of 3 or 4 meant that the topics of each question were “effective”. Given that there were 37 students who filled out a survey, this meant that each question had the ability to reach 148 points total (4 possible points for each survey question).

Figure 1  
Overall Reaction from the Survey



*Students scored each question out of 4 points. Each question had the potential to receive 148 points given that 37 students took the survey. The “Ineffective Ratings” show how many lower ratings students gave to each question*

From Figure 1, it is clear that the majority of students answered that the activity was effective for every question. But I want to look at some of these questions more closely because individually each question provides a different outlook for how students responded to the activity. For example, Question two (Q2) asked: *How effective did you find Edmodo to be to facilitate the peer review activity?* This question focuses on the effectiveness of the specific SNS used for the activity. From the survey, only two students said that the SNS was not effective for the peer review activity; the other 35 students ranked the website’s effectiveness as a 3 or a 4. Given the challenges that introducing technology can bring, this number is higher than I anticipated. However, given that most interviewees mentioned the similarities that Edmodo had to Facebook,

their level of satisfaction seemed directly related to their level of comfort with the website. This relationship created an online space in which students were most comfortable providing feedback to each other. During his interview, Student 2 explained the connection that he had to Edmodo and social media websites like Facebook: “Everybody knows how to use Facebook...That’s what we do, we get on our social media...it’s how we express ourselves.” His inclusion of the collective first person does not seem out of place here given the numbers from the survey. Each of the students who were interviewed also admitted to using Facebook among other social network sites like Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr. Throughout the interview process, students also mentioned the specific ways in which Edmodo resembled Facebook. This list included: similar layout design, leaving comments or feedback, posting statuses, inserting a profile picture, uploading a document, amongst others. With no instructor prompt, students commented on these relationships to Facebook when I first introduced them to the SNS.

When looking at these results from Figure 1, it is also important to take into account why two students ranked Edmodo as ineffective. The short answer section of the survey provided specific details related to their reasons. One student had several issues with repeated comments due to the fact that the comments were available for everyone to read. This student noted that because there was a minimum word count assigned to each comment, some students would borrow ideas from comments written by other peer review partners on Edmodo instead of coming up with new, original ideas.

The highest ranked question (in point value) from the survey was Question 10, which asked: *How effective was reviewing a student from my other class as opposed to reviewing a student in this class?* This question begins to look at how having anonymous peer review partners played a role in the students’ answers and shows how well students responded to the

peer review activity given this potential anonymity. Each of the 37 students who were surveyed said that this method of peer review was effective. Figure 1 shows that Q10 included some 3's instead of the highest 4 ranking, but overall, everyone agreed that not knowing the person had a positive impact on the peer review. The impact of anonymity was a widely discussed topic as well during the interview.

Figure 2

**Survey Question 13:**  
Did you know any of the students that you peer reviewed?

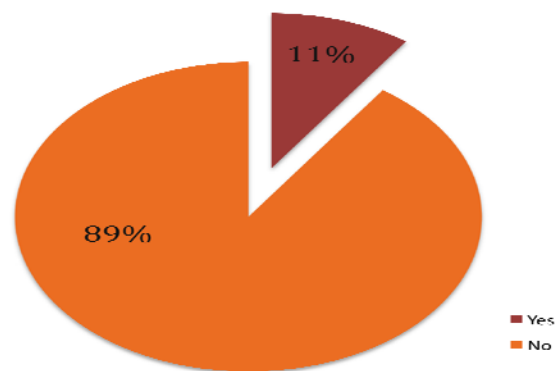
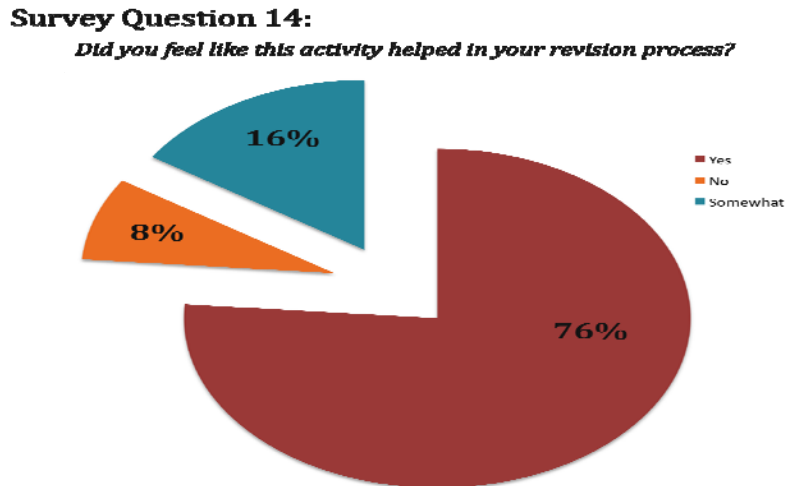


Figure 2 shows how many of the students ended up peer reviewing someone that they actually knew. Only four students claimed to have known any of their peer review partners, which gives a context for the overall effectiveness of the anonymous, online strategy. It is still important to note that even though four students peer reviewed somebody they *did* in fact know, they still pointed out on their surveys that they thought the anonymous peer review was effective. Many students explained that not seeing a person face-to-face helped them “get straight to the point” (Student 6) and it allowed for an “honest” exchange of ideas (Student 8). Many students also explained that other styles of peer review have social interactions that usually require students to try to avoid offending each other. One student mentioned that other peer review

activities that he had done in previous classes involved him thinking of “fluff to make people feel better” instead of “saying what [he] thinks” (Student 5). Student 8 explained that it is not only giving comments to people, but also receiving them that can be difficult in a face-to-face interaction: “If I would have known them, I would have taken [the comments I received] more personally. I tend to take it very personally when other people are critiquing my writing.” These responses show that the students responded well to the removal of the social cues that comes along with a face-to-face context. Of the four that knew at least one of the peer review partners, most of them had only positive anecdotes to add to this conversation. One student wrote on her survey (Q13 Short Answer) that she was paired with a childhood friend and they had no problems being honest with each other about their writing. Another of these four students wrote that he knew how his partner “liked to receive information” so he was able to say everything “straight forward.” In these cases, the students were reviewing someone whom they had a positive relationship with, and it is worth noting that students with bad relationships with their peer review partners could have experienced the activity differently. Communication patterns of friends using educational social media might be an interesting topic of further research.

Figure 3



When studying peer review, it is important to continue the exploration of how the activity affects students' revision processes. Survey Questions 1 and 11 accomplished just that for the project, and Question 14 provided a short answer with accompanying details related to the same issue. These questions asked students about their revision process and whether or not the peer review activity helped them with revising their rough drafts. For Q1 and Q11, 31 students indicated that this peer review activity was effective in helping them to revise their rough drafts. For the short answer on Q14, 76% of the students said that the comments did help, while the other 24% were broken up into subcategories of being "somewhat" helpful and not helpful at all. This majority can probably be attributed to the fact that many students said during the interviews that they enjoyed writing the negative comments more than the positives. The negative comments, in general, were more specific towards "local" problems like their grammar, format, and/or punctuation. Student 4 stated that she would rather write negative comments because she

says, “you can write more about [the negative comments].” And Student 8 agreed that it is easy to make corrections to a paper. He stated, “when I am reading something, I automatically have the mindset that I am tearing [the paper] apart...my immediate reaction is to be critical of something” (Student 8). While this comment is exaggerated, it still shows how students are much more able to criticize writing than praise it. The critical nature of peer review lends itself to constructive criticism. Student 9 summed this up by explaining that it was easy to critique a peer’s rough draft because the incorrect things stood out more in the paper. It was generally agreed upon that writing constructive criticisms work to bring attention to overall issues that need additional revision. These issues were deemed easier for students to comment on because they were easier to locate in their peers’ rough drafts.

This question of effectiveness for revision begins to show where some of the students start to disagree with the majority in larger numbers. Six students from the survey did not think that the comments helped them with the revision process and there are several reasons as to why this may be true. A big reason that many students were turned off by this activity was due to what I previously mentioned about students repeating comments to fulfill the word count of the activity’s assignment. This is something that I plan on adjusting with the activity in the future, whether with higher privacy settings for students or a word count below 150 per comment. Another reason why these students might not have found the comments very effective was due to the fact that they had trouble trusting their peer review partners’ feedback. Student 6 stated, “I got a lot of comments that were wrong.” She went on to explain that it really depended on who was reviewing her paper because if they were not a good writer, then they would not be able to provide any helpful feedback. Student 9 provided some context for why some students felt that effectiveness of peer review activities relies on the competence of the peer review partners. She

boasted, “I was used to a higher level of thinking and so sometimes the wording made it less credible.” Here we begin to see where some of the peer review comments might have been deemed less credible because the quality of writing for these comments was lower. If peer review comments were confusing overall, this may be attributed to poor grammar within the comment or incorrect suggestions. Although these students had some negative experiences with a few of their peer review partners, overall students seemed to take away more positives than negatives in the area of improving their own revision process after the activity.

After figuring out how each student responded to their negative peer review comments, I also wanted to know how the negative comments helped the students become better writers more specifically. Q4 really works to see how effective students thought their own written comments were as well as the comments they received. When answering Q4, only three students stated that the negative comments did not help them whatsoever with improving their writing. Student 9 commented that some of her peer review partners would refer to obvious issues with the rough draft like a lack of pages, instead of focusing on the more impactful aspects of writing like issues with content or the overall strength of the argument. She stated, “Focusing on things that are much more obvious are not as helpful” (Student 9). The same student did, however, go on to say that peer review in general is “more helpful to certain people than others” and that she had to convince herself to look at each comment in a “positive or nothing” mindset, meaning that each comment is meant to be helpful, but it doesn’t mean that they are correct all of the time. This shows that students are aware that their partners may not be perfect, but they are at least trying to provide help to each person. Overall, students agreed that this feedback was, in fact, helpful for revising their rough drafts. While my research did not look at students’ final drafts, from this



data I can conclude that students felt that the peer review comments helped in revising for their final draft.

As previously mentioned, the repetition of comments probably played a factor with students meeting the word count, but some students actually responded well to my strict requirements for the activity. Student 2 explained that he “needed to get the grade,” so he provided specific information for his partners’ papers. He expressed in his interview that he wanted to receive full credit for providing “thoughtful comments” to his partners and responded well to the guidelines of the activity. There seems to be a consensus with this idea because although there were a limited number of students who did not agree, the majority, again, agreed that receiving “thoughtful” negative comments helped them in becoming better writers. Student 5 responded to this idea by saying, “It’s nice having people’s feedback and seeing how you can make your paper better.” For the most part, students were able to see the value in having another pair of eyes to look over their drafts because as Student 4 put it during the interview, “I could fix the mistakes that I didn’t see before.” When answering Q3, only five students said that they did not feel that the comments they gave to their partners would help all that much. This gets to the larger issue that instructors must figure out how to approach within a peer review activity, which is how to convince students that they have enough authority to provide helpful feedback. As previously mentioned, many students take their writing very personally, which when coupled with the lack of confidence over writing can cause anxiety when performing a peer review activity. This also highlights for instructors a good reason for asking students to provide positive comments to each other instead of only criticism.

The positive comments, however, were not so well received as the constructive criticisms. Answers from Survey Questions 7 and 8 provided the biggest difference between the

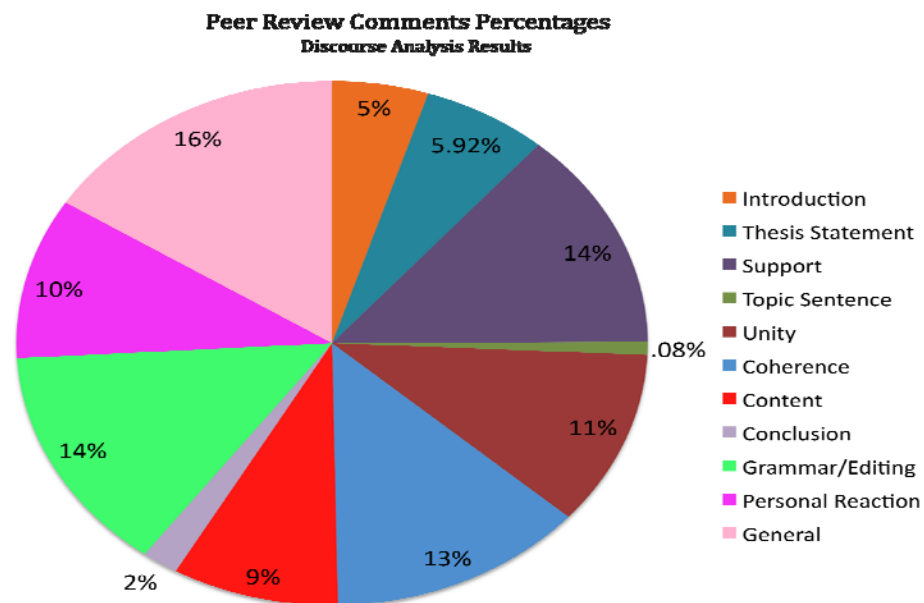
effective and ineffective categories and both of these questions are closely related to how the positive comments affected each person's writing style. Ten students said on the survey (Q7) that the positive comments did not help them to recognize their strengths as writers and seven students said that the positive comments did not help them in understanding the assignment requirements (Q8). While the majority of the students still said that the positive comments did help their growth as writers, it was surprising that the amount of discussion from the interviews was very vague about which specific positive comments they received. Student 8 described how reading through the positive comments gave her "hope" and Student 5 mentioned that the positive comments "let [me] know [I'm] on the right track." The best example from the interview that showed the benefit of including positive comments as a peer review activity came from Student 3. Throughout the interview, Student 3 used every question to restate in a different way how inadequate she felt about her own writing and in turn giving feedback to other people. She even exclaimed that she doesn't know why someone would want to peer review a quality paper; "they know they did well" (Student 3). This particular student lacked the self-confidence needed to perform a peer review effectively and eluded to this at the end of the interview: "The activity needs to give more confidence to students who do not feel that they are good writers" (Student 3). Most of the students that I interviewed, including Student 3, could not tell me specifically what the negative comments were that they received throughout the semester. They each remembered the positive comments, but very few were able to recall specific negative comments related to their writing. This intriguing revelation brings me to analyze what types of comments students gave to each other in order to focus on what topics of comments were easier to remember. This analysis will help shed some light on why students remembered the specific

positive comments over the negative ones amongst other findings related to how the activity was presented to the students.

### Discourse Analysis

When investigating the overall effectiveness of a classroom activity it is important to also take note of how students performed during the activity. In relationship to this peer review activity, this meant that I needed to take a look at what sort of comments were made by the students. As previously mentioned, I used Guardado and Shi's coding method with a few minor tweaks to the vocabulary. I coded over 2,000 peer review comments from two essay assignments. Each individual student gave anywhere from 20 to 100 peer review comments throughout the semester. Figure 4 provides the specific breakdown of how these comments were distributed into different topics.

Figure 4



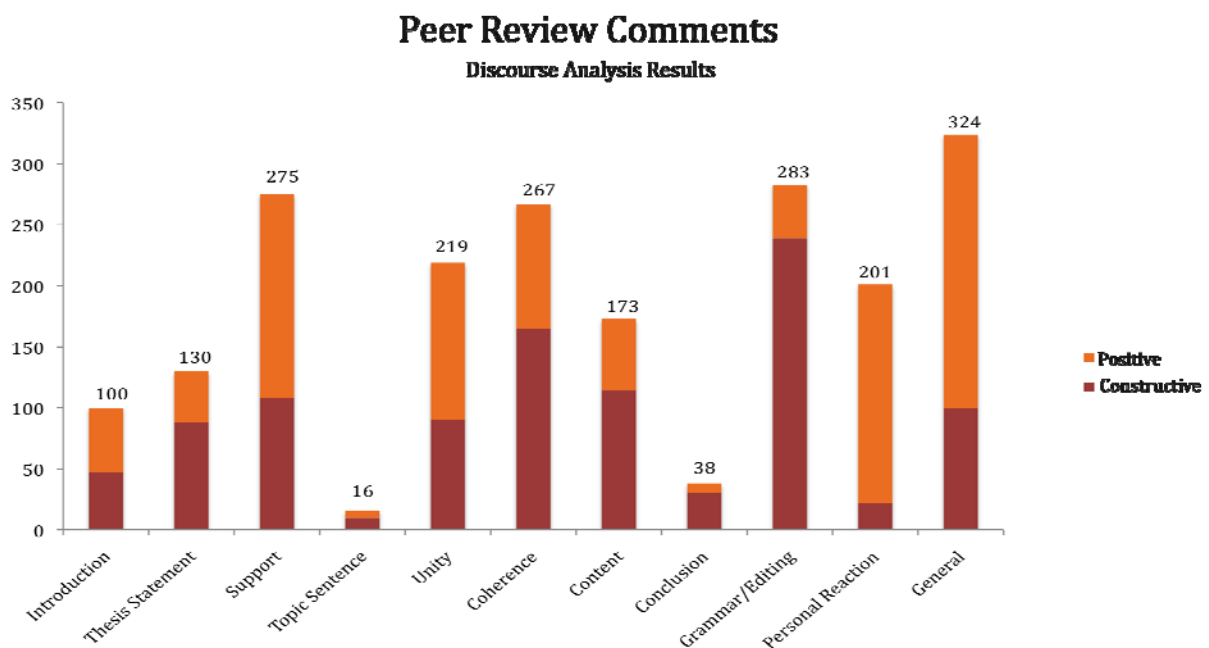
Seven of the eleven categories of comments were used fairly consistently, with students giving the highest percentage of “General” comments and the lowest percentage of “Topic Sentence” comments. These statistics introduce two arguments that can be made in relationship to the context of my study, the first being that I did not talk very much about topic sentences as part of this course and as a result, their peer review comments were lacking in this area. We discussed topic sentences as tools for organizing paragraphs, but did not expand that discussion very much. The second argument that stands out to me is that a “General” comment is very unspecific and could be a number of things related to peer review. For instance, I tried to put every comment that related to a person’s creativity in the “General” category. Comments like, “You really entertained me with your idea” are put in the same category as a motivational comment like, “There are a few problems with your paper though, which is OK it is a rough draft after all.” The act of even including a “General” category is asking for the leftover sentences that do not belong anywhere else and, as previously discussed, if certain students were only worried about reaching the word count, then it is likely that their comments would also fall short of a more specific category as well. In hindsight, if I were to create a category for a topic’s “creativity,” then the “General” category would have been used much less. The next two highest percentages were for the “Grammar/Editing” and “Support” categories, which are more traditional peer review categories due to the implications they have on specific parts of the writing process.

The other lower percentages for “Conclusion” and “Introduction” comments were somewhat shocking to me based on the fact that we did spend so much time discussing both of these topics in class. The fact that these were not as commented on show that perhaps students do not feel confident enough on the subjects to be able to comment effectively. This reminds me

of the aforementioned Student 3 from the interview who voiced this very frustration: “I’m not really as confident as a writer that I want to be. So, if I am grading somebody else’s paper, I don’t know if I’m actually covering everything.” It is very easy to see how the bottom percentage categories are topics that I need to revisit in my own methods of instruction.

Within each of these percentages of comment categories, there is another indicator that needs to be dissected: which categories had the most positive comments and negative comments. Figure 5 below shows how each category breaks down into positive comments and critiquing comments.

Figure 5



This graph helps expand on some very interesting patterns. For example, the “Grammar/Editing” comments are for the most part negative comments. This makes sense given that any rough draft is very rarely turned in without grammatical mistakes, but in my classes we also talked about how writing can never be completed and that there is always something to

improve upon in an essay. Students also mentioned in the interview that the mistakes “stand out more,” which could point to the separation in this category between negative comments and positive comments. The positive “Grammar/Editing” comments were mostly related to an essay’s correct use of MLA formatting.

It is also interesting to look at how positive comments were used in some of the categories. For example, the positive “Personal Reaction” tended to be more conversational like, “I really liked this paper if you didn’t notice” and “To be honest this paper was very impressive and I felt like I was actually reading a very professional advertisement for this product.” While these may not necessarily help improve the reviewed student’s writing, they more than likely help the person commenting. Student 9, in the interview, described how she would rather read a great paper and have only positive things to say as opposed to reading a poorly written paper and writing mostly negative comments. She explained, “I would rather focus on the positive comments because it will make me a better writer. You get a different perspective on topics or ideas that you would not normally have” (Student 9). I believe that this breakdown of “Personal Reactions” show how students benefitted from seeing other successful writing techniques and styles, which has been a major factor in the popularity of peer review in first year composition classrooms for over a century.

During the interview, most of the students agreed that providing negative feedback was the easiest, but the above quote from Student 9 shows a differing opinion. For this student, the ability to focus on what her partners did well in the essays exposed her to different effective writing styles that she felt able to learn from. This statement makes a larger argument about the benefit of peer review in general that I believe is worth noting. While negative comments may be easier to identify during a peer review activity, writing positive comments provide students

the ability to assess effective styles of writing so that they can use these styles in their own writing. Peer review has a tendency to turn into an editing activity, which is not the worst thing that first year composition student can experience, but it is also why I enacted the word count policy on the peer review comments. By asking students to follow word count guidelines for reflection of their peers' positive writing styles, the activity afforded students the ability to compare their own writing and argumentative styles with other effective examples.

The last pattern from these numbers that I believe is worth taking note of is the difference between the "Support" and the "Coherence" categories. While coding, it was sometimes difficult to separate these and the numbers inevitably show how I subconsciously made the distinction. Comments for the "Support" category ended up being mainly positive, while the "Coherence" category was mostly negative. "Support" comments had to do mainly with the logic and evidence provided in the essay, which is something that we worked on throughout the semester. "Coherence" mainly dealt with including specific information in the essay and making sure that sentences flowed together in a strong pattern, which was a comment I often made on their final drafts. These two instances show how the outcomes of a specific classroom assignment or discussion depends very much on context.

I also found it interesting that in the interviews, most of the students could not remember many specific comments that they had received throughout the semester. Overall, most of the students whom I interviewed remembered specifically what positive comments they had received but not the negative ones. Students 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 all remembered getting positive comments about their thesis statements, but if you look at Figure 5, the "Thesis Statement" category had a majority of negative comments and there were not as many total comments compared to other categories. This separation of data could be caused by the amount of time between the actual

peer review activity and the interview; some students also had trouble coming up with any examples at all. The interview participants also recalled some positive “Coherence” comments throughout the process, mainly to do with sentence organization and syntax. Finally the interview participants all mentioned remembering receiving negative “Grammar/Editing” comments as well. Again, this response could have been from the timing of the interview compared to the peer review activities, but this category had the second most comments and the majority of the comments were negative, so this makes sense. Had the survey and interview been directly after the peer review activities, students’ responses may have been clearer about both specific positive and specific negative comments.

The results from this case study are varied and do not lead to any specific conclusions, but they do propel the conversation of using social media in the classroom as a peer review tool. The findings here do not present an argument, but rather begin a discussion of what the next step should be in investigating social media as a peer review tool. There are several directions this conversation can lead, and as I conclude this project I want to introduce several of these ideas in order to present the context of both my peer review activity and larger conversation for inclusion of SNSs in the composition classroom.



## **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

According to student responses and the variety of peer review comments, the inclusion of SNSs for a peer review activity has many benefits and is a topic that can lead the conversation of Web 2.0 technologies forward more easily into the instruction of college composition. For our students it is important to pay attention to these advances in technologies and how composition instructors can help improve students' writing using the modes that students are most comfortable with. This does not mean to say that composition instructors should incorporate every use of written communication technology in their classes, but as long as instructors can remain aware of the evolution of these technologies, it should be easier to know which technologies are useful or not to use in the composition classroom.

It is vital that composition instructors no longer distance the writing that students do every day on SNSs from the educational setting. Making this omission sends a message to students that the writing they are doing on Facebook and Twitter has no relevance to the writing that they do in the classrooms. If instructors can help students understand that the social process of written communication is the same regardless of where (or how) the writing takes place, then students will be able to make the connection that the text they compose on SNSs every day should, in fact, use the same communication principles as the writing they do in the classroom. By incorporating SNSs as a peer review tool, instructors are helping to prepare students to be effective communicators for the twenty-first century. The purpose of this case study is to show that writing on SNSs is as appropriate a tool as any other written communication tool for peer review used in the past.

Instructors should take from this method of peer review that there is a lot of organization that needs to happen before assigning an online peer review activity. As Guardado and Shi point

out, instructors may initially believe that moving a peer review activity online is a “simple” way around face-to-face peer review activities (458). This was also one of the three myths that Haas pointed to in regards to how instructors view technology. Myth #1 stated that technology can be a “transparent” tool that only helps in making activities “easier and faster” CITE. But as my process of integrating SNSs into my peer review activities can attest, there are plenty of instructional and organizational steps along the way that, when done correctly, make for an easier transition to a technological platform. Instructors must be aware of the challenges of switching a peer review to SNSs and plans ahead accordingly; only then will the activity resemble a “faster” transition from FtF to online.

My study provides the beginning to a longer conversation about the differences between FtF peer review and SNSs’ peer review. Because the lack of research in the composition studies field, my study avoids making generalizations on the overall effectiveness of instructors’ use of SNSs as a peer review tool. More research is needed to compare the two modes of peer review in general so that we can understand the similarities and differences that both provide for composition instructors and students.

While research has shown that SNSs facilitate effective written communication skills, it would also be helpful to know how effective peer review on SNSs can be for helping students edit essays for the final draft stage. This is an area where more research is needed to know how well the peer review comments influenced the editing process for students. The next step in the process of investigating SNSs as a peer review tool should look at the overall effectiveness of the peer review comments. It is important to understand how students respond to activities like peer review on SNSs, but if the students’ writing does not improve, then the inclusion of SNSs might need to be re-evaluated. This method of study would require researchers to focus on the first

drafts (or rough drafts) that students submit for peer review and take note of the specific peer review comments that they receive. Once the students make corrections and turn in their final drafts, researchers could investigate what changes were made to the essay that related to the peer review comments and how effective these changes were in improving the overall writing.

More research should also be done to look at the types of peer review comments that students gave in relationship to the comments that they received from the instructor on their own essays. It became very evident during the interview that students would use language related to issues in writing that they had heard me use in class or in my comments on their essays. My guess is that students are much more likely to provide comments related to issues that they, themselves, have received on previous essays. For example, if a student receives a repeated comment from the instructor related to the wordiness of a passage, this issue of wordiness may be something that she is more likely to look for in her peers' writing. This area of research would not only help further SNS peer review activities, but FtF peer review as well.

As future researchers contemplate further investigation into these pedagogical areas, I would also provide one more piece of advice. While the coding process of peer review comments may seem daunting, the use of pre-determined categories may add more work than one might suppose. The categories I used from Martin Guardado and Ling Shi provided a good starting place for my discourse analysis, but I would advise future researchers to let the comments dictate how closely to stick to these original categories. It might be easier to organize the peer review comments into similar groups, and once the comments have been organized into groups, researchers should choose an appropriate title for that category. There certainly will be some overlap in the category titles, but researchers also may find that new categories would arise, thus making the discourse analysis more descriptive of each instructor's specific activity.

When researchers borrow pre-existing categories from past studies, the notion of bias certainly plays a part in how comments are coded. With this mind, future research in the field should reflect this bias more blatantly in their process by creating their own specific categories for coding.

With further research, instructors can help guide students' use of SNSs so that they can learn to communicate effectively, instead of ignoring the relevant social communication tools of SNSs. Only after additional research is compiled will we know the effects of instructors' inclusion of SNSs within the composition classroom. But as my study has shown, this is something that students are open to experiencing and these online activities have many of the same benefits that traditional FtF peer review activities have. Instructors should move forward with these inclusions so that students can benefit from instruction on how to communicate effectively over these familiar networks. But it should be more than that. Students need to see a smoother transition from activities inside the classroom to the outside world and peer review activities on SNSs use written communication to bridge this gap for students. While composition instructors have begun to embrace technology in general, without the inclusion of SNSs in these pedagogical roles, understanding the overall effect of pedagogical technology remains incomplete.

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Appendix A

Case Study Peer Review Survey

*Rank your answers using the following scale of 1-4:*

*Not Effective (1) Less Effective (2) Somewhat Effective (3) Very Effective (4)*

- 1) How effective were the comments that you received during your revision process? [\_\_\_\_\_]
- 2) How effective did you find Edmodo to be to facilitate the peer review activity? [\_\_\_\_\_]
- 3) How effective did you feel that the comments you *gave* to your partner were towards their revision process? [\_\_\_\_\_]
- 4) How effective were the constructive criticism comments in making you a better writer in general?  
[\_\_\_\_\_]
- 5) How effective were the constructive criticism comments in understanding the assignment? [\_\_\_\_\_]
- 6) How effective were the constructive criticism comments in helping you with format? [\_\_\_\_\_]
- 7) How effective were the positive comments in helping you recognize your strength as a writer? [\_\_\_\_\_]
- 8) How effective were the positive comments in helping you recognize your understanding of the assignment? [\_\_\_\_\_]
- 9) How effective was the Workshop Guide when thinking about what comments to make? [\_\_\_\_\_]
- 10) How effective was reviewing a student from my other class as opposed to reviewing a student in this class? [\_\_\_\_\_]
- 11) How effective was the peer review activity in helping you revise your final draft? [\_\_\_\_\_]
- 12) How effective was this activity in helping you become a stronger writer? [\_\_\_\_\_]

**Yes/No and Short Answer Questions:**

- 13) a) Did you know any of the students that you peer reviewed? (Yes or No)



[\_\_\_\_\_]

b) If yes on the previous question, then how did knowing him/her affect the comments that you provided to them? (Skip if previous answer was “No”)

14) Did you feel like this activity helped in your revision process?

15) Overall, do you think that this activity was a good use of class time?

Appendix B

Case Study Interview Questions

- 1) When thinking back over the semester, how do you feel about the peer review activity using Edmodo?
- 2) What were the positive/negative comments that you received regarding? And were they effective to help write your final draft?
- 3) Were you comfortable with using Edmodo for the activity?
- 4) Is there a difference in how you communicate to your friends on Facebook and how you communicated with your peer review partner? Explain the two uses you have for outside communication and communication with your peer review partners.
- 5) Did you know any of the students who you peer reviewed? If yes, explain how you knew them and how that influenced the peer review activity.
- 6) Which comments were easier for you to write, positive or negative? Why do you think that is?
- 7) Which comments helped you more on your essay? Positive or Negative?
- 8) What were some of the specific comments that you received?
- 9) Had you done a peer review activity before this semester, and when?
- 10) Do you think that Edmodo worked for the peer review activity? Why or why not?

## Appendix C

### Assignment Sheet Peer Review Online Workshops

**Objective:** To improve your writing by receiving and providing a meaningful conversation in response to students' pieces of writing throughout the semester.

You will participate in an online workshop with my other section of ENGL1101. These workshops will be done in class the day that the rough drafts are due. Please upload your paper by **10 a.m.** on the day the rough draft is due so that we can conduct our online workshop the same day in both classes.

**Program Overview:** Edmodo will be the program we use for these online workshops. I will invite you join the ENGL1101 group so that you can privately interact with only the members within the group. On Workshop Days you will be assigned a group of **three** students from my other section. First thing you will need to do is download your partner's document and open it in **Microsoft Word**. You will make comments using the **Track Comments** feature in Microsoft Word. After you have completed the margin comments, you will upload your partner's paper back on Edmodo, putting "**REVISED**" in the document name. For example if your partner's paper is named "Bob's Paper.doc," then you will save and upload the document as "Bob's PaperREVISED.doc" Remember papers that are not uploaded as **.doc** or **.docx** will not be accepted in the class.

Once you have uploaded your REVISED document, you will leave a **1000 character** comment (approx 170 words) in the "**Comment**" space underneath your uploaded file.

Repeat these steps for all three of your group members. You only have in class to finish this assignment each Workshop Day so make sure to only spend **25 minutes** on each group member.

Before the next class meeting after the Workshop Day, you will need to write a 1000 character comment (approx 170 words) back to your peer review partner that includes thanking them for their feedback and a reflection of the changes that they proposed. Nicely tell them which suggestions you plan on taking for your final draft and which suggestions you think will not work for the final draft.

Your Workshop Grade will be worth **10%** of your final grade. You will be graded on how closely you stick to the **Workshop Guide** and I will be looking over your comments to make sure you are using proper grammar and language. This work will **NOT** be permitted if done outside of class. If you are not there for roll call, then your workshop grade for that paper will be 0.

Refer to the Workshop Guide in order to achieve a successful workshop participation grade.

## Appendix D

### Workshop Guide

This guide is meant to give you a thoughtful outline of what is expected of your online workshops. This guide will outline my ideas for your conversations and suggestions that you give to your workshop partners. These are items that you can focus on when giving feedback either on the document or in the Comment field.

#### 10 Peer Review Objectives:

- 1) **Authentic Voice:** Does this piece of writing have a voice that is easy to relate to? Is there any vocabulary usage that stands out to you? Why or Why not?
- 2) **Grammar:** Are there any grammar mistakes such as misspelled words or incorrect verb tenses?
- 3) **Syntax:** Are there any irregularly structured sentences? Does the writer achieve a successful pattern with words?
- 4) **Documentation:** Are there any research sources? If so, are they documented properly following MLA standards? (Refer to MLA handbook/ebook)
- 5) **Formatting:** Is the paper formatted correctly? Page numbers, headers, title, font? Refer to MLA standards (Refer to MLA Format Sheet).
- 6) **Evidence/Support/Research:** What support does the writer give to back up their thesis? Is the support credible and introduced correctly?
- 7) **Organization:** Are the paragraphs organized clearly to support the thesis?
- 8) **Assignment Guidelines:** Are all of the guidelines outlined on the Assignment Sheet met?
- 9) **Unclear Sentences:** Are there any sentences that do not make sense? Do you have any questions about sentences?
- 10) **Proper Audience:** Is the voice appropriate for the intended audience?