WRITTEN FEEDBACK IN A FRESHMAN WRITING COURSE IN THE U.A.E: INSTRUCTORS' AND STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON GIVING, GETTING AND USING FEEDBACK

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Elva Anne Shine

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ABSTRACT

Instructors' frustration with the feedback/revision cycle in a tertiary setting provided the impetus for this study examining the complex issue of written feedback on L2 writing. Areas of contention considered included the type of feedback offered, when to offer it and how to present it to encourage maximum use by students as well as the actual use students made of the written feedback. An ethnographic approach led to three case studies being conducted in academic writing classes in a university in the United Arab Emirates. The students' and the instructors' perspectives were drawn on as well as those of other interested parties including other instructors in the department and writing center tutors. Interviews, focus groups and email exchanges were the principle sources used to gather participants' views. In addition, students answered questionnaires on instructor and peer feedback procedures. Essays were examined in terms of instructor and peer feedback, and the students' responses to that feedback were examined. The data gathered from these sources exposed contradictions and misunderstandings. It appeared that students had little faith in peer feedback but a strong desire for instructor feedback, which they believed they used when revising; however, instructors doubted that most students made any significant use of feedback or even revised productively. Examination of the essays suggested that: instructors did not always offer the feedback they intended to offer focusing more on grammar than content, and sometimes instructors underestimated how much feedback students attempted to act on. The study identified that key problems for students were: understanding the extent of revisions anticipated, knowing what to concentrate their efforts on and knowing how to act on the feedback, especially if they had exhausted their ideas on a topic. In addition, the difficulty of providing clear, usable feedback suggests that rather than relying extensively on written feedback, other ways of assisting students to revise their writing should be considered. The study suggests that feedback that relates explicitly to classroom instruction, and exposure to revision strategies are two techniques that offer a lot of potential for improving students' responses to written feedback. Instructors should also consider making their feedback strategies and expectations of the students explicit. Finally, individual variables mean that it is unlikely that one approach will work for all students; therefore, instructors need to be flexible and respond according to the needs of the student.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

In the last weeks of every semester, students would come to my office and tell me about the disadvantages they had faced learning English because they went to government schools. Then the request would come: "Help me miss." In the first couple of semesters, I would feel a frisson of triumph. Although obviously too late, nevertheless, here were students who wanted to learn. I would lean forward earnestly and begin to recap the main points of a 16 week semester. After a few seconds the same reaction occurred; the eyes glazed over. Despite feeling troubled, I would plow on. Discussion with other instructors helped me to see that the request for help meant only one thing; increase my grade because if you do not I will fail. I came to see that this was indeed exactly what that request meant, and this was emphasized by the students who put it to me straight, "Give me more than I deserve."

Recently, students have come near the end of the semester and asked me to give them some extra work so that they can increase their grade. They are more sophisticated now and know that there has to be an exchange of goods in this barter system. I do not lean forward eager to recap a semester's work. I am more jaded and cynical. However, puzzling questions have remained. What were those students doing during the semester that they did not take advantage of the instructor's willingness to help? How did they think they would improve their writing without doing the work and responding to the feedback? Did they not want to learn, as some instructors say? Or was there something about the feedback/revision cycle that did not work for some students? Giving written feedback on students' writing is a large part of what I do. The possibility was before me that this task, which took up most of my time, may not have been the most sensible way to help students improve their writing skills. I had serious doubts about what I was doing, and that was how I got started on this study.

1.1 The Role of Writing in ESL: An Area of Change

Worldwide, English has achieved dominance in many areas such as business, film, the internet, and science and technology to such an extent that competence in speaking, reading and, increasingly, writing English has become a critical issue for people in many countries. Rather than choosing this language from a selection of possible languages, the prominent position of English in many fields means it is often the only choice considered even when other languages are on offer. Warschauer and Ware suggest there has been a burgeoning interest in English language related to the

effect of the internet on social and economic boundaries, which has led to the "educated urban population . . . now [needing] to write in English for vocational and professional purposes" (2006, p. 158). In such circumstances, English as a Second Language (ESL) students are increasingly seen to need to be competent writers as well as speakers of the language (Hyland, 1998; Johns, 1995; Leki, 2000). Interest in second language writing has blossomed in recent years, particularly since the 1980s, with increased representation in academic journals since the 1990s. It is clear that writing in a second language (L2), in this instance English, has become relevant to a lot of non-native English speakers, many of whom have an instrumental engagement with the language as they seek university education opportunities in English speaking countries.

In ESL classes, the diversity encountered in terms of students, purposes and contexts means that there is scope for much research on L2 writers and the teaching of writing. Matsuda noted that the majority of studies of ESL writing have involved "international ESL students in U.S higher education" (2003, p. 27). Although this is changing, there have been calls for more research in diverse ESL contexts and a greater dissemination of the findings as some locally conducted work is not widely reported (Matsuda, 2003; Goldstein, 2005). So, there is a need for further research on L2 writing, extending or possibly replicating earlier work, and for researchers to continue to work with a particular segment of a selected field developing knowledge and competence (Ferris, 2004, 2005; Goldstein, 2005). In addition, there is a need for research and reporting on L2 writing in specific cultural and educational contexts that have been neglected to date, the Middle East and specifically the Gulf region being one such area.

Furthermore, the changing needs of L2 writers, many of whom these days may well have academic or professional goals, mean it is no longer possible to conceptualize L2 writers only within the narrow context of the ESL school classroom. Frodsen and Holten (2003) refer to the reconceptualization of errors in writing due to the impact of such errors on a native English speaking academic audience leading to negative assessments of the writers. It is possible an academic audience could respond negatively solely on the basis of errors, not that L1 writing is devoid of errors, but they are different types of errors and have a different impact on readers. There is potential for the ideas of L2 writers to be unrecognized or undervalued if readers experience difficulty accessing them due to errors. L2 writing can no longer be seen as a skill

taught so that students are capable of essay composition for language classes only; instead, it is increasingly a work and study tool (Warschauer and Ware, 2006).

As students need the option of having other, far wider writing needs addressed if they are to become confident and competent writers in English in contexts such as those presented by academia, business and employment in general, the focus of research in L2 writing needs to be ready to respond. In addition, with the increasing internationalization of English as a tool, research needs to be coming out of broader contexts than conversation classes in Japan or ESL classes in the USA. Researchers now have the opportunity to address the challenge this wider focus on L2 writing presents.

1.2 Teaching Writing in the UAE

The context in which this research takes place, a relatively new but well respected university in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), will, in order to enhance confidentiality, be known as Gulf States University (GSU). An English medium university, attended and staffed by students and faculty representing at least 70 different nationalities, it is just one example of a university determined to meet the needs of a diverse student body who expect to be able to perform credibly at an academic level in English.

What makes this setting interesting is that although the UAE is an Arabic speaking country, it is also a country in which English has become the language of business as the population is made up of peoples from many parts of the world, approximately 160 different nationalities (Abdullah, 2007). Both Arabic and English have prominent roles in a country that is developing fast and, like a gangly teenager, is learning to be at ease with its new form. Detailed information on the country and educational imperatives will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

1.2.1 Academic Writing and the Process Approach

All freshmen coming to GSU are required to take writing classes as part of the General Education Requirements (GER) that are a part of American universities, particularly. Because the majority of the students are ESL students, they begin with either WRI 001, WRI 101 or WRI 102 depending on the results of the TOEFL test and have to complete four English classes as part of the GER for any degree. The writing classes aim to teach academic writing skills principally using the writing process approach.

For the purposes of reporting this study, it is the writing process approach and the feedback/revision cycle taken in WRI 101 from which the data will be gathered. The writing process, as practiced at the institution where this research took place, requiring as it does prewriting, planning and the completion of multiple drafts, all of which are examined to some extent by someone other than the writer, is a writing intensive course for students and requires a lot of reading and responding to essays on the part of the instructor. In addition, it may be the first experience students have had with the writing process approach to writing. It is not unusual for students to say that they have previously just been asked to write, or that they have never heard the term thesis statement or topic sentence before. Initially at least, many students are not particularly engaged with the process approach and express surprise at the request for revision and multiple drafts. Peer review, which has a place in the process approach, is not always well received by participants, instructors and students alike.

Instructors, too, may have mixed feelings about the benefits of the process approach and the feedback/revision cycle considering the amount of time involved in responding to the different stages. When assisting students with writing, the major task comes with the written feedback given on drafts. Drafts are commented on and returned to students who may have time in class to query the instructor about the feedback offered and may also have a class in a computer lab where they work on the essay calling on the instructor for help as necessary. More commonly, students work on the essay further in their own time. What actually happens varies according to the instructor. The final draft is then printed and handed in along with all material used in the process of creating the essay for a final reading, more feedback and the grade. There are individual variations on this process in terms of the number of drafts, the amount and type of feedback and the timing of the grade.

1.2.2 The Place of Feedback

It is not the purpose of this study to query the use of the process approach to teaching writing; rather the focus is on the written feedback given. Although there is controversy over issues in teaching L2 writing, there does seem to be sound reasoning for engaging in the process approach as having students read and incorporate the feedback on early drafts provides the opportunity to work towards a higher quality piece of writing without having to go through the lengthy initial invention phase anew. However, the lack of confidence on the part of instructors over what actually happens,

and to what end, after the feedback is given and the draft is returned means that there is a lot more to be known.

Written feedback on written work is a common means by which ESL instructors provide their students with responses to their writing. In some learning contexts it may be the primary means by which writers get information about their efforts, especially when there are many students in a class making individual conferences on their writing logistically awkward. Instructors at GSU, who typically have 80 students per semester, cannot teach their classes and mark work, fulfill their other professional obligations, such as committee work and research, and schedule time slots for writing conferences without considerable strain. Also, sometimes students' academic commitments mean that they find it difficult to schedule conferences with their instructors. As a result, instructors rely heavily on giving written feedback on essay drafts. Though written feedback is also time consuming, it is a more flexible activity than conferences as it involves only the instructor and the paper, can be scheduled to fit the instructor's timetable alone, and it may well be as effective as conferences. Goldstein (2004, p. 65) comments that her research suggests conferences are not an "inherently effective means of giving usable and helpful feedback".

Written feedback often takes priority over other potential forms of feedback, and it can be used to achieve many tasks. For example, instructors can comment positively on some aspects of a student's writing in an effort to draw attention to what was most successful. Encouraging students is important with a task that is as demanding as writing in a second language. Another goal of written feedback is to draw attention to the content of the essay. Instructors may choose to focus on content issues such as unity, coherence, the quality of the introduction/conclusion, idea development, and the logic of the argument. The issue of feedback on form is equally complex and requires instructors to make judgments about what types of errors to respond to, how many and how to do this.

Along with what feedback to give, instructors confront the choice over when to give it, particularly in the writing process approach, which has writers producing multiple drafts. Questions arise over whether to give content and form feedback together or separately, on drafts or final products. Another significant issue is deciding when a piece of writing actually is a final product. Into all of these considerations come the needs and wants of the writers themselves and the possible affect of the feedback on the students' perspectives of themselves as writers.

Certainly, the complex interactions involved in writing and responding to writers provide considerable scope for investigation in an attempt to understand how to help students work towards the production of higher quality writing than they are currently capable of producing. Increasingly, there is acceptance of the idea that the product of writing has a place as well as the process the writer goes through. Not surprisingly, research so far on feedback has frequently produced ambiguous or contradictory views of what the best way is to help students.

1.3 The Initial Impetus to Examine Written Feedback

Like many before me, the work I am involved in as a writing instructor led to many questions about what was going on between providing written feedback on students' essays and the students returning revised essays.

1.3.1 Instructor as Researcher

This research was conducted within the department where I work as an instructor, but not with my own students to mesh with the ethical principles that inform the research. This meant that I had a privileged role as a practicing instructor working with similar groups of students and facing similar issues as the participating instructors but examining what I saw with the detachment possible in my role as a researcher. Clearly, the impetus to question the role of written feedback was prompted by my desire to find a way to improve my own teaching practice through investigating the "contextualized experience" of participants in a setting I was familiar with (Edge & Richards, 1998, p. 334). Looking at how both instructors and students struggled to find a way forward, I had pressing questions about the feedback/revision cycle, and I anticipated I would have long term access to the site of the study and participants, meaning I would be able to avoid taking a "dive-bomb" approach to the setting (Edge & Richards, 1998, p. 334 & 338).

Although the research methodology outlined later is ethnographic, making considerable use of a longitudinal case study approach, because of my position as departmental member and researcher, this research is to some extent related to practitioner research, but, as I have said, with the detachment possible as the participants were not my own students. Can practitioner research add to the body of knowledge on teaching and learning? Allwright (2005, p. 17) would have that this is indeed possible and even desirable as he mounts an extended argument for teachers to be alert to 'learning opportunities' which may be created by learners or teachers, may be big or small, and may actually only refer to a "fleeting lesson moment" and take

place in specific local settings. This concept gives rise to a setting in which "the proper people to do this work are the practitioners themselves (the teachers and the learners)" (Allwright, 2005, p. 27). Looking at research from Allwright's perspective, I anticipated tapping into those critical moments in the experiences of other instructors in the department fortified with my 'insider' knowledge of similar experiences.

1.3.2 Doubts and Queries Arising from Experience

Working with the writing process approach to teaching writing to L2 students at GSU, I became interested in the efficacy of feedback on written work, particularly written feedback, as an instructor frustrated by what I saw as my students' reluctance to make use of the information I had spent hours inscribing in the margins and at the end of essays. I noticed that there were wide variations in the way students responded and in what they were willing or able to do. I was curious to know more about this as these students were attending an academic institution and presumably had personal academic goals that represented the very needs that Warschauer and Ware (2006) refer to in relation to professional and commercial contexts and which I assumed would have motivated them to make productive use of the feedback. I was also aware that the fees for most of the students at this institution were high. Admittedly, there were scholarship students who paid nothing, and costs are relative, so for some families the fees were not an issue; therefore, it would be oversimplifying to assume that the students had a shared concept of the costs. It would also be a mistake to assume that these freshman students could see a correlation between the costs their parents were incurring and the need to make use of feedback in a freshman composition class that they were taking because it was a GER. The issue of the use students make of feedback on written work became increasingly complex the more I considered it.

As a member of faculty, I was party to the casual talk of fellow instructors noting that I was not the only one frustrated by what I thought was happening, or more importantly not happening, in L2 writing classes. Ad hoc comments and more focused discussions at meetings revealed that there seemed to be a general despondency about the time taken to provide feedback and the lack of up-take on the part of the students. With this in mind, I decided to investigate what my students' perspectives were of the feedback I gave. I designed several questionnaires asking questions about the feedback given by peers and the instructor, the students' level of understanding and how much of it they thought they used. I also attempted to find out what they wanted that they were not getting. I used and adapted these questionnaires over the next year and they became

the pilot study for the questionnaire section of the current research undertaking, which is discussed in more detail in the methodology chapter.

To my astonishment, in these initial explorations, I found that the majority of the students claimed to value the feedback given and if anything wanted more. A subsequent literature trawl confirmed that others have come to this conclusion, too. The students, generally, also believed that they used most of the feedback they received, which was in contrast to what instructors claimed. There was obviously some mismatch or breakdown in understanding here between instructors' and students' expectations of the way the feedback/revision cycle played out. Questions arose for me as to whether or not students really did understand the feedback provided, what their previous L2 writing experiences had entailed, whether or not they were familiar with the concept of drafting, revising and editing, and how the sociocultural context of the classroom impacts their interactions and responses.

According to Ferris, "the research base on the 'big question' – does error feedback help L2 student writers? – is inadequate" (2004, p. 50). But, error feedback is not the only concern. In situations where everything rides on your use of written English, such as the ability to demonstrate understanding of a concept in an examination or where the chance of landing an important contract for your firm depends on how you present your case in written English, more than just sentence skill errors need to be addressed. Willingness to work on development, organization, logic, and meeting audience expectations become of considerable interest. More needs to be known about what works when providing written feedback in L2 writing instruction and why it works.

1.4 Aims and Central Questions

Like many other instructors in the ESL field, I felt a need to know more about what instructors can do to help their students make advances in writing within the context of typical class sizes imposed by the administration at GSU and working with the marking requirements when using a process approach to writing (Goldstein, 2005). Also, my experiences had led me to question the usefulness of much of what teachers write on students' essays, even though students seem extraordinarily fond of the 'red pen'. Instructors strive to assist their students to come to a clearer understanding of the conventions of written English, but the current uncertainty and lack of agreement in the research over how to go about this, while not unexpected, is somewhat disheartening. Instructors intermittently express dismay at the amount of time spent writing detailed

comments because of the apparent unwillingness or inability of many students to act on these comments in a productive way. It seems many writing instructors working with students learning to write in L2, whether for academic purposes or not, lack confidence in the value of written feedback.

And yet students want feedback on the whole. Kischner explained the apparent disparity between the desire for feedback and revisions that result from it through his own experience with L1 students saying that despite lengthy feedback "the papers remained stubbornly the students' own, circumscribed by their own literary and intellectual reach" (1995, ¶ 7). There is an element of cold comfort in this view which warns instructors against having expectations of students that are too high. Feedback, it appears, needs to start with where the student currently is and attempt to move forward from there, but how is this to be done?

Uncertainty over what to do to get the attention of the students and enable them to make progress is exasperating for instructors. Goldstein (2004, p. 64) summarizes the agonizing of both instructors and students over essay commentaries claiming that "[m]any questions and issues underlie the processes of reading students' papers and providing effective commentary and of reading teacher commentary and revising successfully". It appears that all participants are dealing with some degree of immobilizing uncertainty in respect to feedback and revision.

While students do make changes in response to written feedback, the reworked essay that is presented often shows little evidence that the student has read, understood and acted on the comments in such a way that the result is a higher-quality essay. Whether this is because of a lack of understanding in terms of the advice given or other reasons is far from clear. I wanted to know why students make the choices and changes they do and, in tapping into that information, perhaps find ways to empower them to do more.

While it is true that instructors and researchers in the ESL field have discussed the topic of written feedback on written work before, there is still much uncertainty and, some researchers believe, a paucity of well-documented research (Ferris, 2004; Goldstein, 2005). In an environment as multifaceted as an L2 writing class, where students have complex and possibly competing needs and goals, come from a variety of ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds and must interact with instructors who possibly see education quite differently due to their particular educational, cultural and social experiences, there is much to be considered.

Perhaps one way forward is a needs analysis approach to uncover "students' experiences with, preferences for, and attitudes toward written commentary" (Goldstein, 2005, p. 21). Or perhaps a different way of examining the L2 classroom, an 'ecological perspective' of language teaching and learning which places emphasis on the local reality of the experiences of the students and instructors, could offer an insight into the situated experience of a group of learners (Tudor, 2001). With the assistance of faculty in the department and the students, the opportunity arose to try to find out what was going on and sometimes going wrong from the perspectives of the participants.

These were the considerations that impelled this research undertaken at GSU in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What difficulties do students have interpreting written feedback received from their instructor and peers?
2. What do they understand to be their responsibilities in terms of acting on the written feedback?
3. What are the instructors' views of the use students make of the feedback offered?
4. Are there identifiable aspects of the process of giving and receiving written feedback that help to make it an understandable and productive experience for students?
5. What factors can be identified that limit the amount of time and effort students put into reading, understanding and acting on the written feedback from teachers and peers?

1.5 Conclusions and Overview of the Thesis

This chapter has provided the background and context of the study. The changing needs of ESL students, particularly in terms of L2 writing, have meant that there has been an increased focus on the use of the process approach to writing and the role of written feedback. Personal doubts about the efficacy of written feedback in the context of an English language university in the United Arab Emirates led me to conduct a study looking at the perspectives of the different participants in the hope of understanding what was going on and finding a way to make the feedback more relevant and usable.

Chapter two provides background information on the use of English and the development of education in the UAE. Socio-cultural dynamics that impact the use of English in many domains of society are explored as well as in the two main tiers of

schooling: government and private. The implementation and expansion of tertiary education is discussed ending with a detailed account of the university where the study took place.

Chapter three explores key ideas from the literature on L2 writing. Firstly, the process approach and its place in L2 writing is discussed revealing how it was this development that led to an increased emphasis on written feedback. Secondly, the questions of students' receptivity to feedback and the content/form dichotomy are addressed with intention of revealing some of the more general concerns related to written feedback. From that point, feedback is questioned and probed in an effort to reveal the benefits and pitfalls related to different focuses in terms of content, form and peer feedback. The questions of what students want and how these wants mesh with instructors' goals are explored. Finally, the impact of classroom culture and institutional issues such as class sizes and the degree of support for writing across the curriculum are discussed in relation to feedback.

Chapter four provides a full account of the context of the research looking specifically at the department where the research was conducted, the writing courses offered and the feedback procedures. The research problem is outlined and the research questions presented. The selection of participants for the study is discussed. Ethics and the methodological approach are outlined as well as instruments and analytical procedures.

Chapters five, six and seven present the data from the three case studies. Although the ideas that emerge from the data vary, all three chapters cover roughly the same areas. Initially, the instructor's insights into the experience of teaching writing in the UAE and the way students respond to feedback are explored. Next the actual feedback offered is discussed in general terms followed by a broad presentation of students' insights gathered through two questionnaires. The next section of each chapter presents a detailed examination of individual student's revision processes and the chapters end with information gathered from student focus groups. In addition, each case study explores peer review processes drawing on students' and instructors' perspectives, information from a questionnaire as well as data from the peer review sheets.

Chapter eight pulls together the different perspectives garnered from the three case studies in an effort to see how the feedback/revision cycle was played out in each and to explore what does and does not work and why this might be. The impact of

culturally prescribed expectations is looked at as well as grade expectation. Generation 1.5 issues identified in the students are discussed. Then the perspectives of what is happening in the feedback/revision cycle are discussed drawing on data from diverse participants. The impact of form and content feedback on revisions is analyzed as well as the use of rubrics. Appropriation, resistance and requests for more feedback are discussed as is the issue of workload and the impact on the quality of feedback. Alternatives to written feedback are explored and the need to write for courses other than writing courses in this particular context is taken into account. The chapter ends by relating the key point to the research questions.

Chapter nine reveals what is left as a result of refining and sifting the data and relating the results to the research questions. In addition, limitations of the study are discussed leading to an exploration of future directions that need to be explored in the hope of gaining increasing confidence over how to approach the feedback/revision cycle in order to maximize the benefit to students.

CHAPTER TWO
LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION IN THE UAE

This chapter briefly examines issues to do with the development of the UAE and the rapidly expanding population. The intention is to explore issues of relevance to the educational experience of many of the students who enter GSU, experiences which impact the extent to which they are prepared for studying in an English-medium, western-style university. It explains the position of English in the UAE historically and currently as well as the tension between the conservative desire to protect the supremacy of Arabic and the business-oriented desire for an increasing use of English. A detailed outline is given of the different language and learning experiences students encounter in schools in the UAE followed by a brief outline of the expansion of tertiary education since the 1970s. The issues of difficulties freshman students may encounter as they begin their studies in a western-style university and implications for university writing instructors are presented.

2.1 The Growth of the United Arab Emirates

The UAE is a relatively young country formed out of the unification of seven independent Sheikdoms in 1971. Although small in size, since the discovery and production of oil it has become a wealthy nation; and more recently, it has seen staggering growth. Today, although the ruling families remain firmly in control, a first tentative step has been taken towards democracy (Abdullah, 2006).

Unification brought not only wealth through exploitation of the oil but also a rapid growth in the population (Table 2.1). As a result, UAE Nationals are now a slender 20.1 per cent of the population, and this is likely to reduce (Abdullah, 2007). This demographic forecast raises many issues such as national identity, citizenship, multiculturalism and sustainability, all of which impact the lives of UAE citizens and residents (Abdullah, 2007). Clearly, it has serious implications for the future of the UAE Nationals.

Table 2.1

UAE Population Growth

Year	Population
1968	180,226
1979	900,000
2005	4,104,695

(Abdullah, 2007; Peck, 1986)

2.2 Tensions in the Role of English and Arabic in the Community

Unification coincided with a withdrawal of British influence, and this meant that there was little acrimony felt towards the British. In the UAE, a country where nearly every nation in the world is represented, and perhaps because of the colonial presence of the British, English is the language most often heard, superseding even Arabic in some parts of the country. English is the language of daily exchange between people of many different nationalities such as taxi drivers and clients, and within the households where there may be a Filipino 'maid' in an Arabic speaking family (Malallah, 2000; Hokal & Shaw, 1999). It is the language of business in international and national companies allowing communication between staff. The instrumental uses of English are recognized by the students in the region both for employment and for study overseas (Malallah, 2000).

The UAE, like the rest of the Arab world, is an example of diglossia where two distinct varieties of Arabic are used (Al-Kahtib, 2006); classical Arabic, being the language of the Holy Qu'ran, is held in high regard. Some Arabic speakers perceive a threat to the language and identify this, along with being in the minority in one's own country, as one of the many factors currently having an impact on the culture of the Gulf Arabs. There appears to be a "submerged feeling of resentment . . . at the marginalization of Arabic as an instructional medium" (Findlow, 2001).

2.3 Diversity in School Experiences in the UAE

Reflecting on the prevalence of English in the UAE helps to clarify the needs of Nationals and residents in the UAE for access to higher education in English. English is an important tool in the booming world of business in this growing nation; therefore, although they may be ESL students, the students' needs go far beyond what is taught in a typical language classroom.

Although government schools are primarily Arabic medium, English is taught to some extent in all high schools, both government and private. However, the decision to promote English in all schools is likely to have met resistance as the UAE moved away from the traditional schooling that involved memorizing the Qu'ran. Findlow (2001) sees the expansion of education in Arab countries as characterized by tension as decisions are made about models to follow, the colonists or other Arab countries. The model drawn on in the UAE is the Egyptian system and this is evident in the government schools and Egyptians have been dominant in the Ministry of Education (Findlow, 2001). However, the pressure is on the Ministry of Education to modernize educational practices.

2.4 Language in Schools in the UAE

There are two main distinctions in terms of schools in the UAE, government and private, although this distinction hides more than it reveals. This is because the private schools are set up to meet the needs of distinct language/cultural groups, therefore have quite different concerns. Although all schools must teach Arabic, it is emphasized in markedly different ways depending on how seriously it is taken by the individual school. Many schools also offer English, and these are the two languages discussed in an outline of key features of both government and private schools.

2.4.1 Language in Government Schools

In the government schools, the primary language of instruction is classical Arabic, but English (EFL) is included at a rather basic level from secondary school onward. Until recently, L1 English speakers were not present in government schools and writing, beyond the alphabet and vocabulary items, was not included. Government schools are open to UAE and GCC nationals with other Arabs accepted under special circumstances (Al Najami, 2007b; Shaw, Badri & Hukul, 1995). For budgeting reasons, this option is seldom available, but citizens attend free of charge (Education in the UAE, 2007; Salama, 2007).

Arabic language and Islamic studies are major components of the curriculum. According to Shaw et al. (1995, p. 14), adherence to traditional teaching methods and materials is related to the desire amongst some citizens to "hold the line against western values and styles, and to ingrain Arab/Islamic identity". But, students, who have attended Arabic medium schools whether government or private, experience difficulty getting access to the more prestigious English language universities in the region. Emirati students know what they are up against: "Whether we like it or not English is

the dominant language in universities and in the workplace" (Al Najami, 2007a, p. 6). However, moves are currently afoot to reform education with the study of English being promoted, and time will tell how acceptable these reforms are to the citizens of the country (Salama, 2007). Amongst these new initiatives are experimental government schools called *Madares Al Ghad*, Schools of the Future, in which a greater emphasis is placed on English to better prepare students for the transition from high school to university and eventually eliminate the need for UAE students to take foundational courses at universities before being fully admitted to programs (Al Najami, 2007b).

2.4.2 Languages in Private Schools

In addition to government schools, there are the international schools, but it is not possible to think of these as offering comparable experiences since the differences in the degree to which they include English and address the ESL needs of students is vast. Private schools sometimes advertise their affiliation to a particular country or a specific language with the intention of appealing to a particular sector of society such as *The Australian English School*. In some private schools students may have been taught by trained teachers who are first language English speakers. These schools attract the children of Western expatriate families in large numbers and some schools even give priority to their nationals.

Other private schools, in an effort to appeal to a wider clientele, try to run a dual language program with emphasis on both Arabic and English. Experience with students from schools with this approach suggests that both languages can suffer. Although these students speak Arabic at home, they have had their secondary schooling and now their tertiary education in English medium institutions. A recent newspaper report included comments from Arabic teachers in private schools about the way the declining emphasis on Arabic is taking a toll on young Arabs' abilities to communicate fluently without peppering sentences with English (Al Najami, 2007b).

These non-native English speaking students may even fall into the category known as "Generation 1.5", a term usually reserved for immigrants to English speaking countries to describe students who have had experiences in English speaking education contexts over a number of years, but experiences which may have "neglected attention to linguistic forms and de-emphasized corrective feedback" leaving the learners with little awareness of their weaknesses in academic English (Frodeson & Holten, 2003, p. 150). Generation 1.5 students need to be encouraged to read more and develop

hypotheses making and testing skills that are essential in academia (Lay, Carro, Tien, Niemann, & Leong, 1999). But, how to provide for these 'generation 1.5' students in academic settings and address their needs is complex as they are not inexperienced learners.

2.5 Pedagogical Issues in Schools in the UAE

The students can have widely varying learning experiences attending government and private schools. The government schools offer a traditional approach to education, but so, too, do some of the private schools. The variation depends on the extent to which a private school attempts to offer an education based on the philosophy and practices of a particular country and what model of education that country adheres to.

2.5.1 Pedagogy in Government Schools

While many Emirati students attend private schools, others attend the government schools, possibly for financial reasons or because the parents want their children to experience a more traditional, single-sex education in Arabic. Most of these schools have retained a traditional knowledge transmission approach to teaching as a result of the initial influence of the Egyptian knowledge transmission model introduced when formal education was established and the reliance on Egyptian teachers (Findlow, 2001). Even today most of the teachers are Arabic speakers and come from countries such as Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Palestine and Pakistan as there are few Emirati teachers, although this is changing as education programs are developed in the tertiary institutions and Emiratis are attracted to the profession by the salary package offered specifically to attract them (Hokal & Shaw, 1999; Shaw et al., 1995).

Concern over the education system in the government schools is evident in the repeated references to reforms in the local press. A recent report in the *Gulf News* revealed that the UAE ranked 112 out of 128 in primary education and that the concentration on rote memorization was a target for reform (Shuey, 2007). Outmoded teaching methodologies mean students struggle writing in Arabic as well as having little access to English leaving them weak in their L1 and L2 (Khuwaileh & Al Shoumali, 2000).

According to Hokal and Shaw (1999, p. 173) there is a lack of quality in the education offered, classes tend to be large and due to the pressure of numbers as well as the normal distributions of troubled students found among city-dwellers, "full-time social workers . . . handle the problems of at-risk students". Behavior management in

the boys' schools in particular is an issue. It appears that rapid development and urbanization as well as family size and segregation of the sexes are likely contributors to the types of behavior problems encountered in the schools.

There are other identifiable issues with the government schools that limit the quality of the education received and the likelihood of reform from within. Education is free, but classes are large and schools have few resources and limited equipment. Recently, a newspaper report suggested that students become demoralized due to teacher apathy (Ali, 2007). Possibly because of an unrealistic expectation that there will be "plenty of well-paid jobs", families were also described as uninterested in whether or not their sons attend school and study (Ali, 2007, p. 8). The prevalence of cheating, which is so common "that it creates a free-for-all atmosphere" was also mentioned as a demoralizing factor in schools (Ali, 2007, p.8). Presumably, those students who have been through such a system, on entering a western-style university, will have difficulties with a classroom culture that is vastly different from their previous experience.

The administrations of schools are often caught up in a manipulation and negotiation process. Considerable negotiation over grades goes on in schools, and this has undoubtedly had an impact on student behavior and classroom practices. Powerful families in the UAE community have been known to put pressure on a school administration to alter grades, and inspectors have 'negotiated' grades to meet ministry expectations (Hokal & Shaw, 1999). This negotiation is still in evidence at the university where the research took place, although it does not lead to grade changes anymore. It is a practice that students appear to see as culturally appropriate and certainly at freshman level they are not ready to relinquish the practice.

However, change is coming to the UAE education scene and the area of exit grades is one place where reform from outside has taken place. One of the criteria for entrance to many tertiary education institutions is the student's high school percentage, so clearly manipulation of grades has made this an unreliable measure. In the academic year 2005/2006, a new exam was initiated called the Common Education Proficiency Assessment (CEPA). In May 2007, the CEPA exam was made mandatory for all government school leavers and to further ensure the reliability of the result, this test was administered in the high schools by the instructors from Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), not the teachers. A drop in percentage grades has resulted from the

introduction of the CPA requirement as it is calculated in overall grades and cannot be manipulated through negotiation (Al Najami, 2007a).

UAE Nationals who have attended government schools where English plays a minor role in the curriculum, currently struggle to gain entrance to the university courses because of the English requirement and often spend several years in intensive English programs. When faced with the demands of academic writing, they lament the lack of attention paid to English in their high school, although they are usually very communicative verbally. But reform is taking place impelled by a particularly innovative leader, His Highness Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and ruler of Dubai.

2.5.2 Pedagogy in Private Schools.

To cater for the vast numbers of expatriates in the UAE, there is a thriving business in private schools at all levels. It is not accurate to assume that the private schools all offer a dramatically more modern approach to education than the government schools. There are huge variations. Some private schools cater for particular nationalities and offer similar experiences to the government schools: strict segregation, Arabic medium, and a knowledge transmission approach. Others, such as the Indian schools, offer something more in line with modern teaching methodology and the chance to take GCSE exams. For example, one school, *Our Own English School,* is a moderately priced, privately owned school that draws its students from the Indian community as does *Cambridge English School*. These schools are usually less expensive than the Western private schools, but they are able to provide students with an education in English that sets them up for entrance to English language universities.

American schools such as *Dubai American Academy* (DAA) are usually very expensive, charging approximately Dhs 60,000 (NZ$21,000 depending on the exchange rates) per year at high school level, a cost comparable to full boarding fees at elite private schools in New Zealand. DAA attracts students of various nationalities but has a commitment to American students written into its policies and can restrict intake of other nationalities. Schools such as DAA also strive to employ teachers from the countries they purport to represent. However, the teachers in the private schools are from many parts of the world, Middle Eastern, Asian and Western countries, though of course, there is usually a strong representation of nationalities that fit with their particularly affiliation. Although the expensive schools actively work on retention of staff, this is not always the case and many have a high staff turnover. A GSU faculty

member explained that because she had four children to put through school and the university only funds two she had been forced to send the children to a "crappy school" that showed no interest in retaining good staff (anonymous, personal communication, May 5, 2007). Her dissatisfaction is representative of parents' feelings about some of these schools.

In respect of private schools, it must be remembered that all are basically businesses, some even being owned by individuals in conjunction with an Emirati partner, and the educational experiences offered vary considerably. The success of these schools in educational terms seems to depend on the management policies, and some segregated schools continue to have serious behavior issues, especially with the boys' sections, where the supervisors on each floor responsible for maintaining discipline carry canes. From personal experience I have seen that corporal punishment is often threatened and sometimes carried out. However, there is little real control and some students regularly disrupt classes making learning nearly impossible. The threat of punishment is more of a bizarre game between supervisors and students than a disciplinary technique. The continued lack of real discipline may partly be because there is a perception that a strict behavior code will mean the loss of some fee paying students.

Many private schools offer instruction up to grade 12 after which students can apply to enter university, but some private schools also suffer from the grade negotiation practice prevalent in government schools and outlined above. This means that the percentage grades students present as a measure of their academic achievement, if not from an accredited examining body such as International Baccalaureate, are questionable. Another issue that impacts students' readiness for university is that students attending schools which offer 'O' levels can attend university on completion. This means that some freshmen are very young and possibly not yet mature enough for the demands of academic study being only 16 or 17 years old as they opt to do the university freshman year rather than 'A' levels, which are perceived to be harder.

2.6 The Growth of Tertiary Education in the UAE

Unlike Lebanon, where tertiary education has been long established, the existence of tertiary education in the UAE is a relatively new concept dating back to the mid 1970s, with United Arab Emirates University established in 1976. It opened to students in the academic year 1977/78 with four colleges and has continued to grow. In 1988 the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), English medium institutions, opened

providing vocational training, largely based on a Canadian model, through an expanding number of colleges across the country. The UAE government is committed to providing tertiary education free of charge to its citizens. Other government sponsored and funded tertiary education institutions have continued to appear, but more recently there has been a growth in private institutions from countries such as the USA, Britain, and Australia. Presumably there is a ready market.

In 1997, Sharjah Emirate demonstrated a commitment to education with the establishment of an education zone known as University City, a park-like setting which now houses six separate educational institutions offering various types of education such as vocational training, American style university education, as well as one university that is a "traditional counterpart in order to ward off conservative objections to an overly-secular, coeducational and Western-learning system" (Findlow, 2001, p. 12). Dubai is following Sharjah and establishing large tracts of land designated for tertiary education with such grandiose names as Knowledge Village and Academic City.

2.6.1 The Setting of the Study: Gulf States University

In contrast to governmental tertiary institutions in the UAE, GSU, established along with the second crop of universities in 1997, adheres to an American model of education and charges fees. The university is one of the first among a growing number of English language universities that offer coeducational study to fee paying and scholarship students in the UAE.

In terms of its academic focus, GSU has three schools and one college: the School of Architecture and Design (SA&D), the School of Business and Management (SBM), the School of Engineering (SOE) and the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) (Appendix A). Four year undergraduate degrees are offered in addition to a small selection of Masters' Degrees. The university is known in the region to have a strong administration and to follow stringent policies against some of the problems that beset parts of the education system, as discussed above, and other academic institutions such as the use of *wasta* (influence) to by-pass entrance criteria or to negotiate grades.

2.6.1.1 The Student Body at GSU

Understanding the student body involves untangling various similar but distinct strands. Firstly, Emirati Nationals are coming to GSU in increasing numbers despite free tertiary education facilities available elsewhere. In addition, other students come from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds and many are Arabs speaking different

varieties of Arabic such as Gulf, Egyptian or Jordanian Arabic as their first language. According to Al-Khatib (2006, p. 2) there is no clear ethnic group that is Arab, rather language and the "acceptance of Arab-Islamic culture" make a person an Arab. Although there are many students who are Arab by this definition, there are also students who share aesthetic, cultural and religious understandings such as Farsi speaking Iranian students. A further strand is made up of the students, although not Emirati citizens, who have been living in the UAE for the whole of their lives, or nearly so, accompanying their parents who work here; these students represent many nationalities, for example Sudanese, Indian, Pakistani, British, Italian, Filipino.

2.6.1.2 A New Educational Experience

The jump from high school to tertiary education is quite a leap for many students anywhere in the world. Choice, independence, living in dormitories (strictly segregated), and for many of the students coming to GSU, co-educational classes for the first time since kindergarten are all challenges. GSU students enter what is for many a completely different culture of teaching and learning, delivered in a language they may have an uncertain grasp of. They may never have worked in groups with members of the opposite sex before or been taught by members of the opposite sex. Holliday's analogy of 'tissue rejection' helps to describe some students' responses to "a learning institution which is insufficiently embedded in local realities" and puts into perspective the difficulties experienced by many young students beginning their studies at GSU (as cited in Tudor, 2001, p. 44).

UAE Nationals who have attended government schools may find it especially difficult, initially. Tudor (2001, p. 20) claims that there is reason to consider that "sociocultural traditions of learning to which students have been exposed exert a real influence on how they perceive the teaching-learning process" and interact in the environment and with other participants including teachers, a concept which teachers could do well to consider when initiating students into the university learning environment. At GSU, students generally to a greater or lesser extent, but particularly young Emirati men, experience difficulties with often taken for granted aspects of university life such as attendance and time management, doing background reading to prepare for class, and completing tasks on time. Students who have received high grades for their writing at high school and manage to get the requisite TOEFL score may be disheartened to find that these past successes are no guarantee of easy success in academic courses.

Although as mentioned above, there are many nationalities represented at GSU, the majority of students are Arab. Some typical difficulties present in the writing of Arab ESL students can make their writing difficult to understand. One such problem is handwriting. According to Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic (1983) Arabic writing goes through the line, a feature that is sometimes seen when Arab students write English and can appear messy or careless to English teachers. Combined with an uncertain use of vowels due to there being little correspondence between Arabic and English in terms of vowels, this can make their writing appear less proficient than it is if the instructor is not aware of some of these specific problems. For example, Mohammad could be spelled *mhmd* in Arabic illustrating that capital letters as well as vowels pose a problem for students (Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983). Instructors new to the region are often heard complaining about the way students keep spelling their own names incorrectly. Clearly, there is ample space for misunderstandings.

2.7 Summary

Students at GSU have come from a variety of different countries and learning backgrounds and have varying degrees of expertise in English. However, they have all come to an English medium university. Clearly, assumptions can not be made about the homogeneity of the learners in the university. With such a diverse student body, the instructors in the writing department face a considerable challenge presenting a course that satisfies all stakeholders. The needs of freshman ESL students in terms of learning to become competent academic English writers are many. Student numbers mean that feedback is often largely given in written form, a time consuming and sometimes disheartening practice if little change is evident in students' work. It is inevitable that such a time consuming practice should become a focus of enquiry and feedback on L2 written work has become an area of considerable interest to many educators and researchers.

This chapter has outlined key issues to do with the growth of the UAE, the place of English in both commerce and education and the development of tertiary education with particular reference to Gulf States University. The next chapter will explore the literature relevant to the study.

CHAPTER THREE
THE LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter draws on both past and recent studies to examine the development of the process approach to writing and this leads to an exploration of the use of written feedback on written work. The feedback/revision cycle is looked at from the instructors' and students' points of view. The questions of whether to focus on content or form, whether to offer these together or separately and whether or not there is a logical order for offering feedback are considered. Concerns about the usability of both instructor and peer feedback are dealt with. In addition, institutional issues that impact what goes on in writing classes are examined.

3.1 Introduction: Written Feedback on L2 Students' Essays

One of the major tasks in L2 writing instruction is giving feedback to students on their written work. But uncertainty about the role of instructor feedback has researchers asking, "[s]hould teachers spend hours correcting their students' written productions" (Guenette, 2007, p. 40)? Perhaps in trying to answer this question it is necessary to consider why this feedback is given. For some instructors, the response to this question is that the purpose of feedback is to assist students to overcome weaknesses, or as Hyland and Hyland put it "to help students to develop into independent writers who are able to critique and improve their own writing" (2006a, p. 96). Despite doubts over the efficacy of feedback, a look at changes over the years reveals that written feedback practices have expanded and now generally also include "peer feedback, writing workshops, oral-conferences, or computer-delivered feedback" in addition to instructors' written comments (Hyland & Hyland, 2006a, p. 83). Feedback has relevance to both process oriented and genre methodologies of writing instruction as well as being used in both formative and summative evaluations of students' writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2006a). But questions still abound over feedback techniques and procedures, and unqualified answers are rare. Clearly, writing instruction is a dynamic field of teaching with an equally dynamic field of research critiquing practices and searching for ways to proceed.

3.2 The Process Approach to Writing

An examination of how the process approach entered and developed in L2 writing shows the contestation and change taking place in the field of writing instruction. As a result of considerable changes in conceptions of best practice in writing instruction, the place of feedback has become an area of considerable interest,

and there is much conjecture for instructors to consider when incorporating current techniques and enthusiasms in classroom practices. It is this uncertainty that makes feedback practices and procedures a field of research ripe for continued investigation.

3.2.1 Conceived in L1 - Eased into L2

The process approach to writing developed in L1 writing, which had previously concentrated on analyses of literature presented as compositions, emphasized the product and was devoid of instruction on planning, drafting and revising (Benson & Heidish, 1995; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). The 1960s appear to be the time that conceptions of writing changed although still product oriented (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005; Johns, 1995). Firstly, an awareness of rhetorical modes, such as cause and effect, altered the way writing was taught but tended to be rather formulaic and linear in an approach referred to variously as the 'traditional paradigm' and 'the product approach' (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005).

However, Hayes' and Flower's (1980) influential model of the writing process in L1 writing promoted planning, translating and reviewing. Early conceptions of the process of writing, while acknowledging a degree of recursive behavior in writing, have been seen to be largely linear in approach proceeding from prewriting to product (Lee, 2002; Zimmerman, 2000). Adaptations occurred and Flower and Hayes requested instructors to be more concerned with "putting an important part of creativity . . . in the hands of the working thinking writer" and so the business of gathering ideas and finding one's own voice became vital (1981, p. 386).

Over a thirty year period 1960-1990, different theorists explored and emphasized different aspects of process, largely centered on the writer's creative process. Two threads appear in this movement: expressivism, an early notion that conceived of writing as creative, and cognitivism which emphasized higher-order thinking and problem solving (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Johns, 1995). As the ownership of the writing was an issue, the potential for instructors to 'appropriate' the writer's text through too much intervention and commentary impacted feedback procedures. Students drafted and revised, and instructors made nervous attempts to encourage from the position of this constrained role. The spotlight was on planning and drafting, not grammar (Badger & White, 2000).

The process approach was not accepted uncritically as a fix-all for perceived deficits. As happens repeatedly in education, researchers began to ask what had gone missing in the shift to the writing process. According to Johns (1995), practitioners

began to ask where audience and purpose fitted, and others less popularly, due to the connection of this issue to the earlier 'traditional' conceptions of writing, asked what had happened to form.

3.2.2 L2 Writing Before the Process Approach

Writing in L2 was originally seen as a language practice exercise (Ferris, 2002). Controlled composition was an early approach to writing in L2 in which the behaviorist view of language learning (primarily speech) as habit formation dominated, followed by the "linear and [prescriptive] current-traditional rhetoric [which] discouraged creative thinking and writing (Silva, 1990, p. 15). The process approach, a paradigm shift of significance, freed L2 writing from the prescriptive approach, acknowledged the recursive nature of writing, the discovery of ideas and the importance of awareness of audience and purpose as revisions occurred (Coe, 1987; Ferris, 2002, 2003; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Hyland, 2004; Lee, 2002; Silva, 1990; Zamel, 1983). Perhaps most importantly, drafting created an opportunity for giving and acting on feedback rather than a one-shot summative response to writing and this was welcomed even though L1 research saw little evidence that feedback was taken note of (Ferris, 2002, 2003).

3.2.3 The Process Approach Reinterpreted in L2

Initially, as had happened in L1, the process approach seemed a logical new direction in L2 writing at a time of growth. In fact, rather than being applied unchanged, the process approach may well have trickled indirectly into ESL instruction undergoing changes on the way (Archibald & Jeffery, 2000; Benson & Heidish, 1995; Caudery, 1995). One such challenged perspective is the notion in L1 that the teacher is a non-interventionist facilitator as this would leave students with no preparation for academic discourse (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995). A rigid application of the process approach in L2 writing would position the instructor at quite a distance in terms of guidance or scaffolding, concepts which many L2 instructors see as pivotal to enhancing learners' chances of success. The idea of taking a supportive role is an acknowledgement that students writing in L2 have different and possibly more needs because of "their imperfect knowledge of the language code" (Caudery, 1995, p. 13). It appears a gradual rethinking of the needs of L2 writers and how they differ from those of L1 writers recommends giving instructors a more interactive role in the teaching of L2 writing especially when considering the language needs of the students.

Although the chance to write, revise, and edit one piece of writing initially had a lot of appeal, Wolff (2000) claims that since writing in L1 is different from L2, L2

instruction should develop its own methodology. It is possible that instructors do just that (Horowitz, 1986). Despite its representation in the literature as a homogenous method of instruction, there are as many different writing 'process approaches' as writing teachers and tasks (Coe, 1987; Horowitz, 1986; Ferris and Hedgecock, 2005).

The desire of instructors to meet the perceived needs of students meant the writing process became an adaptable instruction technique changing to fit the particular needs of L2 students. Concerns were expressed early on about the lack of attention to accuracy apparent in process pedagogy, which appeared not to address L2 students' needs, for example, for focused error correction and time to develop competence (Ferris, 2002). The needs of students in academic settings were a reason to go beyond a strict L1 interpretation and step into the realm considered 'appropriation' in order to assist students to be taken seriously in academic writing where the particular kinds of errors L2 writers make can lead to negative assessments of their writing (Ferris, 2002; Horowitz, 1986).

3.2.4 Process or Product - a Deceptively Simple Binary View

The textual product has been examined by researchers for at least a quarter of a century (Archibald & Jeffery, 2000). Hyland criticizes the neglect of form claiming that "the 'freedom' to write may encourage fluency, but it does not liberate [students] from the constraints of grammar and form in public contexts of writing" (2004, p. 8). This asks instructors to consider how the students intend to use their writing skills in the future. There are students whose needs go beyond developing confidence in written expression in the language classroom. For some the ability to write in such a way that their ideas will be taken seriously in the world of business or academia is a major goal (Horowitz, 1986). Where students must sit exams at the end of a period of teaching in which judgments of their product could lead to being denied access to work or higher education opportunities, the product should be undervalued, and indeed it is useful to remember that "process and product do not stand in opposition to one another" (Horowitz, 1986, p.142).

Ferris puts forward strong points in favor of considering the needs of L2 students in a process approach pointing out that second language acquisition is a slow and complex task and that these students are not just learning to gather ideas and put them together as they develop writing skills; therefore, their need for assistance is greater than that of L1 students and applies directly to finding and dealing with errors (2003). This view brings the realm of error feedback firmly into the spotlight.

Many students appear to want information, advice and an evaluation of their product even if teachers want to place emphasis on feedback and having learners respond to that feedback. The desire of L2 students for feedback could mean they are less likely to be inhibited by corrective feedback than L1 basic writers (Archibald & Jeffery, 2000), a reflection of the students' understanding of their needs. The importance of the process approach as a learning tool, and acknowledgement of the importance of the product, appear to have received acceptance over time (Goldstein, 2004; Raimes, 1998).

Researchers and instructors alike searching for some certainty in terms of instruction and feedback on L2 writing face many, possibly infinite, variables. Examining the different models of learning and instruction, the variables in students' previous experiences, current needs, attitudes and behaviors, amongst other factors, Cumming and Riazi (2000) make clear how complex this field is. As we flail about, sometimes quite clumsily, Silva's (1990) analysis of the way new methodologies are taken up, applauded, lose precedence and finally face rejection for the new model is a pertinent message recommending caution.

3.3 The Feedback Conundrum

A brief overview of the changes in approaches to writing and the way in which L1 procedures, such as the process approach, have been incorporated and adapted in L2 demonstrates the need for instructors to be cautiously open-minded about writing instruction methodologies. This also applies to the complex area of feedback on writing. New theories need to be and are being considered, but the uncertainty surrounding many aspects of feedback procedures suggests instructors ought to consider the options carefully before abandoning a technique that has worked in favor of the latest trend. After all, students do not necessarily get a chance to take the class again, so they deserve the best the instructor can offer. Doubts exist about almost every aspect of offering feedback, yet it seems that in the current realm of uncertainty, many instructors would rather offer something that is unproven than do nothing.

3.3.1 Motivational Factors Related to Instructor Feedback

Motivation is one ingredient in what makes one student a successful learner and another less so. There is no certainty that instructors can significantly influence students' global motivation to learn. But, it seems logical to expect that it is possible to influence motivation to perform certain tasks, for example revising and editing first drafts. According to Lewis and Hill, "student motivation will almost always be better if

they see the purpose of what they are doing" (1992, p. 11); therefore, part of the instructor's task should include demonstrating the purpose of giving, receiving and acting on feedback in an effort to maximize its relevance to students. Unfortunately, this positive spin put on enhancing motivation to perform a specific task is reduced when considering research that shows that in some learning situations writing is not significant to L2 students who will have little or no need to write outside the classroom (Ferris, 1999; Leki, 2003b); in this situation motivation to write and respond to feedback is unlikely to improve even if the benefits are demonstrated.

The issue here is the distinction in the purpose for which students are studying language. Students in high school language classes, especially when a foreign language course is compulsory, can be expected to have an entirely different attitude and level of motivation to students who are preparing to attend university and may have little interest in learning to write well just for the sake of it (Geunette, 2007). If students have no intrinsic or instrumental motivation to write, expecting them to take on board feedback and use it productively is unrealistic; therefore, classes of this kind are not ideal for research focused on feedback and improvement in writing, because without a commitment to improve their writing skills, it is unlikely that any feedback technique will lead to improvements (Geunette, 2007). Some research, however, stresses that a writing instructor's role is to inspire students to develop a commitment to improving their writing through conveying the importance of editing their work (Bates, Lane & Lange, 1993; Ferris, 1999).

Another area of concern is that feedback may be demotivating, and/or overwhelming (Leki, 1990a). Too much feedback may well be overwhelming, but how can an instructor tell what is too much? According to Reid (2002, p.90), who appears not to be a proponent of the heavy use of the 'red ink' technique, instructors could reduce frustration, and presumably the demotivating affect, by refraining from marking errors that "students could neither recognize nor correct" reminding instructors that some errors may be evidence of the point at which the learner has arrived in interlanguage development and instructors can use this as a guide when deciding on how much and what to respond to when giving feedback. However, it would be a mistake to construe from this that Reid presumes students can figure it all out themselves; instead, she uses examples of her own failure to notice key features of an unfamiliar genre, such as romantic fiction, to demonstrate that learners need to be shown explicitly what features to attend to, an idea similar to the concept of 'noticing'

found in other research to do with SLA and feedback and discussed below (Frodeson & Holten, 2003; Geunette, 2007; Lewis & Hill, 1992; Reid 2002).

Hyland and Hyland (2006a) point out that feedback itself can be used to motivate students. Wiltse (2002, p.127) concurs making the claim that "instructor feedback can inspire and motivate students to work harder on improving their writing". Presumably the expected reward is a good grade or even a feeling of accomplishment, but this is likely to be most influential when the students have specific goals related to writing and less influential in obligatory FL language classes.

Wiltse's ideas suggest that we should make an effort to tell writers what they did well, a behaviorist approach. But the way to do this is not always clear cut. With reference to studies on L2 students and feedback, a key issue is that praise needs to be credible and informative to be well received (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Yet other research suggests that students want and value encouragement and "even expressed some bitterness" if there was none (Ferris, 1995, p. 49; Ferris, 1997). But, in this contrary and complex field, evidence that some students see praise as empty words suggests that there is sound reason both for explaining 'why' you give certain feedback and taking the classroom temperature in relation to this issue (Hyland & Hyland, 2001).

Clearly, all students and all writing instruction contexts are different, and it is this difference that instructors need to consider. What may seem to be appropriation to one student may be exactly what another wants. When considering motivation in writing class, it seems many variables including the learning context and the students' needs are factors that may limit individual engagement with writing tasks, and instructors should consider these factors and tailor expectations accordingly to maximize the chances of having students engage with the task and make progress (Ferris, 1999).

3.3.2 Timing and Motivation to use Feedback

When instructors doubt that their labor over feedback produces results, this may be a fair assessment of the situation if that feedback is mistimed. It seems that extensive feedback on the end product is ignored as both L1 and L2 students make little or no use of it (Cohen 1987; Gascoigne, 2004; Guenette, 2007). Extensive comments on the final draft are not necessarily going to help L2 students to avoid similar errors on the next writing assignment; whereas, feedback aligned with the time and the opportunity to revise is more likely to be acted upon and stored for future application (Ferris, 1995; Leki, 1990a). Ferris (1995) concluded that students believe they pay more attention to

feedback on drafts, presumably because of having a chance to make immediate use of the advice.

A further timing issue related to motivational concerns and creative impulses raised by some research is that premature error feedback can have a negative impact on L2 students, focusing them on proofreading before they have finished creating (Ferris, 2002). This idea revisits the issue of appropriation and brings us to the content/form debate discussed below.

3.3.3 Content or Form: A False Dichotomy

An historical review of the development of commenting on writing and its purpose reveals a shift in focus from critical judge to the provision of help and advice; the target of the advice has also been subject to changes. It appears that the interest in offering feedback on content came with the process approach as earlier feedback had been more or less exclusively form focused as the instructor's role was to focus attention on the sentence level concerns of grammar, vocabulary and syntax (Ferris, 2002; Kepner, 1991). With the expansion in the perceived role of feedback, questions related to the appropriate order in which to give feedback have persisted and led to attempts to separate feedback into content, addressed first, and form, addressed later in the writing process.

Certainly, some research points to the benefits of feedback on content. Bates et al. (1993), claim that feedback on content will help students develop a sense of audience and improve the content of subsequent drafts. Straub (2000) in a case study analysis of his own responses to a student (presumably L1 but not specifically stated) puts forward seven principles for responding and demonstrates them in use. It is immediately clear that Straub favors the use of content feedback primarily, but this may be a feature of the student body he is working with. His comments are extensive, conversational and encouraging, but he has a maximum of 44 students and from the examples offered, students with a working command of English. These factors influence what is concentrated on as well as how much feedback there is time to give, which Straub makes a point of mentioning, indicating that he could not manage this extensive, conversational feedback if he had more students (Straub, 2000). Several of these principles in particular have considerable appeal in L2 writing classes, for example, the call for consideration of the stage the writing is at, the individual needs of the student, the use of praise and limiting of the scope of the response. However, L2 students may be more concerned with grammar correction than Straub appears to be.

The supposition behind the delivery of content feedback first was that students would concentrate on the comprehensive changes needed to the content before getting bogged down in the minutiae of form issues (Ferris, 2002). This idea continues to be tossed around, and like many aspects of feedback, is debatable. Some research indicates it is unwise to underestimate the resilience of learners and their willingness to take onboard the feedback instructors offer, both content and form (Ashwell, 2000; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 1997, 2002). For example, in a study looking at form and content feedback given in different ways to ESL college composition students, Fathman and Whalley suggest that "grammar and content feedback can be provided separately or at the same time without overburdening the student" (1990, p. 187). Bates et al. (1993) recommend that instructors respond to both form and content. And Ashwell found that the recommended order for content and form feedback was not superior to offering the two together or reversing the order in a study conducted with Japanese EFL students (2001).

Some researchers, however, doubt that attention to content is the focus of the feedback frequently given to students. Stern and Solomon (2006) in an extended replication of Connors and Lunsford's (1993) study examined 598 student papers looking at feedback given across the curriculum; no mention is made of whether or not the study included ESL students, but it was the instructor feedback that was the focus rather than the students. Stern and Solomon (2006) found, in contrast to the earlier study, a paucity of overall comments and comments on the quality of specific ideas. However, this study agreed with the earlier one in finding that many errors were missed even though most of comments made were form focused and stood in "sharp contrast to the dearth of comments on ideas presented within the paper" (Stern & Solomon, 2006, p. 36). Missing many errors they interpreted as being due to two reasons: positively as selective marking, or negatively as faculty overload. A major concern that comes through in relation to weaknesses in instructor feedback is that there is too little evidence of an effort being made to identify a pattern of weakness and provide solutions (Stern & Solomon, 2006; Straub, 2000).

In a study looking at over a hundred L2 learners, who had various L1s, Cohen (1987) found some interesting results related to the types of feedback generally offered and students' responses. Feedback was frequently a single word, symbols were used 20% of the time and the feedback largely dealt with grammar and mechanics and this became more apparent as students became more proficient (Cohen, 1987). Care is

needed when considering reported results such as these, as the purpose of the class where the research was conducted is important, as is knowing the number of students involved. Also, brief comments on rhetoric could be the result of the writing meeting the assignment criteria in a language class, and different results could emerge from an academic writing class where the goal is to become proficient in demanding areas where synthesizing, logic and persuasion are important.

Although there is evidence that content feedback is encouraging and assists writers to make useful changes, instructors may be encouraged to give more feedback on grammar because it leads to more changes than feedback on content, and because rewriting for whatever reasons seems to improve the content of an essay anyway (Ashwell, 2000; Fathman and Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 2003). Possibly instructors are discouraged when the impact of content feedback does not appear with the immediacy of feedback on grammar. To enhance the benefits of content feedback, Bates et al. (1993) recommend instructors: address the writers personally, give text-specific information and balance positive and negative comments.

How instructors tackle the business of giving written feedback on written work is at least in part determined by how they conceive of their role and what they expect the students to do in response to that feedback. Frequent reference can be found to the idea that error feedback is used as the most common instruction technique (Cohen, 1987; Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Frodeson, & Holten, 1990; Stern & Solomon, 2006). A further explanation for the amount of attention paid to error feedback is that writing instructors see themselves as language teachers (Gascoigne 2004; Goldstein, 2004). If instructors perceive themselves as language teachers first, content will take a secondary position to a focus on form in an effort to enhance accuracy in writing.

However, claims that instructors have a tendency to favor either content or form may be the result of the methodology of the study. Factors that could reveal the use of one type of feedback over another are such things as the number of drafts examined, the stage in the writing process and even the point in the semester; therefore, clearly described longitudinal studies that examine multiple drafts have the potential to be more revealing. In addition, case studies that draw on instructors' explanations and interpretations of their actual practices may offer insights.

There is no empirical evidence at the present time that suggests students will ignore content feedback simply because error feedback is provided with it (Ferris & Hedgecock, 2005). Evidently, conceiving of a content/form dichotomy has the potential

to divert instructors and researchers from the issue of how to make responses more usable. Focusing on content or form questions is seen by some as a distraction from considering a more pressing issue, the argument against error correction feedback.

3.4 Understanding and Dealing with Error Feedback

Error feedback commonly referred to as error correction is one major area of concern that has been battled over in the literature. Error feedback is prevalent in the response patterns of L2 writing instructors. However, there is considerable contention over the benefits and the delivery of error feedback.

3.4.1 Speaking Out Against Error Feedback

Doubts about the benefit of error feedback and even some hopes that it could be abandoned due to the time-consuming tedium of the practice for little apparent benefit, the hidden agenda of some research, have had an airing (Ferris, 1999; Frodeson & Holten, 2003). Looking back over major studies shows that feedback practices have come under fire periodically; researchers have explicitly and implicitly upbraided instructors for inconsistent and even arbitrary feedback (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris, 1999; Zamel, 1985). And Truscott (1996) suspects that many instructors know too little about grammar to teach it in any useful way.

In addition, the actual practice of error correction has been derided; according to Leki (1991, p. 204) "the literature abounds with proof of the futility of marking errors". Other research is ambivalent, such as Polio, Fleck and Lecker (1998) who suggest there is some benefit in error feedback but it is not significant as they found little difference in evidence of successful error correction between the students offered help and the control group. Cumming (2002, p. 132), while suspecting it is useful, points out that "we know so little" and he fears error corrections may hold back progress in some situations, a view supported by Truscott (1996, 2004) who would prefer to see students doing more writing rather than fiddling about with different grammar correction techniques.

Truscott (1996, 2004) has been at the forefront of arguments over the lack of efficacy of grammar correction, particularly because of his bold call for its abandonment, a position which, in his more recent critique of Chandler's (2003) findings in favor of feedback on errors, he still maintains claiming that error correction is time wasting and even harmful. One reason to be concerned about error correction is that it encourages avoidance behavior in students with the negative result that their writing becomes shorter and simpler (Hyland, 2002; Truscott, 2004). This also occurs

to Kubota working with lower intermediate language Japanese learners (2001). Truscott (2004) further suggests that gains reported by Chandler could have been as a result of other influences not referred to such as exposure to English or even practice with the language that could have occurred outside Chandler's classes. In addition, Truscott claims the reported gains should have been more dramatic, and this is presented as evidence that error correction harmed the students (2004).

Ultimately, having mounted a complex analysis that examines alternative and ostensibly logical interpretations, Truscott concludes that "the state of the evidence, especially regarding grammar errors, points to a clear conclusion: Correction is a bad idea" (2004, p. 342). While Ferris (1999) does not agree with Truscott's view of the matter, finding flaws in his earlier argument on the subject, she does accept that "the 'burden of proof' is on those who would argue *in favor* of error correction" (Ferris, 2004, p. 50) echoing Polio et al. who concluded that "grammar correction as practiced is ineffective" (1998, p. 60).

For instructors who know that their students expect corrections, conflicting findings are one problem, but the idea that grammar correction can do harm is a far more difficult claim to handle than the contentious idea that error correction does no good. Guenette sees the potential for the negative effect of inconclusive research on instructors when she explains that her experience led her to the conclusion that some students would benefit from corrective feedback and some would not, but indicates that the uncertainty surrounding the issue of error correction must act as a spur to further, tighter inquiry practices for researchers (2007). Reichelt, (2001) while not in Truscott's camp, criticizes researchers for the lack of control groups as this makes it difficult to make legitimate claims about any particular intervention as the source of improvement.

Despite this ambivalence and until there is more and comparable research, some L2 writing researchers, in opposition to Truscott, recommend that instructors continue to provide feedback since such a complex field is slow to produce certainties and particularly when other variables in the classroom influence the way feedback is used and responded to making the classroom experience successful or unsuccessful (Ferris, 1999; Geunette, 2007). The complexity of the issue of responding to L2 writing suggests that, as with other concepts about L2 writing instruction, instructors respond cautiously, even skeptically to trends and "avoid adopting a pedagogy just because it is having its 15 minutes of fame" (Silva, 2002, p. 82). Ferris, who has conducted

considerable research in this field, offers an interesting, if cautious, comment in the polemic over L2 error correction:

> It seems clear that the absence of any feedback or strategy training will ensure that many students never take seriously the need to improve their editing skills and that they will not have the knowledge or strategies to edit even when they do perceive its importance. (Ferris, 1999, p. 8)

More recent tentative support for corrective feedback indicates that although a synthesis of the literature on corrective feedback and acquisition of grammar in L2 carried out by Russell and Spada (2006) was not able to definitively pronounce on the efficacy of implicit or explicit feedback due to methodological differences, results do suggest that corrective feedback is more effective than no corrective feedback but much more carefully carried out and reported work is still to be done. Despite the concern about error correction, this is such a contentious issue that instructors who offer error feedback need not feel pressured to give up the practice as yet.

3.4.2 Selective Feedback Responses and Proficiency Levels

Helping students through the lengthy SLA process as they struggle to express themselves in writing may be best achieved if instructors take particular note of individual factors such as students' proficiency levels, frequency of errors, and what students' concerns are. Also, although students may be able to handle content and form feedback simultaneously, selectivity in response reduces the risk of overwhelming students; however, many instructors are aware that students want to be informed of all their errors, so there is tension surrounding this issue, too.

Frodeson and Holten claim that the question is "not whether we should 'teach' grammar but how best to do it" (2003, p. 157). Perhaps the scope of the feedback is the main concern as research points to the idea that it should cover content, style, mechanics and form but selectively, prioritizing errors and taking into consideration student, and assignment/course variables to avoid overwhelming students with criticisms and suggestions (Ferris, 1999, 2003, 2004; Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997; Stern & Solomon, 2006). Ferris (1999, 2003) recommends that care in selecting and prioritizing helps students to work with a few errors at a time and prevents instructor burnout. This concept of selectivity, which requires careful deliberation on the part of the instructor who needs to have an in-depth knowledge of each student and the errors they can handle (Reid, 2002; Stern & Solomon, 2006) seems like a lot to

manage, but experienced instructors probably do this automatically to some extent (Ferris et al., 1997).

Selectivity also requires judging which are the most damaging to the comprehensibility of the writing. The concept of *local* and *global* errors (global impede the message of the text and local do not) has been used to judge weaknesses in essays and focus response patterns (Bates et al., 1993; Ferris, 2002; Frodeson, & Holten, 2003). Selection based on comprehensibility transcends divisions such as content or form and instead deals with the capriciousness of defining which errors are global. While it is generally accepted that word choice problems are more confusing for readers than verb tense, the relative "globalness" of words in context makes a difference and a verb tense problem could threaten meaning when time/tense is significant in the passage (Ferris, 2002, p. 58). The concept of the 'globalness' of the problem, although fallible, supports the idea that writing instructors need to be selective when giving feedback, but a cautionary thought here is that commenting on 'serious' global errors before a writer is ready to understand and deal with these may be of no use (Ferris, 2002).

In an in-depth and richly reported look at individual student's responses to instructor feedback Hyland (1998) draws attention to the wide-ranging reactions due to hidden variables within students in the way they approach language learning, and anticipate and interpret instructor feedback. It seems that some students followed the instructor's advice without knowing why it was needed; for others, feedback led to extensive revision perhaps even beyond the original prompt; and sometimes feedback led to students deciding to use avoidance tactics (Ferris, 1997; Hyland, 1998; Truscott, 2004). These negative responses to feedback suggest support for a selective response that identifies major patterns of error, perhaps in one section of a paper only, and leaves students free to find these in other parts of their writing (Stern & Solomon, 2006). According to Cohen (1987) in some cases students simply avoid reading over the feedback if their reading level is low. It seems a student's level of proficiency makes a difference to what a student can and can not do and is under-researched (Guenette, 2007). Clearly, feedback that is meeting the needs of the student is required, and yet again it becomes clear that this can only come about when instructors have the opportunity to get to know the students.

Another way to see the importance of a selective approach to error correction based on proficiency levels and students' needs for differing amounts of help is to

consider Brown's (1994) taxonomy of stages of error recognition and correction: random, emergent, systematic and stabilization (cited in Ferris, 2002, p. 56). This taxonomy acts as a guide to instructors on how to respond, as a student at the presystematic level may not be able to recognize an error never mind correct it, whereas at later levels less help is required and simply indicating an error may be enough.

It appears that instructors are selective in offering feedback and base their selections on various factors. In a discourse analysis study that closely monitored one instructor's feedback over a term, Ferris et al. (1997) found that the instructor's feedback was offered differently to different students and reduced as the semester progressed; explanations for this reduction in feedback offered range from instructor burnout to decreased need as the students' competence developed. Then there is the evidence that feedback varied for different students between conversational and directive. Perhaps this is because the teacher is selective and knows what the student responds to, but ethnographic studies are needed to clarify teachers' perceptions of what they are doing as there could be other explanations (Ferris et al., 1997).

The onus is on individual instructors to get to know the students and respond in ways appropriate to gaps in the student's competence and limiting what is dealt with at one time, but this is a skill to be mastered. Also, this individualized attention implies low teacher-student ratios. Yet research related to teacher/student ratio suggests that they are often far from ideal and less may be achieved than is hoped for (Connors, & Lunsford, 1993).

3.4.3 The Use of Direct or Indirect Feedback

For those who err on the side of grammar feedback, not just how to select what to comment on, but how to deliver the feedback is also an issue. According to Ferris (2002, p. 22) "[t]he most important dichotomy discussed in the literature is between direct and indirect feedback". Direct feedback has the instructor making changes directly on the students' papers, while indirect feedback means the instructor uses a simple technique to draw attention to the existence of an error either through underlining or circling a section of a sentence, a whole sentence or even a paragraph. Indirect feedback may include a code that indicates the type of error involved but not always. The student is encouraged to work out a repair strategy, a technique which may work with complex errors where the instructor fears to intervene.

One popular approach has been, rather than direct feedback, indirect methods of feedback using codes (Bates et al., 1993). This is an idea examined by Ferris and Roberts (2001) in a study that distinguishes between direct feedback (make the change) and indirect feedback (circling, underlining, coded or uncoded) and included a control group who received no feedback. The findings indicate that feedback assists students to edit errors as both groups that received feedback outperformed the control group, but just indicating there is an error may be enough as the addition of coding made little difference (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Ferris and Roberts make a claim for uncoded feedback stating that:

> if teachers' primary goal in giving error feedback is to give students cues so that they can self-edit their papers mostly successfully, it may be adequate at least with some student populations to locate errors without labeling them by error type. (2001, p. 177)

Overall, it seems that less explicit feedback is just as effective in allowing students to self-edit their work, although a student's level of proficiency has an impact here and the level of support and intervention needed relates to the ESL student's competence. Concerns about the efficacy of indirect feedback in the long-term were expressed and continue to be considered (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ferris, 2006). Ferris suggests that although error feedback led to changes on subsequent drafts, this new competence, with the exception of verb feedback, did not necessarily transfer to essays later in the semester (2006). However, the type of feedback offered, direct or indirect, and the frequency of feedback on verbs in contrast to some other grammar feedback may be of significance and require further study.

There is at least one more reason to be cautious with direct or even coded feedback. Not all errors are the same and some require a different tack when responding and this leads to distinguishing errors as 'treatable and untreatable errors' (Ferris, 1999); responding to some 'untreatable' errors, because meaning is lost due to the "complicated and idiosyncratic" nature of the errors, means instructors run the risk of confusing students as a result of misreading the intended message (Ferris & Roberts, 2001, p. 178). In this case instructors can give students the opportunity to self-correct before offering direct feedback and/or seek clarification from the writer (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Goldstein, 2005). Ferris makes further claims in terms of 'treatable' and 'untreatable' errors, revealing that instructors use direct feedback more often with the

'untreatable' errors, and this is likely to be because instructors feel it was the only way to assist (2006).

In contrast to these instructors, according to Ferris (2002), direct feedback is not the way to assist L2 writers as they do better if they correct their own errors, but there is disagreement. Chandler (2003) in a similar study of different types of feedback to that of Ferris and Roberts (2001) but involving more competent students (freshmen with TOEFL 540-575), found in favor of 'correction' (direct feedback) or underlining but not of giving coded feedback either with or without underlining of the error. Unlike Ferris and Roberts (2001), Chandler (2003) reports a surprising increase in errors in the rewrites of students who had received descriptions of the error (codes) either with or without underlining and discusses the possibility that this confused students, an idea that resonates with Ferris (2003) although the explanation for the discrepancy may be related to previous learning experiences.

The differences in the degree to which students coped with different types of feedback procedures may be related to students' previous English instruction as some students may not have the background to cope with the jargon of language analysis. For example, students differ in their learning experiences, oral/experiential learning or book learning, and the way they have grasped the language (Ferris, 2002. 2003; Frodeson & Holten, 2003). The codes themselves, even when explanatory sheets are available, may be difficult to understand (Ferris, 1995; Ferris et al., 1997). Also, those who have accessed the language through oral experiences and practice may struggle with codes that require them to access a grammatical knowledge base they do not have despite being able communicators. This concept of different learning experiences adds more detail to the idea of student differences and the potential for difficulties.

Also, although in Chandler's (2003) study efforts were made to create a control group even if somewhat flawed, the issue of a control group needs to be taken into account when considering the results. The ethics of giving no feedback in the climate of uncertainty over its usefulness make it a difficult choice and Chandlers' response, to give the feedback but not have the students do anything with it until after the data collection phase, was an inspired attempt to approach the issue of creating a control group. Nonetheless, it was seized upon by Truscott (2004) as a weakness. Perhaps a better option would be for the instructor to copy the papers, respond to one set and hold on to those marked papers until the time came to work on them after the data had been collected. Even so, this would necessitate a short term study.

Direct feedback is far from unanimously agreed on, and reading the research base closely, it is clear that researchers sometimes try to eliminate it for the purposes of a particular study. But, Ferris and Roberts (2001) mention that, even when teachers had agreed not to use direct feedback, they did use it for 45% of marked errors. Looking at why instructors do this is an issue worth considering more closely. Perhaps giving in to the urge to give direct feedback reflects both the frustration that comes from there not being enough time to sit with students and untangle complex errors and the desire or obligation felt to give the student a way forward even if research and commonsense suggest that it is an imperfect way. Certainly, Ferris (2006) found that a feeling of obligation motivated one instructor to give direct feedback because students would be "unable to self-correct" without it even when this type of feedback was not part of the study (2006, p. 97). Further research into the frequency with which instructors use direct feedback, and both instructors' and students' feelings about it, could add a piece to the feedback puzzle.

So far there is no one clear answer to questions about what feedback works; however, the idea of students being engaged in the process of constructing and testing their own grammar suggests that the responsibility for progress is not entirely with the instructor. In relation to this, and echoing other researchers mentioned earlier who have been critical of instructors' responses to students' writing, Ferris and Roberts (2001) reported that although instructors sometimes coded errors incorrectly, students made correct revisions 77% of the time in response to indirect coded feedback, 75% with no code and even 62% of the time when the teacher's code was considered to be wrong. It seems the students applied "their own acquired competence to self-correct mistakes" (Ferris & Roberts, 2001, p. 165). In the process of learning a language, students are constructing their own grammar, faulty and all as it may be at times, and this construction may not be as open to influence as the practice of a liberal application of feedback assumes.

The complex nature of language acquisition along with individual differences and preferences suggests that it is unlikely that one universal error treatment practice will work for all (Ferris, 1999, 2003; Hyland, 1998). Also, instructors and researchers need to remember that measurable changes in writing quality are slow to appear, an idea, which again suggests the need for longitudinal studies (Chandler, 2003; Ferris & Roberts, 2001).

3.4.4 Reformulation, Error Correction and 'Noticing'

Writing instructors have experimented with various alternative ways of bringing errors to the attention of students and demonstrating good writing. One technique to do with teachers' comments has been using 'reformulation' (Myers, 1997; Sachs & Polio, 2007). This technique comes with a warning about the possibility of becoming 'composition slaves' (Hairston, 1986, as cited in Myers, 1997, p, 5). Reformulation is having a native speaker (NS) rework the L2 composition bringing it closer to NS level but respecting the original (Thornbury, 1997 cited in Sachs & Polio, 2007). Although dallying at the edge of appropriation, Myers suggests 'reformulation' introduces L2 writers to gaps in their knowledge that are not an issue for native speakers (1997). The technique goes beyond direct feedback and in Myers' (1997) conception has students rewrite the essay incorporating the changes and publishing. Myers (1997) reports student satisfaction with this method although the methodology used is not fully reported making it difficult to really assess the results. However, this study adds to the growing body of evidence that L2 students, on the whole, expect to receive a lot of advice and assistance from their teachers.

A recent investigation involving two slightly different approaches and using ESL learners over a short-term, investigated the use of both reformulation and error correction (direct feedback) with particular attention paid to the role of 'noticing'(Sachs & Polio, 2007). The concept of having students attend to language features, referred to as 'noticing', has been considered important in SLA (Sachs & Polio, 2007; Schmidt, 1990). Although incidental learning is possible, particularly for children, without drawing attention to particular features, students may simply not notice, even reading right on past errors in their own work and also items that have been the target of a lesson (Schmidt, 1990). It appears that instructors need to help students to 'notice' the features of current relevance in a lesson for there to be a positive outcome and use explicit instruction to take 'noticing' from awareness to understanding (Lewis & Hill, 1992; Radwan, 2005). The noticing theory, which relates closely to theories about how the brain processes information, taking it from short-term sensory storage to long-term memory through attending to the information and rehearsing it, seems intuitively to make sense. The quality of noticing, substantive or perfunctory, was considered as part of a study by Qi and Lapkin, but the data did not confirm it was significant as it was difficult to capture (2001).

Despite not confirming one theory, other ideas have been explored more profitably. In their research Sachs and Polio (2007) had students write a descriptive essay, then they coded it for error type; they then provided feedback in the form of error correction or reformulation. The participants were given 15 minutes to examine the original and the corrected or reformulated writing before it was removed; then several days later, students attempted to correct the originals. The results indicate that "error correction led to more accurate revisions than reformulations did", but the control group made the least number of changes (Sachs & Polio, 2007, p. 86). Harking back to the earlier reference to rehearsal and long-term memory, Sachs and Polio (2007) consider that it may have a role in feedback and language acquisition in relation to the salience of the feedback and the time to process it, but further than this the data did not allow them to go.

Acknowledging issues related to the methodology which need to be considered, they point out that: error corrections were in purple ink, and located the errors specifically, whereas in the reformulations the error corrections were embedded in the text; memorization was a related factor though one they tried to reduce, in part two of the study, by adding more days between reviewing and rewriting (Sachs & Polio, 2007). Although no major claims can be made in relation to distinguishing between error correction and reformulation because of the variables and also the short-term element, it appears that there may be issues related to 'noticing' and error correction that instructors can exploit, such as novel colors to draw attention to errors. Also, this recent research does lend itself to further investigation such as a replication study using black pen for error correction, or using other feedback combinations such as simply underlining.

So, having looked at some prevalent error correction techniques, is there a glimmer of advice on how to proceed? For one thing, feedback offered prior to working on a subsequent draft means there is an incentive to make changes that is missing when it is on the final draft. Feedback on form is, as mentioned, subject to many variables and, although there are proponents of direct form feedback, indirect feedback even without codes appears to have a lot going for it. Giving instructors and students confidence in using this approach may take time (Ferris, 2006). Most research suggests continuing to give form feedback. However, it seems that few students are willing to rewrite unless obliged to, so the use of the process approach encourages incorporating feedback and making revisions. Most importantly and possibly most demandingly,

instructors need to consider individual student's preferences and readiness for feedback.

3.5 Understanding and Dealing with Content Feedback

Considering that much feedback may not be responded to by students, instructors are often plagued by the concern that students do not understand their written comments or cannot make use of them. It seems that instructors struggle to provide feedback that leads to students making productive changes on content, but why this is, and how to offer more useful help are issues mired in doubts and contradictions - although it does seem that sometimes even something as simple as the handwriting can reduce the usability of feedback and increase frustration in students (Ferris et al., 1997; Ferris & Hedgecock, 2005). Because of the complexity of the variables involved, feedback on writing needs to be handled carefully if it is to be received and acted upon as it is often misunderstood or not understood at all for difficult to pinpoint reasons particular to the context, the feedback focus and the perceptions of the participants (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Leki, 1990a).

3.5.1 Sources of Confusion: Hedges, Questions and Clarity Issues

Summary comments and other comments on content can cover a range of possibilities including offering praise and general recommendations for improvement, and it is the latter that are subject to hedging, a practice that is seen to have the potential to confuse students. However, hedging on the part of instructors is a result of the possibility that unfavorable responses can create apprehension in students, a concern for many instructors (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996).The tendency among instructors to use hedges to mitigate the potential negative impact of what they are saying because they are aware of power relations in the classroom and wary of being too directive or critical, can blur the instructors' intention if the student does not pick up on them (Ferris et al., 1997; Hyland, K. 2000; Hyland & Hyland, 2001).

The use of hedges is tied in with instructor anxiety over how best to assist without going too far, so concerns about appropriation may be implicit in the use of hedges. Questions about content, a form of hedge, are used in academic writing contexts for many reasons such as avoiding appropriation and showing respect for the students' ideas while guiding them as well, but they can confuse students and may be a limiting variable in relation to students' responses (Bates' et al., 1993; Ferris, 1995; Ferris et al., 1997; Goldstein, 2004, Hyland, K., 2000). Also, students do not always perceive the instructor's intention when advice or guidance is couched as a question

and may just answer it in their minds and move on. According to Conrad and Goldstein (1999) 'how and why' questions used to convey the instructor's disagreement with a student's view appeared to be unsuccessful in conveying the message, which suggests that a certain amount of directness is needed if it is important to get the message across.

3.5.2 Criticism and Praise

This blurring of intentions becomes particularly interesting looking at the use of praise, criticism and suggestions in combinations and in ways that mitigate the force of a negative response. These mitigating comments include paired act patterns (praise and criticism), hedges (should), personal attribution (implying others may disagree), and questions (expressing doubts) (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Mitigating comments are used to avoid damaging the "fragile intimacy of the teacher-student relationship" while offering assistance (Hyland & Hyland, 2001, p.192). But these combinations and subtle criticisms may have the effect of hiding the implicit intent, being too subtle, even invisible to L2 readers. The need for caution in terms of the use of hedges is not just for low English proficiency learners (Hyland & Hyland, 2001).

As with many ideas in L2 research there is disagreement over the negative aspects of the use of hedges, and one idea is that appropriation can be avoided by the use of hedges (Ferris, 2003). Also, Ferris (1997, p. 330) claims that "the presence or absence of hedges had little effect on the degree to which changes were made". Hyland and Hyland refer to Ferris's 1997 claim pointing out that pairing hedges with easily understood, usable feedback may be what limited any possible negative impact from hedges (2001). This indicates that the quality of the feedback is important.

The mitigating effect created by combining praise and criticism is one use, but other research on praise reveals contradictions in students' responses. One strand of enquiry suggests that students want and value encouragement particularly on content and "even expressed some bitterness" if there was none (Ferris, 1995, p. 49; Ferris, 1997). Another view, one that resonates with commonsense, recommends the use of responses that show instructors value the ideas and purposes in students' writing (Cumming, 2002). This is similar to the finding that students respond well to and remember positive comments on content (Ferris, 1995). And a study with quite a different group, L1 grade four students therefore not directly generalizable to L2 students, showed little difference in quality of writing, but the praise group wrote more and appeared more favorably disposed to writing (Taylor & Hoedt, 1996).

All seems well with praise so far; however, praise can induce mixed reactions due to the different ways it is perceived by students. Writing in L2 is challenging and it appears that most students are aware of their weaknesses to some extent, so depending on a student's culture and classroom expectations, praise can seem inappropriate or even false to them, causing confusion rather than acting as encouragement as instructors may expect (Cumming & Riaza, 2000; Ferris et al., 1997; Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Students who know their writing is flawed, and whose cultural and learning practices have given them scant experience with praise as a technique to encourage or honor effort, can find it hard to accept praise or feel confused about praise when their grades are low. Confusion linked with cultural misunderstanding can lead to anger and frustration in students.

3.5.3 Preparation and Strategies for Dealing with Feedback on Content

One explanation for feedback on content being generally seen as less likely to be attended to and seldom leading to substantial changes is because of the need to develop a strategy to gather and make use of additional content in response to a question, a task that is beyond some learners (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Leki, 2006). Providing specific written feedback on strategies seems excessively difficult and likely to lead to "overly long and complicated feedback" if the instructor wishes to go further than to simply say *add an example* (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999, p. 172). One way to minimize this complex feedback could be through classroom preparation for feedback. Higgins, Harley & Skelton (2001) point out that students need to be involved in considerable discussion about what is expected of them before they write, a process of 'feeding forward' which helps them to understand assessment criteria. This meshes with ideas from the literature that feedback should relate to specific, taught material directly related to the essay as it is not possible to respond to everything.

Similarly, rather than lengthy, complex, written feedback, Conrad and Goldstein (1999) suggest both conducting conferences with individuals and also using classroom time to teach students how to handle revision combined with practice opportunities. One supporter of conferences points out that instructors "can give more feedback per minute orally than if [they] had to write it all out" (Fassler, 1978, p. 188). And, as long as it is handled sensitively with the instructor being well prepared so as to be able to engage with the student and the writing, a conference can be a positive experience, which reveals a lot to the student (Fassler, 1978).

As with feedback on grammar, there is controversy and some research suggests that feedback should offer strategies for change. In fact, in a recent piece of research, Goldstein (2004) claims that students benefit from feedback that shows where they have achieved or failed to achieve what was intended and offers strategies. This suggests more written feedback, rather than less but feedback of a particular kind, feedback that shows a way forward, and how to achieve a quality result (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & William, 2004; Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Strategy training in class linking content feedback to clearly demonstrated approaches to handling it may be one productive approach.

3.5.4 The Quality, Clarity and Usability of Feedback

It seems that not all feedback is equal (Gascoigne, 2004). The possibility of learners not understanding the feedback, or understanding it but not knowing how to act on it, is raised by Cohen and Cavalcanti in a study carried out in Brazil in three different EFL learning situations (1990). It is likely that ESL students also have the same reactions to feedback from time to time. Although related to inexperience and lack of strategies on the part of ESL writers, not knowing what to do in response to feedback could also be because of generic comments from instructors, comments that are so vague they could fit any essay, therefore do not relate to individual student's writing and offer little specific guidance on how to revise (Ferris et al., 1997, Ferris & Hedgecock, 2005).

Cohen (1987), in a study that gathered students' reports on their reactions to teachers' written comments, found that 17% did not understand teachers' comments because of such things as "vague statements about clarity . . . use of arrows without explanation, allusion to transitions without an example" (p. 65). Considering the possibility that some students have a limited repertoire of strategies for processing teacher feedback, this is a problem that may be addressed through giving text-specific feedback that prompts action, although it is important to remember that general comments do have uses, too, such as opening a dialogue between instructors and students (Cohen, 1987; Ferris, 1997). Goldstein claims that instructor response needs "to be text-specific, understandable . . . and it needs to provide strategies for revision where appropriate" (2005). However, the more specific the feedback and the fuller the strategy advice given to individuals, the more time this will take the instructor. One factor not mentioned so far is that students, too, face time constraints and make

decisions based on these (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999). Periodically, these decisions can lead to less revision being carried out than would be considered ideal.

In brief, many factors limit the accessibility and usability of feedback as mentioned above, but instructors should assess whether or not their feedback is suitable for particular students (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999) and what instructional experiences students have had in terms of writing (Ferris, 2003). Although general comments are a fast way for instructors to refer to elements of writing, their lack of usefulness makes them appear to be only justifiable as the last resort of the over-burdened. It often appears that when the feedback is not responded to instructors assume that the burden of responsibility rests with the student, but instructors, too, have a role to play in assessing the clarity of their regular feedback patterns (Kroll, 1990).

Two approaches identified above, preparation for feedback and offering strategies for revision through the feedback have the same aim, but one emphasizes in-class preparation for feedback and the other the use of extensive feedback; however, this need not be so if the strategies are demonstrated in class, thus reaching a wider audience than writing potentially convoluted comments on individual essays. Also, although students do have difficulties with instructor feedback, it is worth remembering that SLA is a slow process. Students may not be able to make instant and obvious changes based on instructor feedback, but that does not mean the feedback is not useful in some way. Until we have more evidence to the contrary, feedback is on the list of tools for writing instructors.

3.6 Peer Feedback

The role of peer feedback is yet one more controversial area in L2 writing. According to Ferris (1990) the increased use of peer feedback came out of despondence over an apparent lack of use of instructor feedback by students reported in research in the 1980s. Peer feedback offered a way forward at a dark point (Zhang, 1995).

3.6.1 Doubts about the Use of Peer Feedback

Although widely used in both L1 and L2 writing classes, peer feedback is not accepted by all. In fact, it is not necessarily seen as useful in comparison to instructor feedback by both instructors and students (Pianko & Radzif, 2001; Silva, 2002; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006). According to Nilson, peer feedback is uneven, and there are "many errors of omission – a failure to point out problems" (Nilson, 2003, p.39). From an instructor's point of view, a dubious image of peer feedback is one that suggests that it interferes with the rightful order of feedback in the process approach to writing –

content first, then errors – and focuses students on the product interfering with the creative process (Nelson & Carson, 1998); however, for one thing peer feedback does not need to be grammar focused and may be more beneficial if it is not (Leki, 1990b). Secondly, more recently, doubt has been cast on this prescribed feedback order (Ahswell, 2001).

Students have also been found to be detractors on the subject of peer feedback. Peer feedback is assumed by some students to be superficial, focused on trivial errors, inconsistent and inaccurate, and this makes students hesitant to act on it (Leki, 1990b; Nilson, 2003; Yang et al., 2006). Also, students themselves doubt the competence of other students to give useful feedback in a non-threatening way (Ferris, 1990). Zhang (1995) reports that ESL students in two colleges in the USA strongly preferred teacher feedback to peer feedback; however, the questions offered did not give the option of having peer feedback along with instructor feedback, which must be seen as a flaw.

Students who doubt the usefulness of peer feedback and their own competence to make a serious attempt at offering advice could be one explanation for the low quality of peer feedback. If you believe you cannot do something well, then why make an effort. In fact, failure following the expenditure of little effort is less damaging to a learner's self-esteem (Stipek, 1993). So poor peer feedback, at least some of the time, may represent avoidance of a task assessed as beyond the student's competence level.

The peer feedback sheet may be a culprit in reducing the efficacy of the task. According to F. Hyland (2000), using data from a study of ESL students preparing for university study, the use of peer review sheets is an area where caution is called for as there is some evidence this reduces student autonomy and makes the process dull. Restricting students to following a course of written revision dictated by the instructor resulted in some students simply writing 'yes' in the appropriate place and offering no clearly useable feedback (Hyland, F., 2000), which possibly takes us back to avoidance behavior. Some research suggests more productive exchanges taking place between students in collaborative situations and writing workshops where informal interaction took place (Hyland, F., 2000; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992; Nelson & Murphy, 1993). One other problem identified was that students tended to focus on surface errors rather than grappling with meaning related issues (Leki, 1990b; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992). If a peer feedback sheet is to be used, perhaps it could be made useful by drawing attention to issues with the text other than sentence-skill errors.

3.6.2 Seeing the Good in Peer Feedback

From another point of view, peer feedback gives students autonomy (Hyland, F., 2000). Students are more likely to discuss and contest advice coming from peers than from the instructor, particularly in certain cultures. Also, students can benefit from reading the work of others, interacting with others, becoming aware of weaknesses in other students' writing, sharing difficulties, and through this interaction taking ownership of a text and possibly boosting participants' confidence as writers, all of which means that peer collaboration has the potential to benefit students in ways that instructor feedback cannot (Hyland & Hyland, 2006a; Leki, 1990b; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang et al., 2006). Jacobs, Curtis, Braine and Huang (1998) in a study that sought the perceptions of ESL university students in Hong Kong, concluded that peer feedback is valued as one type of feedback; however, instructor feedback was still wanted, an idea shared by other researchers (Ferris, 1990: Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang, et al., 2006).

Possibly one of the reasons students benefit from peer editing, and perhaps this is best achieved in informal settings, is that they get to discuss and critique the writing in a way they may not be able to with the teacher. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the power relations between teacher and student mean that many students feel reluctant to challenge the teacher's comments (Black et al., 2004). Secondly, when students are discussing each others' writing together, they are using a level of language, possibly their L1, which is readily accessible to them, a language that teachers may not always use. An example of this is the student who sought assistance from her more proficient husband and defended the practice of having him explain errors to her in the face of instructor disapproval (Hyland, F., 2000). Collaboration with others who can take the learner that next step, a Vygotskian concept, has merit, but caution is called for when students have other more proficient students simply do the editing for them without potentially educative discussion and negotiation, and this may have been what concerned the instructor in F. Hyland's study (2000). Recent research suggests students can benefit from learning how to give peer feedback, and in other feedback situations, this may also help to ensure that collaboration does not become taking over (Min, 2006; Jacobs et al., 1998, Yang et al., 2006).

Training students to give peer feedback seems to be essential to maximize its use and improve students' attitudes to the procedure (Ferris & Hedgecock, 2005; Leki, 1990b; McGroarty & Zhu, 1997; Min, 2006). The issue here seems to be finding a way to get peers to respond to meaning in the text drawing the writer's attention to

weaknesses such as gaps in explanations that the writer may miss because of the additional knowledge they have about the material that other readers are not party to (Berg, 1999; Pianko & Radzif, 2001). Berg (1999) sees this distance that peers bring to the reading of a text as the best argument for peer response training as opposed to simple training in revision per se. Findings from a study by Yang et al. where training in the form of modeling was used, indicate that students make more accurate changes when they use peer feedback than instructor feedback. Could this be because peer feedback is more comprehensible being within the students 'zone of proximal development', or, in terms of sentence-skill errors, could it be that the peer simply provided the correct form while the instructor provided only hints? These are questions for further exploration.

A recent study by Min (2006) used training as a way to improve peer feedback and the level of use of the feedback. According to Min (2006), in addition to modeling, the training involved giving a grade for the actual peer feedback and scheduling an individual conference to discuss this as a follow-up. Min reports that eventually 90% of the revisions on students' essays were related to peer feedback (2006, p. 133). The conference element of the training program takes the training for peer reviewing into the realm of individual instruction and that may have been the crucial element, but the addition of the grade also needs to be considered. It could work to spur some students to take the task seriously, but it could reduce the confidence of others.

With or without training in peer review, there are variations in the way students approach the task, but students who concentrated on the task tended to put more time into it and approached it more seriously (McGroarty & Zhu, 1997). This is interesting as it indicates that even with training some students find it difficult to settle to the task. It would be of interest to find out why this is in the hope of finding a way to engage more students. So while not an uncomplicated good, peer feedback with training of some sort has benefits if the students believe in it and have the confidence to use it.

3.7 Feedback: Students' Needs, Wants and Utilization Techniques

Although according to Ferris (2002) there is no compelling evidence in the literature for giving feedback, still the possibility exists that it is the key to long-term advances in students' writing. As different questions related to the way writing is taught and responded to by instructors have been explored, there has been occasional reference to what students believe they need, an area worth exploring, particularly with the recent recognition that nowadays many ESL students have far greater needs than

the students in the past who studied EFL in language classes as part of the curriculum or as a hobby. Apparently, there is little doubt in the minds of students that it helps them to make progress as students' responses to questions about feedback indicate that feedback is what students want on all aspects of their writing and is read carefully with the intention of acting upon it (Ferris, 1990, Leki, 2006).

3.7.1 Generation 1.5 Needs

Although some research indicates that ESL students in academic contexts want form-focused feedback (Ferris 1995; Hedgecock & Leftkowitz, 1996; Hyland, F., 2003; Leki, 1991), not all ESL students have the same needs. Frodeson and Holten refer to students such as 'generation 1.5' students who have had lengthy experiences in English speaking education contexts, maybe K-12, but who still struggle with some formal aspects of the language because those experiences have had little explanation of linguistics or corrective feedback leaving the learners with little awareness of their weaknesses in academic English (2003). They may think of themselves as bilingual but have little literacy in their L1 and a faulty command of written English, and more importantly, not get what they need from ESL classes due to their unusual needs (Harklau, Losey & Seigal, 1999; Lay, et al., 1999). The difficulty of addressing the needs of these students has been seldom explored until recently.

Although, the concept of generation 1.5 students is used to identify students in the US, students in countries like the UAE, where English is the language of business and commercial transactions but not the language of the home, may have similar problems to 'generation 1.5' students. And there is a cultural element to this too, considering that universal literacy in some parts of the Arab world is a relatively new development. In terms of meeting the academic needs of L2 students, Johns (2002) warns instructors against turning writing classes into grammar practice sessions recognizing that there is a lot more to academic writing practices than feedback on grammar. This is especially so for generation 1.5 students. These students may need assistance to develop familiarity with critical literacy, to enhance their confidence in questioning, evaluating and discussing texts, tasks that go far beyond reading and understanding the words.

3.7.2 Writing for Different Academic Discourse Communities

Presumably, those students who have instrumental goals, such as a desire to gain access to an English-medium university, also have ideas about what skills they need to attain that goal. One of the issues for students with academic goals is how their

writing will be perceived by particular academic discourse communities. Although native English speakers make mistakes, they are different mistakes from those of L2 students. According to Frodeson and Holten, certain types of errors, such as those made by L2 students, 'stigmatize' writers and this can lead to their writing being responded to at a surface level and rejected for sentence-level errors when in fact the writing demonstrates a considerable grasp of content if the reader delves in far enough (2003, p. 152). For this reason, academic students may have a strong desire to overcome those persistent sentence-level errors that they know exist in their writing but which they struggle to overcome.

In a survey of undergraduate students about their previous experiences in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes, Leki and Carson (1994) found conflicting evidence indicating that although ESL university students were still concerned about sentence-level errors, only 16% of them reported that this was a concern of the content teachers. Further analysis of the data suggested that the students were really concerned with vocabulary and the need to be quicker at using language to cut down on the time studying in English took, a need that probably became readily apparent when the demands of a full university load descended on students (Leki & Carson, 1994). This research illustrates that getting the full story, uncovering the real concerns of students is not easy. Data from questionnaires sometimes needs to be viewed through a lens that takes account of interview data as well if the full picture is to come clear.

Another issue with feedback related to the academic goals of some ESL students centers on what students are actually taught in academic writing classes and the use of the process approach. Atkinson and Ramanathan, dissenting voices in relation to exposure to "an extreme process-writing approach", suggest that this leaves students unprepared for academic writing as these students have "no recognizable discourse structure to speak of" (1995, p. 564). According to Atkinson and Ramanathan (1995, p. 560) there is a mismatch between what is taught in courses purportedly preparing L2 students for writing academic essays and what is actually expected in university culture where "[the five paragraph deductive essay] acts almost as a symbol of bad student writing – formulaic, mechanical, stilted, predictable and is crippling to the very thought that the program seeks to encourage". The potential for academic writing classes failing to prepare students for the demands of writing for other departments, because they are not learning how to write for different audiences and

genres, is a concern and one which needs to be addressed revealing to students what different departments value (Johns, 2002; Reid, 1994).

The possibility that not only across the curriculum, but also within writing departments, there is little general agreement on what makes good writing complicates the business of revealing what different departments value. Leki (1995) in a study that asked ESL students, writing instructors (both ESL and non-ESL), and content instructors to rank four different ESL students' essays in an effort to find criteria valued by students and teachers, found that there was little agreement between any of the four different groups on what makes a good essay. There were even different implicit understandings of terms such as appropriate organization or strong vocabulary (Leki, 1995). Context seemed to be the factor which made the difference and leads Leki (1995, p. 41) to claim that *good* writing, "is shown to mean writing that meets particular requirements set for a particular readership at a particular time and place". This of course has implications for the way we teach and the way we give feedback and further supports the need to introduce students to the idea that different tasks and discourse communities have to be handled in a particular way as there is no absolute definition of *good* writing.

The complexity of the task ahead of L2 writers suggests that they will need some assistance with written language throughout their academic careers as no ESL class is going to be able to help them to overcome all their difficulties (Wolfe-Quintero & Segade, 1999). Wolfe-Quintero and Segade emphasize the important distinction between difficulties with language use and ability to understand a subject (1999). This distinction needs to be clarified for those instructors in various disciplines who judge students on their writing ability alone.

Meeting the needs of students in academic writing classes comes into focus as a complex task in which grammar, content and familiarity with multiple discourse communities and genres have to be addressed; yet the five paragraph deductive essay is a frequent model in many textbooks available for L2 freshmen writing students and often the only model supplied.

3.7.3 Feedback on Feedback

The literature suggests instructors proceed cautiously with feedback, but it is also worth finding out what students think. Ferris's reference to an instructor who for well articulated reasons gave no feedback, with the result that students became both frustrated and anxious, leads her to suggest that there is a need to listen to students

(Ferris 2002; Leki, 1991). The idea that teachers can become more effective in the classroom if they listen and respond to students' perceptions suggests a useful line of inquiry (Bateman & Roberts, 1995; Panasuk & LeBaron, 1999, Silva, 2002). At university level these maturing young people have ideas about teaching and learning and these can guide us as teachers. By using brief questionnaires instructors can see how students are finding the learning experience in that class and react accordingly. This may be either through discussion and further explanation or by adjusting classroom or feedback techniques.

While it may be true that students do not always take questionnaires seriously, their responses can be enhanced if they understand that they have the power to alter the learning experience for themselves and future students through their responses. Also, familiarity with the process of being asked for their opinion may lead to contempt if the students see no changes or hear nothing back from the teacher following a concerted effort to convey their points. But if there truly is a dialogue set up between the teacher and the student, this could be a very productive line of investigation. Echoing this idea, Goldstein (2004, p. 71), who has used questionnaires to assess students' preferences, suggests that when there is a mismatch between students' and teachers' preferences accommodation on the part of teachers could mean "students will be receptive to our feedback". And, it is likely that students who feel listened to will be more content in the classroom and therefore more receptive.

When asked what they want, generally speaking, students want feedback on all aspects of writing, have a strong desire for grammar feedback and want feedback to be expressed clearly and concretely (Ferris, 1995; Ferris and Roberts, 2001; Straub, 2000; Leki, 1991). As this indicates, not just any feedback is wanted as a considerable body of research shows that students were irritated by 'implicit' suggestions, and the more explicit the feedback the happier they were (Ferris, 2002; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996). In addition, according to Reid (2002, p. 93), students preferences were for: "transparent information and explicit description of appropriate choices" as well as models of academic writing by L2 writers and L1 writers, in short, comprehensive feedback. This desire for explicit, concrete feedback, a recurrent theme, again suggests instructors examine what they generally give.

Expanding our understanding of the complexity of students' desire for feedback, F. Hyland (2003) found that even though students knew form-focused feedback was unlikely to have an immediate effect, they believed it would benefit them

and was necessary if they were to make improvements. F. Hyland (2003) points out that as students' belief in feedback influenced their strategies for responding to it, it needs to be taken account of. Precisely stating the importance students place on feedback, Ferris and Roberts claim "L2 students want, expect and value teacher feedback" (2001, p. 166).

In addition, Reid (2002, p. 93) claims that asking students about their experiences "led to an epiphany" and helped her realize "that no student deliberately wrote a poor paper; no student came to class not to learn; no student tried to make no progress". It seems obvious really, but by describing this understanding as an epiphany Reid (2002) makes it apparent that for her, and probably for many writing instructors, the enormity of the task of responding to writing means it is easy to get frustrated, bogged down and despondent when students, writing seems to remain untouched by the advice offered. With reference to the content/form issue, asking students for their opinions on what feedback they want and in what order could be beneficial or, because individual needs can differ considerably, such an investigation could add to the instructors' burdens making it necessary for them to repeatedly check what each student has requested and adjust their approach accordingly (Goldstein, 2005; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996).

Despite continuing uncertainty in some areas, finding out what students want is beginning to look like a useful approach to feedback, and one that instructors need to engage with repeatedly as they become acquainted with each new group of students, each unique class with its own dynamics (Tudor, 2003). Cumming and Riaza (2000), looking at different identifiable sub-groups of learners from an ESL course at a university, suggest that due to the different attitudes and behaviors, realistically, there may be no identifiable right way to respond to students' papers as students have diverse preferences. Future research will need to take account of these differences if it is to be useful.

3.7.4 Wanting What the Instructor Wants

Trying to find out what students want may not be as easy as it at first appears. Research looking at what students want, and what they believe they do in response to feedback suggests that they consider themselves active, particularly in relation to grammar and mechanics, but a concern is that they focus on what they think the teacher is emphasizing (Cohen 1987; Ferris, 2002). Ferris (1995, 2002) goes further claiming that whether paying attention to grammar or moving more towards content it appears

that students sense the focus of the instructor and respond to it even reporting it is what they actually want, which shows the power of the instructor's influence. This influence can even obscure the purpose of the multi-draft approach to writing to the extent that students do not make good use of the revision process if they interpret the instructor's feedback as related to sentence-level 'corrections' only (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996). Other research suggests that students are receptive to subtly transmitted messages from instructors. Prior (1995, p. 53) found through an ethnographic examination of students' responses to assigned tasks that students did not simply read and analyze what the professor said, but also considered other personal factors such as the professor's "intellectual bias and personality" as they understood it, in an effort to meet the demands placed upon them. But, it is not clear if this helps or hinders revision practices.

3.7.5 Reception and Use of Feedback

Researchers acknowledge that students ask for corrections on their work, but there is little evidence that what they ask for leads to positive changes in writing (Chandler, 2003; Cumming, 2002; Hedgecock & Leftkowitz, 1994; Hyland & Hyland, 2001). It is not uncommon to hear writing instructors complain about the amount of feedback that is apparently ignored by students. However, although they may not always understand, students in ESL university classes do assess themselves as active learners who either use the feedback or ask for clarification (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Leki, 2006). Other research supports this finding that both instructors and students see benefits in feedback (Ferris, 2003). Also, it is possible that students use more feedback than is sometimes thought and when they do not use it there are often valid reasons for this avoidance (Hyland, 1998). One of the reasons may be that the feedback was inaccurate or too general to have applicability. Also, a second draft is not always required, getting one draft having proved enough of a challenge in some EFL programs, leaving students the option to stop at making a mental note (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990).

In terms of actually reading what is written, a study by Cohen showed 81% read most of the comments, 17% read only some and a low 2% did not read any, possibly the students who rated themselves as poor writers with little expectation of successfully understanding and using the feedback (1987, p. 60). Similar results have been found in research on students' responses to instructor feedback indicating that most students

made accurate use of nearly all the feedback they received (Ferris, 2006; Hyland, 1998). Yet many instructors continue to doubt that feedback is used.

One thing for instructors to be aware of is that some feedback is easier for students to respond to, as mentioned earlier some feedback is too vague for students to use, and indirect requests and codes are difficult for some and hedges for others (Ferris, 2003; Ferris et al., 1997; Hyland, K., 2000; Hyland & Hyland, 2001). These may be reasons why feedback is not dealt with, as may time constraints (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999). Also, some feedback is not useable because it is chatty rather than instructive, but this too has a purpose. One goal for instructors, then, is eliminating any factors they can that reduce the usability of feedback and Ferris suggests instructors offer thoughtful advice that shows students how to revise as well as holding "students accountable for at least considering the feedback they have received" (2003, p. 127). The idea here seems to be that if you want it, you have to then do something with it. It would be interesting to see if the desire for feedback would reduce once accountability for using it appeared.

It could be that too much emphasis is placed on seeing changes directly related to the most recent feedback offered, especially considering the recursive nature of learning and the possibility that something may have been learned but nor appear immediately in subsequent writing. Silva, taking a philosophical approach to writing instruction and response, reflects on his experiences throughout his career stating what he calls "[t]he prime directive: first, do no harm" (2002, p. 81). In an effort to avoid doing harm through over enthusiastic feedback revision practices, he gives advice and opinions but is open to students ignoring his suggestions, and he asks students to tell him what they believe they are struggling with (Silva, 2002, p. 80). Just asking is not enough; it is also necessary to listen, to pay attention to what is going on in class and reflect on the information gathered (Silva, 2002). Perhaps the best advice is for instructors to try writing in a second language themselves, a way to truly engage with the difficulties students face and experience the frustrations and choices that are part of this experience (Silva, 2002).

The role of the teacher is a big factor in making any teaching method work through a successful combination of "teacher traits . . . with learner expectations to create constructive learning dynamics" (Tudor, 2001, p. 101). Tudor goes on to develop the idea that enthusiasm and commitment, like laughter, are contagious and should be considered as factors in creating a positive affective climate along with the students' expectations that the teacher has something to offer them (2001). Believing in the

students and in the feedback and conveying that belief may be among the many difficult to prove influential factors in providing usable feedback. On the whole, it appears that students want and believe they use the feedback they are given.

3.8 Institutional and Sociopolitical Factors and the Feedback/Revision Cycle

Institutional factors, often ignored in research, can have a striking impact on the running of writing classes. Workload can be an issue of concern, although teachers are often subtly discouraged from referring to it as their role, like that of other service professions such as nurses, is to provide a nurturing service that does not mesh well with complaints about demands placed upon providers. Class sizes and resources also reflect institutional attitudes.

The workload writing instructors deal with varies for several interesting reasons and it is worth looking at these to expose the pressures that are behind complaints about workload. Firstly, as we have seen the writing process has come from L1 into L2 and has not always been a good fit, nor has it been accepted uncritically. The labor intensive aspects of the process approach to writing worth querying are evident considering the time writing instructors spend giving feedback on multiple drafts of essays, time that cannot be applied to preparing lessons and teaching, tasks that may be more beneficial especially given the on-going debate about the efficacy of feedback (Kischner, 1995; Takimoto, 2006; Truscott, 2004). When the, presumably, greater needs of L2 students for instruction and feedback on all aspects of writing are considered, this question of the best division of labor assumes some significance.

Excessive workload may well be a programmatic or an institutional problem. The demands of the program need to be looked at as some programs require instructors to cover more material than is practical, and if useful feedback is to be given to large numbers of students, instructor burnout is possible. This issue comes into focus considering Chandler's estimation that depending on the type of feedback offered, responding to 2000 word essays for a class of 20 students could take between 26.5 and 33.5 hours (2003). Multiply this by the number of essays written per semester, the number of drafts responded to, and adding it to the preparation and teaching obligations of instructors, who may have 4 classes this size, reveals the potential for a very heavy burden on instructors.

But large class sizes do not only affect instructors. According to Silva, the tendency to over-enroll students in ESL writing classes, and here he is talking of instructors having 50 students in total, is "the single most significant impediment to

quality writing instruction" (2002, p. 76). It emerges that many researchers see that students are not getting anywhere close to ideal learning environments. For a non-credit course with international graduate students, Silva floats the idea of 10 students meeting for three hours a week (2002, p. 76). Class sizes this small are a distant dream for many writing instructors.

3.8.1 Socio-Political Factors and the Impact on Writing Classes

Goldstein takes a socio-political view of what is provided for EFL/ESL students and raises issues linked to the way class numbers impact the feedback instructors can give, revealing that this reduced quality of educational provision is due to negative attitudes to minorities (2005). Goldstein claims these attitudes sometimes translate into huge classes, for example four classes of 25-30 students, in which instructors struggle to provide the individualized, text-specific feedback needed (2005). In contrast to this, in institutions with positive attitudes to writing a totally different experience emerges for all participants where class size was "held to 12, and teachers were regularly paid an extra unit if the class size was over eight to acknowledge the workload of responding to student papers" (Goldstein, 2005, p.13). Addressing the impact of these negative attitudes to the needs of minorities is another task confronting instructors, one that is sometimes tackled by the instructor trying personally to make up the deficit. Putting teachers in the position of trying to provide the feedback they believe the students need to receive, to more students than it is reasonable to ask of them, ultimately benefits no one.

Hyland and Hyland (2006a) also explore socio-political factors concluding that issues such as instructor status and morale, class sizes and resources available, amongst others, can impact what goes on in classes. It is difficult to see writing instructors as having any status when they are overburdened with students and under-resourced. This is not lost on students.

In addition to writing instructors having little status, the actual subject may not be accorded much status but judging this is tricky. Having exposed the workload put on instructors in some institutions, Goldstein (2005) implies that instructors should consider the extent to which the institution values writing and what the program really asks of them. This is because, even when it is not explicit, students usually accurately assess the institution's attitudes to writing and this can alter the extent to which they apply themselves to the demands of the course. Illustrating the problems that instructors may encounter, Silva (2002, p. 77) explains that his composition students had "very

few writing assignments in their other courses" and that is likely to reduce the perceived importance of improving writing skills. From Silva's perspective, the instructor may provide feedback that is not valued by the students who are focused on other goals they see are valued in the institution. However, Leki (2006) warns that relying on information from students on the extent to which they are required to write for other classes is not an accurate method; nevertheless, if they perceive writing as unimportant, this will impact their engagement in class even if the perception is inaccurate.

3.9 Over-Emphasis on Writing

Rather than worrying about the feedback teachers should draw students' attention to, Leki (1990b, 2003a) suggests it is time to query the position of writing in L2. Her concern is with the "institutional power positions" of universities and whether or not our assumptions that writing is useful are substantiated especially if many ESL students will return to their countries of origin where writing in English serves no purpose (Leki, 1990b, 2003b, p.317). The arguments made here are that many students are only writing for one audience, the professors, L2 writing is neither personally satisfying nor particularly useful for many students, and is in competition with oral or visual communication (Leki, 2003b). However, when students know that they have exams to face that involve writing, not preparing them for these exams because teachers are concerned with the power struggle evident within tertiary institutions is not a strong argument. It is further questionable when we consider the idea that with the spread of English through the internet and as the language of business, many ESL students need help in becoming better writers for "vocational and professional purposes", specifically writing that will enable them to advance in academic settings (Warschauer & Ware, 2006, p. 158). Therefore, it seems that for some ESL students, writing is important, perhaps even a passport to the life they have planned.

3.10 Summary: Few Certainties and Cautious Steps Ahead

This review of some of the literature on L2 writing has largely concentrated on the use of feedback and the way it has become a contentious issue in L2 writing as the process approach to writing and the use of multiple drafts have become prevalent in ESL. It reveals that there are many avenues to explore in a complex field. The timing and type of feedback are explored, especially the content/form dichotomy, the use of direct or indirect feedback and a selective or full response to errors. The influence of students' expectations, as well as issues that appear to make instructor feedback

difficult for students to respond to, are discussed. The matter of what students say they want and how much of the feedback offered is used are looked at. Finally, the influence of institutional factors on classroom interactions is covered. It becomes clear that there are few certainties that instructors can cling to as examples of good practices.

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the study; the next chapter provides detailed information on the setting, the participants and the instruments in the study. It also discusses the methodological approach taken.

CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides as full an explanation of the context of the research as possible so that the results will have meaning (Goldstein, 2005), while taking care to preserve the anonymity of the institution and the participants. A description of the conceptual framework for the study detailing the particular socio-cultural and academic context of the research is given. The research design is clarified drawing on theoretical perspectives of educational research and the strengths and weakness of the methodology are explored addressing issues of validity and reliability. The procedure for the selection of participants is laid out, and the measures taken to ensure the comfort and confidentiality of the participants are discussed. The data collection approach, instruments used and analytical procedures employed are discussed.

4.1 The Setting

This research took place, as mentioned earlier, at a university referred to in the study as Gulf States University (GSU). It is a maturing university and in its formative years has gone through many changes as it has set about establishing itself in the region. The ruler of the particular Emirate where the university is situated is a firm supporter of education and planned for an educational institution that would meet the needs of the young people as the country develops.

4.1.1 The Department

In the department where the research was conducted, the Department of Writing Studies (DWS), the instructors are all Masters' or PhD degree holders and native or near-native English speakers. None of the instructors are UAE nationals, but there are at least seven different nationalities among the teaching faculty of the department. Some instructors have come to the Gulf region having been teaching rhetoric in American colleges in the US, others have come from language schools or second language teaching experiences in other parts of the world such as Asia and Egypt, and still others have taught almost exclusively in the Middle East.

4.1.2 The Students

The students attending the university, as described earlier, are drawn principally from the Middle East especially the UAE, although UAE nationals are in the minority. Many of the students are long term UAE residents but nationals of other countries such as Iran, Jordan, Nigeria, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Pakistan or India, to name but a

few. English is a second language for the majority of students. First languages tend to be Arabic, Farsi and Indian languages, although, it is possible to find that there are also students from other parts of the world such as Russia and the Philippines, and there are students with native or near native English competence. However, the majority of students in the entry level freshman communication course, which is the focus of this research, while able to communicate well verbally in English, face considerable challenges with reading and writing.

4.2 The Writing Courses

This research was conducted with participants in the academic writing course known as WRI 101. Although two other courses, WRI 001 and WRI 102, are referred to, the focus of exploration to follow is on clarifying issues related to WRI 101.

As second language English speakers, to gain entry to the university, at the time of the beginning of the research process students had to have a TOEFL score of 173 (500)[1], though this was gradually revised upward and was set at 180 (510) for the academic year 2005/2006, 190 (520) in 2006-2007 and had reached 197 (530) by the beginning of the 2007-2008 academic year. All prospective students take the TOEFL test, even those who are clearly native English speakers. Those students below the required TOEFL score are referred to the Intensive English Program (IEP). The TOEFL score affords students entry, but further testing is required to determine at what level they start the General Education Requirements (GER), specifically physics, maths and academic writing.

Academic writing is introduced to the students as part of the GER in their freshman year; there are three levels (WRI 001, 101, 102). WRI 001 is for students who have certain difficulties with writing. It allows students to begin working towards their degrees by taking some credit bearing courses while taking a comprehensive writing course including study skills, reading and writing (Appendix B).

The other two 100 level academic writing courses are credit bearing courses. WRI 101 is an introduction to academic writing and a pre-requisite for WRI 102. It is the students and instructors in WRI 101, a standard three credit course, that are the focus of the research. The emphasis is on reading and writing through the examination and use of rhetorical strategies suitable for academic writing purposes. A writing process approach to teaching writing is taken. A common syllabus is used by all

[1] Numbers in parentheses represent a conversion from the computer based test score (CBT) to the paper based test score (PBT).

instructors although how this is interpreted in the classroom is at the discretion of the individual instructor, and during the period of the research, the syllabus went through some reworking (Appendix B). Typically, a range of rhetorical strategies are addressed and students are usually required to write three essays as decided by individual instructors. These writing tasks and the feedback given were central to the research. The WRI 102 course, which follows WRI 101, builds on it in terms of critical reading, argumentation, synthesizing ideas from other sources and referencing conventions (Appendix B).

4.3 Institutional Issues and the Impact on WRI 101

As a relatively new university, it is inevitable that GSU is a site of change as it finds its place in the wider community and attempts to respond to the perceived needs of the stakeholders. This process of contestation and change is related to the university community as a whole and the department where the research took place.

4.3.1 Adjusting the Curriculum

In the past, it was not uncommon to hear instructors criticize the writing course, particularly WRI 101, as it was considered more basic than most freshman courses in the U.S.A. The academic level of the communications courses was initially a result of two related factors: firstly, GSU is a relatively new university that has had to work at establishing itself, and secondly the English competence of the students enrolled in the first few years as the university made an effort to attract students was quite low with the TOEFL requirement set at 500. As the university has gained a reputation in the area and the need to attract students has been replaced by the opportunity to be more selective, changes have occurred in terms of TOEFL levels required for entrance to the academic programs, which have meant that the students are generally able to face a more challenging introductory course. Also, accreditation requirements, nationally and internationally, meant there was a need to adjustment the curriculum prompting changes in the WRI 101 course.

WRI 101 is gradually being developed to bring it more in line with international, or more specifically American, standards and to meet accreditation requirements. During 2005, the year the research was started, the curriculum, and as a consequence the syllabus for WRI 101, were subject to radical changes driven by a desire to, on the one hand, have a clear relationship between the three WRI courses with each one building progressively on the skills addressed in the previous course, and on the other hand, by a desire to make the courses move closer to that of typical

American university freshman communication courses. The reading/writing textbooks used for WRI 101 at the beginning of the research changed in the Fall semester 2006 to introduce textbooks that are closer to those students would encounter in a 101 communication class in a typical American university and to offer instructors a choice of textbooks. In addition, a handbook was made a requirement (Appendix B).

Although the level of English competence of students' has increased as the TOEFL entrance requirement continues to be raised, students in each class are likely to still be at various levels of writing ability and grammatical competence. This has carried on into WRI 102 as students with weak grammar can pass WRI 101 with the minimum pass and continue to struggle with the requirement to read and write in English all the way through their studies.

4.3.2 Attitudes to Writing

Changes were made to the WRI courses to address the changing student body as the TOEFL score for entrance rose and the university matured. However, there is another issue apparent within the institution that impacts the writing classes. A requirement to respond or explain in writing is not used widely in other areas of the university and some instructors set exams with no writing component, relying instead on multi-choice questions and, sometimes, short answer questions. It appears that, initially, the English competence of the students was such that the faculty found it expedient to adopt practices that minimized writing, and this has become endemic in the university. The difficulty with this for instructors teaching writing is that they can feel as though they are teaching something that is not valued by the university and therefore not seen as especially relevant to the students either.

4.3.3 Attitudes to Reading

A related problem can be seen in students' reluctance to read. At GSU, many instructors have referred to reluctance on the students' part to read the set chapters of textbooks and come to class prepared. The response to this has been a tendency for instructors to create extensive power point presentations that are available to the students through the intranet, and which, it is claimed by those critical of the practice, reduce or eliminate the need for students to read the chapters. Considering the students have had a knowledge transmission classroom experience they may be trying, somewhat successfully, to recreate that experience through behaviors such as not preparing the set reading ahead of time. Recent criticism has been voiced in Faculty

Development Center meetings of this practice claiming it undermines attempts to get students reading.

4.4 Departmental Issues and Practices in WRI 101

Within DWS, as mentioned earlier, there are faculty with diverse professional backgrounds, teaching experiences and conceptions of teaching and learning. This diversity means that the department, too, is a site of exploration and contestation as instructors strive to enhance students' academic performance.

4.4.1 Writing Instruction and Assessment

Allowing the instructors freedom in their classrooms is seen as important in DWS, the department where the research was conducted, and goes beyond giving faculty a textbook choice and into teaching practice and assessment. Instructors have considerable freedom in the way they teach writing as long as they adhere to the objectives and outcomes set out in the syllabus. The curriculum document for WRI 101 recommends that students produce three essays using the writing process during the sixteen week semester. While it is expected that students will have experience with a variety of rhetorical strategies, such as comparison and contrast, how this is handled is very individual. Some instructors promote personal narrative and others do not address this at all. Some teach argument directly and others by implication. In addition, there is space within the curriculum document to interpret the writing requirement in ways other than essay writing, such as journal or summary writing, as long as a considerable body of writing is produced. In practice, most instructors have their students write three essays, though there are variations in the number of drafts and the point at which grades are decided. The way the instructors and students dealt with these three essays and the feedback cycle are the primary elements under investigation.

In addition to these variations in interpretation of the syllabus, there are no common exams and no moderation of marking. In fact, exams per se came under attack during the research process, and the department moved from having 500 plus students take common final exams together in the university sports complex, to no common exams at all during the time the research was being conducted. Eventually, exams may be replaced by portfolio assessment on the basis that this is what is currently in vogue in American rhetoric and composition classes, and it fits better with a writing process approach. Instructors are increasingly experimenting with this form of evaluation. However, at least initially, portfolios have not found unanimous acceptance.

4.4.2 Feedback Procedures

Both written and oral feedback on essays from peers and instructors are available to students although the way these techniques are employed can differ considerably. Peer review of some sort, although not accepted uncritically, is used by most instructors. Some instructors use peer review in class. Another popular approach is to use a course management system (CMS) to distribute essays among two classes and have students give feedback on-line to an unknown recipient. Further variations in peer review include the type of sheet used to guide the peer responses and whether or not the students are asked to respond to grammar, content/structure or both.

Another means by which students can get feedback is to visit the Writing Center. DWS has made a concerted effort to develop a well-managed and popular peer tutor program. Students are selected through application to the DWS instructor in charge and/or by instructor recommendation. They are usually L1 or near L1 speakers of English and students who are in good academic standing in the university. Some are bilingual or trilingual. On asking one tutor of Egyptian and Italian parentage if she spoke Arabic and Italian, I received the curt reply, "Fluently." Tutors are trained through a Writing Fellows course and paid on an hourly basis at a rate set by the university. Students can get help at any stage of the writing process, but the tutors are well aware that they can only assist and not 'do' the work for the students. Some students complain about the Writing Center tutors because they had anticipated a proof-reading service rather than assistance to do the work themselves. Others benefit from the chance to discuss and question a fellow student, perhaps in a way they, as freshmen, would not have had the courage to do with an instructor.

Instructors' written feedback on essays is an important part of writing instruction and, depending on the instructor, may include reading and commenting on prewriting and planning as well as drafts. Variations in the way instructors respond, the amount of response offered, placement of feedback on the essay and the degree of explanation offered are extensive. Some instructors focus heavily on grammar. Others, while not ignoring grammar errors completely, give most feedback on content and organization. Some instructors are concerned to have students demonstrate a mature approach to the subject matter so critique the logic of the argument presented. Also, instructors vary what they target in their feedback depending on where the student is in the semester.

No matter how it is handled, the writing process approach has instructors reading closely and responding to at least two drafts per essay. As each instructor typically has approximately 80 students, 40 at WRI 101 and 40 at 102 level, this means reading and commenting on multiple drafts of at least 240 essays in sixteen weeks, in addition to the other tasks of creating and delivering teaching materials. Clearly, these courses are very writing and marking intensive.

It is possible for the students to interact individually with the instructors out of class time either during office hours or by appointment. Some students do take advantage of this option possibly because oral traditions are a strong and an integral part of many students' cultural experiences in the region. However, clearly, individual tuition cannot be provided by instructors to all 80 students for each draft of the essays or even for one draft of all three essays, and the students themselves, who have other classes to attend and work to do, may not have time to take part in such an exercise. So, written feedback, with its flaws and disappointments continues to be relied upon.

4.5 The Research Design

An exploration of the specific context in which the research was conducted, the diversity among the students and instructors, the demands of the writing course, and particularly, the concerns and insights of the instructors and students helps to frame the problem under investigation and locate it firmly in the specific site.

4.5.1 The Research Problem

Hours of instructor time go into giving written feedback to students, but instructors do not appear to be confident that this is the best use of their time. Many instructors express views that indicate they feel despondent about the extent to which the feedback is acted on (Goldstein, 2005). Without any clear alternative, and because of the requirements of the department, instructors continue with a time-consuming practice in which some appear to see little value.

For my part, doubts about the students' receptivity to the instructor's written feedback on their essays, and the usefulness of much of the written feedback given to students have led me to examine written feedback in the context of these writing classes, both peer and instructor feedback. The students' and instructors' perspectives of the feedback/revision cycle, the students' level of understanding of the feedback, and the degree to which they act on the useable advice given were of interest. Of course the corollary to this is the equally important issue of the degree to which students do not

act on the feedback and why they make the choices they do. It seemed to me that there was a lot as yet unknown about these choices, and how and why they are made.

My intention was to investigate the complex issue of giving and getting written feedback on the written work of L2 students in this educational context with its particular dynamics. This research aimed primarily to draw on the students' and instructors' perspectives of the feedback/revision cycle within the particular socio-cultural context looking at what was offered, what was used and why this was so. An impetus for the research was concern that, because of the number of students in each class, providing satisfactory written feedback on three essays in a sixteen week course either put instructors under considerable pressure or was unattainable; therefore, my intention was to see how individual instructors experienced the demands of supplying students with useable written feedback and their students' reactions to the procedure. I wanted to know if we were giving the students what they wanted and could use and if not, whether or not we could or in fact should.

4.5.2 Research Questions

Attempting to answer the following questions guided the selection of participants, the design of instruments, and the data gathering and analysis process.

1. What difficulties do students have interpreting written feedback received from their instructor and peers?
2. What do they understand to be their responsibilities in terms of acting on the written feedback?
3. What are the instructors' views of the use students make of the feedback offered?
4. Are there identifiable aspects of the process of giving and receiving written feedback that help to make it an understandable and productive experience for students?
5. What factors can be identified that limit the amount of time and effort students put into reading, understanding and acting on the written feedback from teachers and peers?

4.6 Selection of Participants

Three WRI 101 instructors took part in the research, offered their insights and allowed access to relevant materials in one of their classes. In each of the three classes used the students agreed to take part in questionnaires. In addition, in collaboration with the instructor and on the basis of the initial diagnostic writing done in all classes,

three students, who represented a range of abilities, were asked to participate in interviews to discuss the feedback received and their use of it. Later, as issues emerged from the data that required further checking, an attempt was made to form two types of focus groups, one each for students and instructors. The instructors were cooperative participants eager to discuss relevant issues. However, difficulties were encountered getting students to participate in focus groups.

4.6.1 Instructor Selection

All full-time instructors in the department, 15 at the beginning of the study, were contacted by email, informed about the objectives of the research and the anticipated time commitment. They were supplied with an information sheet and volunteers were called for. Three instructors volunteered by email and were accepted as the instructor participants. Subsequently, other instructors approached me personally and volunteered making back-up available should difficulties have arisen for one reason or another.

Instructors typically teach four classes such as two WRI 101 classes and two WRI 102 classes. Over a period of three semesters, one instructor and a single class was involved in the research process for a whole semester, and only this one instructor and class was worked with at a time. This was because of the time commitment for the researcher in terms of interviewing, observing and gathering data as well as teaching as per usual.

Difficulties did arise over the three semesters of data collection that prevented all of the first three volunteers taking part. These difficulties were due to class assignment time clashes between the researcher and the instructor participating in a particular semester, which meant the researcher was unable to visit this class to introduce the research process and to do observations. Also, some instructors were not assigned WRI 101 classes in the semester they had been scheduled to be participants. For this reason, not all instructors who initially volunteered were used, and others who had volunteered later became involved. In the end, three instructors and their classes took part, but in order to provide for the involvement of more instructors all departmental instructors were contacted by email and given a chance to comment on general trends emerging from the data.

4.6.2 The Role of Instructor Participants

Prior to the commencement of the semester in which they would be involved, instructors were emailed the consent form, the information sheet and a spreadsheet,

which outlined what was expected of them and their students and an anticipated time line (Appendixes C, D, & E). It was assumed that the participating instructor would read the requirements and attempt to adhere to them. But some difficulties were experienced with timing of essays and giving of feedback in the first semester of data collection. For this reason, at the begin of the second semester in which the research was conducted, time was set aside to discuss the time commitment with the instructor face-to-face to ensure that they were aware of the need to keep the researcher informed of where the students were in the drafting process to facilitate interviewing students after they received feedback on the essays (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Instructor's Involvement in the Study

Timing	Activity	Time commitment
Before the semester	Introductory meeting	30 minutes
First/second week	Initial interview	60 – 90 minutes
During semester	Supply copies of essay assignments and grading sheets Notify when essay cycle completed	NA
End of semester	Second interview	60 minutes
Later in research process	Focus groups	60-90 minutes

At the beginning and end of each semester, instructors were interviewed in the expectation of exploring their attitudes to the writing process, students' writing abilities, the feedback/revision cycle and the use students make of feedback. Interviews were transcribed and returned to the instructors for comment. Short follow-up interviews or email exchanges, depending on the wishes of the instructor, were used to target elicit information or clarify points that were emerging from the data.

Instructors were asked to notify the researcher as they progressed through the essays so that questionnaires could be administered and interviews arranged at appropriate times. Copies of materials used by instructors such as peer review sheets,

and essays topics, instructions and grading criteria were also asked for. In practice, it turned out to be easier to get these from the students.

Later in the research process, a need arose for further exploration of concepts emerging from the data and a focus group was formed with the three participating instructors to discuss a selection of key questions. The focus group was seen as a time to share ideas and an opportunity for the researcher to observe the discussions that came out of this group activity in contrast to the individual interviews.

The department is largely a harmonious one and instructors are generally cooperative, so any resistance encountered or problems with timing of activities and access to students were likely due to workload rather than a negative view of the study. Those instructors who became involved with the research were cooperative and generous with their time.

4.6.3 Student Selection

The students were drawn from the freshman communication classes known as WRI 101, a GER course. There are approximately 20 students per class, but some students do not complete the course and some attend irregularly reducing the number on a daily basis. There is a population of between 300 and 500 in any given semester (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Number of WRI 101 students per semester

Semester	Students per class	Classes per semester	Attrition Rates
Fall	20-23	20-25	Approximately 10%
Spring	20-23	15-20	Approximately 10%

In each participating class, the research focus and the students' role in it were explained to them in the second or third week of the semester as this meant that their instructor had had time to get to know the students, establish a rapport with them and, therefore, was able to reassure students that participation in the study would not entail any risk in terms of their expected level of achievement in the class. The research procedure was briefly introduced to the students and they were given time to ask

questions and asked to sign a consent form; they were also given an information sheet to take with them and read at their leisure (Appendixes F & G). In addition to asking the class to participate in a general way through answering questionnaires, three students from each class were invited to be part of the interview section of the study. The decision to work closely with three students was based on the idea that detailed information from nine students, three per class, would provide sufficient data and allow for the inclusion of a diverse range of responses. Multiple interviews with three students per semester were also considered manageable for one researcher teaching full-time.

The research was longitudinal, looking at students in WRI 101 and their writing over a sixteen week semester as they wrote multiple drafts of three essays. It was made clear to all participating students that they could withdraw from the research procedures at any time. But it was anticipated that the students would not find the demands to onerous and would continue to respond to emails throughout the research process. As with the instructors, as the study progressed, it became apparent that an exploration of key concepts emerging from the data would be beneficial through forming student focus groups. Initially, volunteers from the current case study group and from previous case study groups were invited to participate in focus groups. However, it turned out to be impossible to get these students together again even though there was a little initial interest, so focus groups were formed with participants in the current WRI 101 classes being taught by the participant instructors. Although it was disappointing to lose the students who had moved on over the intervening year, the addition of a fresh look at the material from the current group of students was welcome. In the end, the student participants in the focus groups were groups of approximately six students from a current WRI 101 class of two of the three participating instructors.

4.6.4 The Role of the Students

Three classes took part in case studies, which are presented separately in the results. The perceptions and experiences of the whole class were sought and all participating students were asked to participate in questionnaires to gather information on their perspectives of the instructor's feedback, the type of feedback they wanted and their attitudes to peer review. In addition, three students per class were more deeply involved through interviews and allowing access to their essays.

Table 4.3

Interview Students' Involvement in the Study

Timing	Activity	Time commitment
Second/third week	Initial introduction to the research Hand out of information sheets Sign consent forms Selection of interview students	20 minutes
During semester	Individual interview at the end of each essay cycle	20-60 minutes per interview – up to three interviews
During the semester	Respond to three questionnaires on-line	10-20 minutes per questionnaire
Later in research	Focus groups (attendance optional)	30-60 minutes

This meant nine students in three case studies were involved in in-depth interviews, two male and seven female. Their essays were examined and the students were asked to discuss relevant aspects of the in-class preparation process, the procedure they had used to write the essay, and their affective and practical responses to the feedback they had received. The interviews required a significant time commitment from students (Table 4.3). The number of times the interviews were held varied depending on how many essays that particular class completed, but most students took part in at least two interviews in the semester. The timing of the third essay made scheduling an interview after completion impossible in most cases as it ran into exam week.

4.6.5 Additional Participants

Additional participants were drawn on as the study progressed (Table 4.4). As well as the three classes, additional WRI 101 students took part in focus groups towards the end of the data collection phase. These students were volunteers from the current WRI 101 class of each participating instructor. The involvement of these students is dealt with fully under focus groups.

Also, as the research process unfolded, it became clear that there were unexpected issues of interest emerging from the data that could be addressed by drawing on ideas from other departments in the university. As a result of this, data was gathered from discussions held by the Faculty Development Center: firstly from discussions involving an intra-university discussion panel about the need to promote

writing across the curriculum, and secondly from an individual instructor's presentation on students' writing abilities and the need to encourage writing across the curriculum.

One focus group was formed with four experienced Writing Center student tutors to discuss what their experiences with students suggested about students' understanding of instructor feedback and its usability. In addition, in the final stages of the study, all DWS instructors were contacted by email and invited to contribute their views on key ideas emerging from the data gathered.

Table 4.4

Additional Participants' Involvement

	Timing	Activity	Time commitment
All DWS Faculty	Fall 2007	Email	Individual Choice
Other Faculty	Spring 2006 Fall 2007	Discussion Panel Presentation	60 minutes. 60 minutes.
Writing Center Tutors	Summer 2007	Focus group	45 minutes

4.7 Ethics Approval

As the research was to a large extent ethnographic, I was mindful of the privileged position I was in as an instructor in the department where I was also gathering research data. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) ask researchers in positions such as this to consider carefully the use of incidental data accessed from casual conversations keeping paramount the need to establish and maintain good relationships. My colleagues were aware of the research and what I was looking at throughout the process. My research approach had been set out for the department by email, and I was careful to provide a chance for everyone to read about what I intended to do and query me further if necessary. Brief mentions of the research procedure were a part of departmental exchanges at times, which meant that the on-going nature of the research was clear.

Since I would not be involving any of my own students in the research, the human ethics approval from Massey University was relatively straightforward as the study was considered 'low risk'. The procedure involved the design, and acceptance by the ethics committee, of information sheets for students and instructors, a participant

consent form, a release of recording transcripts form, a general confidentiality form, and a recording transcriber's confidentiality form. Also, as the research was carried out in an institution outside of New Zealand, approval was sought from and readily granted by the chair of the department in which the research would take place.

4.8 Confidentiality and Anonymity

The preservation of human dignity, even whilst perusing some hidden truth, is part of a commitment to ethical research (Cohen et al., 2000). As mentioned above, a consent form was created, which indicated that measures would be taken to maintain confidentiality, and this was signed by all participants. Efforts were made to conceal identities of individuals and participants were assured that, within reason, this would be done. However, participants in such data gathering processes as interviews and focus groups are aware that complete anonymity is not achievable.

Because of differences in the numbers involved, it was harder to hide the identities of the instructors than the students; the instructors knew from the start that there would only be three of them yet consented to take part. It is reasonable to assume that the focus of the research interested them, and they saw little threat to themselves as a result of participation.

To some degree, maintaining the confidentiality of the participants was managed by using fictitious names throughout the process so that even the transcribers had no idea whose information they were dealing with. Cohen et al. (2000), state that participants agreeing to face-to-face interviews cannot expect anonymity but have the right to confidentiality.

The number of students meant that identifying the ideas of individuals would be difficult if not impossible. At no time were the participating students' responses identified for the instructors although their ideas were discussed with individual instructors and in focus groups. Sometimes instructors made comments that suggested they thought they had identified a particular student's voice, but they were almost always wrong. Had they been able to identify students, there would have been no threat to the student as the discussions took place after the semester was over and grades were finalized.

4.9 Framing the Methodological Approach and Procedures

Is there a 'right way' to conduct research? Deciding how to approach research in L2 is a big question for budding researchers. Silva (2005, p. 4) pondering the issue of the philosophical basis of inquiry says that although initially he believed empirical

research was the answer, eventually realizing that "researchers disagreed" made him question his choice. Further thought led Silva to the epiphany that "researcher's questions would drive . . . [the] design . . . . [as] different jobs require different tools" (2005, p.12).

The broad methodological approach of this research process is qualitative, drawing on participants' perspectives as they hand over their experiences and understandings to the researcher to collate, interpret, and pass on. This is what has been described as the storytelling approach of qualitative research that is a natural way for "values, concepts, information and insights" to be communicated (Blanton, 2005, p. 151). From the outset, I was mindful of the obligation I had to the participants and of the need to enhance participant comfort by making the purpose and processes of the research as transparent and unthreatening as possible. Researchers may not realize at the outset that there is any threat to the participants, but through her own experience of "mucking around in the lives of others" Blanton reveals that there is and as researchers we must "[d]evise an ingenious plan for rendering results, even results potentially damaging to . . . research subjects, in a way that brings about positive change" (2005, p. 157). These seemed pertinent cautionary words applicable to research taking place with colleagues.

4.9.1 The Ethnographic Approach

Expanding on earlier information about the area where this research took place and the likely educational experiences of the students, this chapter of the research report began with further detail in relation to the academic requirements of the writing courses that the students' typically encounter, giving a relatively full account of the context in which this research took place. Such detail is the part of a methodological approach that examines the writer's 'situated' experiences in the context they are embedded in (Cohen, et al., 2000; Hyland, 2002). A concerted effort has been made throughout to make relevant aspects of the context clear.

The ethnographic element of the research is logical considering that I am a teacher in the department where the research took place. I had been teaching in the UAE for seven years and at the particular institution in which the research took place for four years at the time that I began the research; therefore, I had considerable insider knowledge from the start. An ethnographic approach to research is typically 'emic' allowing for a close-up angle on practices and understandings (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Davis, 1995). Ethnographic, naturalistic inquiry works with what is there and seeks to understand how this operates from the perspective of those inside

(Tudor, 2001). Part of the value of ethnographic research is that detail comes from the "insider, oriented description of individuals' cultural practices" accessible through multiple contacts and ready exposure to the site, which were available to me (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999, p. 49). And this detail illuminates what is actually happening in reality, which is potentially more useful than prescribing behaviors (Tudor, 2001). Cohen et al. refer to the ethnogenic approach in ethnographic research, a paradigm that strives to get the view from the participants' perspective to capture "their intentionality and their interpretations of frequently complex situations . . . and the dynamics of interaction as it unfolds" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 293). In addition, although some data gathered through questionnaires was presented in numerical or graph form, this technique was used to present qualitative data in a concise, visual format to support the qualitative data emerging from other sources, it not being odd to see "some form of quantification in qualitative studies" (Davis, 1995, p. 435).

Capturing the perspectives of the participants is complex. It must be considered that there will be many realities when there are many participants. Drawing these realities together is a task that needs careful handling if individual and apparently contesting concepts are to be given space. Careful and repeated examination of the data collected helps to ensure that the truths are winnowed from the mass of information, which means that the researcher must be thoroughly familiar with the material from interviews, discussions and all sources.

4.9.2 Case Study

To achieve an inclusive examination of the site and the participants' experiences with writing and feedback, three case studies were undertaken in this longitudinal study of the experiences of three instructors and the students in one of their WRI 101 classes. Each case study was conducted separately over a whole semester meaning that the initial data collection took place over a period of eighteen months.

The use of the case study approach is an effective way of gathering qualitative data about individuals' practices and perceptions as participants in the feedback/revision cycle. The case study, tapping into the perceived experiences of the participants, enriched the ethnographic perspective; indeed, case study has been described as ideal for emic research (Cohen et al. 2000). These two methodologies are compatible and tend to be immersion methods requiring the researcher to be deeply involved in all data collection and interpretation, which was what was aimed for (Anderson, 1990). According to Chapelle and Duff (2003, p. 157), "[c]ase studies may

be included in larger quantitative or qualitative studies to provide a concrete illustration of findings". Combining case study and ethnographic research methodologies allows for access to data that permits the rich descriptive view which reveals local features of the context the participants experience and are familiar with, and which influence what and how they do what they do (Hyland, 2002; Polio, 2003).

The importance of having "a trusting relationship with research participants . . . [and] obtaining relevant background information about case participants and sites," a feature of case study methodology, was significant for research in which much of the data came from interactions on the part of the researcher and the participants through interviews (Chapelle and Duff, 2003, p. 165). Only by building up and maintaining a trusting relationship with students and colleagues would there be any chance of having them offer information in an open and unguarded way (Hays, 2004). As an instructor of four years standing in the department, the researcher was known to the instructor participants; nevertheless, recognizing that case study can be seen as a form of evaluation, care was taken to ease tensions and establish an atmosphere of trust with all participants (Hays, 2004). This meant reassuring instructors about their role and the use I would make of their insights. It also meant not conducting observations in one instructor's class and not forming a focus group with her students as that instructor was more anxious about the research than the other two and clearly reluctant to have me observe her. As the students did not know me at the outset, it was necessary to put them at ease and foster a welcoming atmosphere with them. Time was spent at the beginning of each interview in chat and I was at pains to accept all ideas the students put forward.

It was hoped that students would talk freely in an interview situation about their experiences with written feedback, particularly seldom discussed ideas such as the reasons they sometimes resisted instructions, but getting such insights was potentially problematic as it meant discussing behavior at odds with instructor requirements. To build up the necessary trust basis with the students, at the beginning of the semester before the interviews began, I was careful to ensure that they saw me interact in a relaxed manner with their instructor and with them. There was no coercion in terms of getting students to partake. Once interviews began, I always started with some chat and, although there were individual variations depending on personality, most interviewees became very friendly and cooperative. This willingness to make a personal connection with the instructor, or in this case researcher, is a feature I have noticed in general with the students at GSU. It is not at all unusual to have students

come and visit an instructor's office long after they have finished the semester. Good socialization practices seem to be a feature of the culture of the Arab and Iranian students. Similarly, it was hoped that teacher participants would feel unthreatened by the process and therefore be willing, even voluble, participants. Interviews of one and a half hours during which I said almost nothing suggest that this was achieved.

4.9.2.1 L2 Case Studies

Although there are sometimes difficulties in L2 studies getting complex information about actions and perceptions from students due to the communication abilities of the participants, particularly when the researcher does not speak the participants' first language, this was not a significant issue in this study. The reason for this was that the students, although struggling with written English, are used to communicating orally in English as it is the language of commerce and daily interactions outside of the home as well as in the university.

4.9.3 The Writer-Oriented Approach

Ethnography, seen as learning from people, then is a valid consideration for research that intends to find out how different participants experience writing and giving/receiving feedback (Case, 2004, p. 32). Although students' texts were examined to add to the detail gathered, what was found was used to see if the different participants' actions matched what they claimed to have done in terms of feedback, and if not, to generate questions on what this meant. Therefore, a text-oriented approach did not inform this research; a writer-oriented approach to studying writing was taken foregrounding the participants' perspectives.

A writer-oriented approach begins with "'natural scenes' rather than experimental environments and often [seeks] to describe writing from an *emic* perspective, privileging the views of the insiders or those participating in a situation" (Hyland, 2002, p. 26). This approach makes space for the perspectives of both the students and the instructors. Different views of the same or similar activities, as they will not appear exactly the same from the different participant perspectives, help to build up a multi-dimensional image of, in this case, the experience of giving and receiving written feedback on written work. The research process acknowledged from the outset that there could well be a kind of dynamic tension emerge over the different participants' views of the written feedback and particularly the use made of it. Care was needed to access these views.

The writer-oriented approach allows researchers to tap into writers' experiences rather than just examining the product although the product was not excluded from this research and was a source of data on what instructors actually wrote and what students actually responded to. Tapping into writers' experiences and instructors' feedback allowed me as the researcher to ask why this choice was made, this was attended to and that was ignored.

But such an orientation has limitations if it ignores the influence of the particular context in which the writing takes place, the "task environment" (Hyland, 2002, p. 30). Context is especially relevant when writing is conceived of as a social act which takes place in a complex social situation that involves more than the classroom but may well require viewing details reported by participants in relation to the writing experience in light of other knowledge about the institution and the program (Goldstein, 2005; Hyland, 2002). This wider knowledge may include the value a particular institution places on writing per se, which, although not overtly declared, is apparent to all participants through practices across the academic context and may include the chances students have to use what they learn in writing classes or the types of examinations they face in other disciplines all of which are issues discussed in relation to this research.

This approach gives rise to an understanding from inside that pivots around the participants' experiences as they see them and relate them to the researcher but situated within the researcher's broader awareness of the context. And, notably, it brings the field of research into the realm of "the day-to-day experience of practicing language teachers" (Tudor, 2001, p. 42). Exploring issues related to writing and feedback in the WRI 101 classes through an inclusive approach was relevant in the particular academic context where this research took place as university wide attitudes to and conceptions of student writing appeared to be germane to the way students reacted to the demands of WRI 101 writing assignments and instructor feedback.

4.9.4 The Ecological Perspective

The ecological perspective of classroom interactions "focuses on realities as they are lived in particular contexts" (Tudor, 2001, p. 28). This idea of the individual classroom as a place of situated local realities meshes well with the concepts of contextual and social influences and ethnographic research in general (Allwright, 2005; Hyland, 2002; Tudor, 2001). "The move to a more ecological approach to language teaching . . . calls for a research orientation which is able to look beyond observable

behaviours to their origins and . . . to seize the inner logic which underlies participants' actions" (Tudor, 2001, p. 40). Observing gives one type of data, but finding out how all the participants' conceive of and interpret the experiences of writing and feedback adds greatly to the clarity of the picture giving facets and textures that would otherwise be lacking. This meshes with the concept that mental processes exist and can be examined in light of "a larger sociocultural context . . . . [allowing] ethnographers and other qualitative researchers [to] take a holistic perspective", a perspective which this research has aimed for (Davis, 1995, p. 432).

Tudor's view of the classroom reveals not a site of pedagogical perfection but a more active, living, dynamic environment influenced by students, teachers and others whose presence may not be so obvious such as the administrators, curriculum designers and parents (2001). Tudor specifically draws attention to what he calls the 'untidy' business of teaching in which the official discourse of teaching is not the whole story, the actual day-to-day practice being more detailed and diverse than is usually conceded. He resorts to the metaphor of a 'jam session' to show how it may evolve intuitively into a unique working reality in which individuals play a part (Tudor, 2001). Tudor's conceptualization takes cultural settings into account as well as individuals and suggests an inclusive way to explore the classroom that may uncover as yet unexplored realities that impact the experience and the learning. According to Spradley, culture is "the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior" a concept which may prove a useful tool in the complex cultural context of the ESL classroom (1980, as cited in Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 1998, p. 28). The importance of recognizing culturally prescribed ways of being and behaving which conflict with the dominant culture transmitted in the classroom is relevant to research in an American university in the UAE and may clarify issues that cause confusion (Facey, 2001; Hyland, 2002). Applying this ecological perspective to the complex perspectives of the participants involved in the writing/feedback loop gives a ready tool for exploiting the data quarried when culture and context are accentuated, potentially illuminating that which has gone unnoticed.

4.10 Addressing Weaknesses of an Ethnographic Approach

The bounty of the ethnographic approach to research can become the burden. This type of research means researchers are dealing with a massive amount of data from different sources and of diverse types such as written and verbal. Interpretation is important and must be approached cautiously. Hyland warns that researchers need to be

flexible and may even need to "reconsider procedures mid-study" highlighting the intricacy and delicacy of this type of research (2002, p. 158). A recursive analysis, sifting through data, allows for the gradual emergence of theory from the data, a naturalistic approach (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Kain, 2004).

Allowing for emergence is appropriate for research based on filtering the rich layers of material and authenticating concepts and categories through revisiting data and checking with participants that proposed hypotheses are tenable. This concept of member validation means "taking hypotheses and unresolved problems back to the participants themselves or to people in similar situations to them for their comments" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 297). Member validation is considered essential in an effort to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Secondly, when using member validation, the researcher needs to be certain to make it clear that what is sought is the truth as the participant sees it, not necessarily a verification of the hypothesis as such. Achieving this will help to validate emerging concepts and reduce researcher bias.

4.10.1 Researcher Bias

Researchers will bring personal prejudices and attitudes to the research process and clearly need to be aware of this. This is not an issue that applies only to qualitative research and awareness of the issue is important. Probably, the best we can hope for is "limiting observers' biases, not eliminating them" (Bogdan and Knopp Biklin, 1998, p. 34).

Bogdan and Knopp Biklen (1998, p. 34) claim that some researchers become so obsessed with personal bias that it paralyzes them and their advice is to "lighten up". However, as the researcher is the conduit through which the data passes in order to take its final shape, awareness of bias is essential. Involving others, such as colleagues, in the act of critiquing field notes, a form of member validation, is a good way to enhance objectivity (Davis, 1995). Open discussion of the data and the thought processes applied to it with others in the research context is a not inconsiderable means of maintaining objectivity and one employed in this research process through access to other interested instructors in the department who were willing to look at findings and interpretations and comment.

In this research, efforts have been made to address the researcher's prejudices about students' attitudes to writing tasks and feedback to reduce the influence of these views. This process of coming to terms with personal attitudes and beliefs was illuminated through the pilot study, discussed below, in which a lot of information

students supplied contradicted early beliefs about the feedback/revision cycle. The researcher kept informal notes of thoughts and interpretations throughout the research process as a further guard against bias.

4.10.2 Internal Validity

Qualitative research has had a struggle to establish its legitimacy, but proponents of the approach have challenged those who would attack. For example, Davis disputes the ability of quantitative research to produce "'hard' and replicable data" in contrast to qualitative research and sees a shift in the position of researchers, although it seems "the default assumption is [still] that qualitative studies are not rigorous" (1995, p.432).

Five years on, there are still signs of on-going disputes. The concept of validity that states research is valid if the instrument measures what it claims to measure has altered to fit qualitative research in all its richness as explained by Cohen et al.:

> In qualitative research validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher. . . . In qualitative data the subjectivity of respondents, their opinions, attitudes and perspectives together contribute a degree of bias. Validity, therefore should be seen as a matter of degree rather than an absolute state. (2000, p. 105)

So it seems that internal validity, the idea that the description can be sustained by the data, can be dealt with through openness and accessibility in terms of the data, peer examination of the data, member validation, and careful recording and storage of data (Cohen, et al., 2000). Although bias is present in personal accounts, as with researcher bias, acknowledging this is part of maximizing validity.

Access to all participants' perceptions of the experience of giving, receiving, and using feedback on written work through qualitative research methodology such as case study, which generates complex multidimensional data gathered from participants' reporting of actual experiences, feelings and actions, was what was sought in this research in an effort to "to get at language learners' mental strategies in acquiring an L2" (Davis, 1995, p. 428). However, it would be wrong to diminish the need to ensure a due amount of rigor is applied to the business of collecting, analyzing and reporting, as with any research, if a contribution is to be made to the existing body of knowledge (Davis, 1995; Hyland, 2002; Polio, 2003).

This warning was taken into account in order to enhance validity. Initially, considerable preparation took place before this research began. In what became a pilot study, in 2003 the researcher began investigating students' ideas about writing and the difficulties they faced and at that point formulated simple questionnaires that would elicit useful information from students (Appendix H). The responses further aroused the researcher's curiosity and a pilot study was conducted, the results of which were delivered in an unpublished presentation at the TESOL Arabia Conference in 2004 and concluded that students do read and attempt to use instructors' feedback and that becoming better informed about students' perceptions of feedback will encourage instructors to persist. The original questionnaires were altered to reduce confusion and redundancy where necessary and eventually presented on-line in the research process making it possible for students to respond at times suitable to them.

Then, as the pilot study had shown the limitations of questionnaires, other data sources were added such as individual interviews and focus groups that covered similar ground to the questionnaires but from different perspectives. Also, an analysis of essays and feedback received and responded to was conducted. These initiatives meant it was possible for clarification to be sought when ideas were unclear or appeared in conflict with one another. As the study progressed, all instructors in the department were invited to offer insights in an effort to seek confirmation that the findings emerging from the data held truth according to the experiences of others in the department.

Also, as referred to briefly above, the addition of focus groups toward the end of the data gathering process meant that member checks were an integral part of understanding the data and what was revealed. Participants were given the chance to interact on topics generated from the data, and this allowed the researcher to see how the groups responded to and expanded upon what appeared to be significant points arising out of the data and allowed for discussion, clarification and confirmation of perspectives. This type of clarification prevents researchers from arriving at erroneous or poorly supported conclusions. Morgan (1997, p. 27) describes this as accessing "follow-up data collection that pursues 'exploratory' aspects of the analysis".

Morgan (1997) raises the issue that qualitative research that gathers data through both individual interviews and focus groups may produce different results, which could threaten validity. However, Morgan concludes that different results may be as much about context as about validity (Morgan 1997). Certainly, the importance of context is a clear explanation for the way in which discussions proceeded in the

particular focus group sessions, which did not actually contradict information gathered in individual interviews, but rather complemented and expanded it. Contradictory views were able to be discussed, justified and accepted as being pertinent to the expectations and experience of individuals. Underlying reasons for perceptions came into focus such as the different perspectives of the instructors of the students in terms of the amount of revision done. Prolonged and persistent engagement with the site and participants over several years, along with repeated reference to participants for checking and gaining assurance that descriptions and interpretations accurately reflected what was experienced added to the validity of the research.

4.10.3 Generalizability

Although it may at first appear that it is unlikely that the same student body and mix of instructors in a similar setting is likely to be available to interested researchers in the future, this is not quite so nor is it a significant limitation of the research. Firstly, certain aspects of this research could be replicated, for example it would be possible to specifically target Arabic speaking students, the main participants in this research, and their reactions to written feedback in freshman essays. This could be conducted with instructors with similar backgrounds. Furthermore, universities similar to the one this research was conducted at are expanding in the Arabian Gulf region making it possible to conduct very similar research in an analogous institution with a roughly comparable student body. Therefore, the intention has been to make the processes as clear as possible to encourage generalizability (Polio, 2003).

In addition, generalizability, "referring to whether the findings of a particular study hold up beyond the specific research subjects and the setting involved" (Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 1998, p. 32), while not strictly applicable to qualitative research, is not the only measure of the worth of the research. Goldstein (2005) points out that no research is really generalizable suggesting that a more complete picture may be attainable through multiple small studies.

Qualitative research conducted in a specific cultural context, such as this, has much to offer if conducted and reported stringently. So, although the insights of the participants in a specific setting are not strictly generalizable, rather than seeing this as a negative aspect, qualitative research can be seen as the kind of research that allows for detailed explanation and understanding of what is specific to a particular group (Edge & Richards, 1998; Hyland, 2002; Tudor, 2001). Ultimately, this type of research allows for knowing a lot about a particular site and the actors' perspectives and

interpretations of interactions. And, at the same time, insights gleaned from a wealth of detail can aid further research on the same topic assuming the researcher has been as transparent as possible about procedures and conclusions reached within the context to allow for clear understandings. A rigid effort to make qualitative research adhere to the demands that have come out of traditional, experimental scientific research "reflects a continuing feeling of induced inferiority" best set aside as qualitative researchers develop confidence in other means of appropriately useful and usable reporting (Edge & Richards, 1998, p. 338).

Finally, although generalizability is not a particular strength of such a contextually and culturally bound study as this research, there are many points of contact with other research in similar settings. In addition, as research in this field builds up, this one piece of research may be seen to have more relevance in an, as yet, relatively under-researched area of ESL, though one which is developing (Al-Khatib, 2006).

4.10.4 Triangulation

Data triangulation was handled through examining different sources of information all related to the same issue, the feedback/revision cycle (Seale, 1999). Data collected from actual essays showed what feedback instructors actually offered and was examined in the light of instructors' claims made in the interviews, providing two sources of information. Follow-up interviews as the process of analysis of the transcripts took place, particularly with instructors, allowed for clarification of conflicting findings where there was any potential misunderstanding. Also, instructors' comments and descriptions were examined in the light of students' perceptions of the classroom dynamics and written feedback gathered through questionnaires and interviews. Then, later in the study the perceptions of the current WRI 101 students at that time on particular aspects of the feedback/revision cycle were accessed through two focus groups. Finally, as general trends emerged, these were put before the department as a whole for further discussion. This created methodological triangulation of data (Cohen et al., 2000). This multiple examination of perceptions and actions assured that the data used in the research truly represented what the participants intended to convey and the interpretations of the researcher were accurate.

An additional source of information was available when participant instructors supplied copies of their official student evaluations and their students' final grades, so that this information could be added to the perspectives students offered of their

classroom experience. This data allowed for comparisons between what students had to say in interviews with the researcher, who they also knew was an instructor in the department, and what they said in a completely anonymous situation reporting using the official university evaluation sheets. It also allowed for comparison of student participants' affective responses with their final grade in the course. Chapelle and Duff (2003, p. 165) indicate that bringing together "multiple perspectives . . . adds texture, depth, and multiple insights to an analysis and can enhance the validity and credibility of the results". According to Anderson, it is possible to "use triangulation to interpret converging evidence" (1990, p. 163).

4.10.5 Qualitative Research Justified

To sum up, research using qualitative data has begun to stand up to earlier criticisms. To continue this robustness, researchers using qualitative methodology need: to be flexible, to be willing to modify questions in the light of incoming data, to enhance credibility through prolonged engagement, observation, triangulation and multiple sources, and to search for patterns in data related to frequent and rare events. Research reporting needs to be rich in detail and include an analysis of meanings from the participants' perspectives (Hyland, 2002). Indeed, the rich descriptive data available and access to instruments such as questionnaires and starter interview questions mean that it would be possible to authenticate emergent concepts and potentially translate or transfer this research to suitable settings (Cohen et al., 2001; Krueger & Case, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polio, 2003).

Critics of qualitative research may find some issue with the weaknesses referred to above. However, every effort has been made to address these and conduct the research in an open manner but ensuring that it does not compromise confidentiality obligations.

4.11 Instruments and Analytical Procedures

Questionnaires and interviews were used in conjunction with brief, targeted classroom observations. Eventually, to converge on emerging issues, focus groups made up of participating instructors and, in separate groups, participating students were added to the research process. In addition, text materials were scrutinized. Copies of essays including peer and instructor feedback, as well as revisions on drafts, were gathered from the interview students.

4.11.1 Questionnaires

In order to get a broad range of responses on students' perceptions of instructor and peer feedback, questionnaires, which can gather a lot of information from a lot of students, were used to show the general trends of students' perceptions. Hyland reminds us that questionnaires only gather information on what people "say they think or do and not direct evidence of it" (2002, p. 166). Therefore questionnaires were only one of four ways data were gathered. The initial questionnaires were piloted over a period of more than a year, as described above, and alterations were made to eliminate ambiguity and redundancy from the questions so that participants were not overburdened (Hyland, 2002).

The questionnaires used a four point Likert scale to capture general trends in students' perceptions of the feedback process as they experienced it; they were also intended to gauge satisfaction with instructor and peer feedback. In addition, the opportunities to respond with open-ended questions gathered some interpretive, qualitative data.

Three distinct questionnaires were used and presented at different stages of the semester timed to fit the students' writing experiences as they worked through drafts. The first questionnaire asked students for their perceptions of the usefulness of the instructor's feedback; the second asked the students what feedback they would have wanted from their instructor had they had a choice; the final one required the students to respond to questions on the peer editing process (Appendixes I, J & K).

Using questionnaires to gather data has a number of advantages. The data gathered is controlled by the questions, so provides clarity and precision, which is useful for reporting purposes (Hyland, 2002). It is suitable for cross-checking to see if what is coming out of the interviews is reflected in the responses from a wider sample through the questionnaires. All three questionnaires were presented on-line and the quantitative data automatically collated. It was used in an effort to show 'central tendency' (Brown, 1988, p. 66). This data was useful for creating easily understood figures in a few key areas to support or further illustrate concepts as they emerged from the data. In addition, the open-ended questions provided qualitative data in relation to the experiences the students had with feedback. This data was compared and questioned in similar ways to that described for interviews below

4.11.2 Interviews

Interviews, often a principal source of gathering data and triangulating information, were conducted with participating instructors plus three students selected from the participating class for each instructor. Deciding who to interview is an issue of "fitness for purpose" (Cohen, et al., 2000, p. 270). Instructors volunteered and were enthusiastic interviewees. The choice of students was intended to ensure a range of writing abilities, but it was also decided by the willingness of students to put the time into discussing their experiences.

How the interviews were conducted was also important. Different types of interviews lead to different types of data gathering. Interviews can go beyond the restrictions of questionnaires and allow participants to reveal their perspectives as well as express their feelings, giving a full account of their experiences. Interviews "offer the researcher an extremely flexible tool for gaining privileged access to others' lives" (Hyland, 2002, p. 181). Interviews, where the interviewee takes the experience beyond the original questions, make it possible to explore the social situatedness of research data. The exploration of personal experiences was what was sought and allowing interviewees to take the initiative at times encouraged the emergence of such data. This is only achieved if trust is established and although students were sometimes reticent, others were able to offer insights more freely.

4.11.2.1 Instructor Interviews

The interviews with instructors started with a set of prepared questions designed to get instructors talking about issues and attitudes to do with the institution, the program, the students' writing practices and use of feedback, and how they responded to students' writing (Appendix L). The impetus for these questions arose both out of the literature and out of my own knowledge of the context and my experiences as a writing instructor. At times there was a need to draw the interviewee back to this path to ensure coverage of key points. But, on the whole, flexibility was employed so that the direction of the interviews was decided at least as much by what the instructors wanted to talk about as the interviewer's questions and in this way checks and balances in terms of interviewer bias were applied (Cohen et al., 2000). Each instructor participant had a minimum of two interviews followed by the chance to read transcripts and comment further as required. Also, as ideas emerged from analysis of the data, brief informal interviews were undertaken to verify interpretations, or in some cases, brief email exchanges served the same purpose.

4.11.2.2 Student Interviews

The questions for the student interviews were quite different from those used for instructors. Here the focus was on getting the students to offer comments freely on how they saw themselves as writers and on the way they tackled the process of receiving and responding to feedback (Appendix M). I was particularly interested to see why they chose not to act on feedback, an idea that arose from the literature as largely unexplored. Interviews were a major part of the research process. As the students had fluent oral skills, skills that go far beyond their abilities to express themselves in writing, they were engaging communicators.

4.11.3 Data Analysis of Interviews and Questionnaires

Sorting through the mass of data was done through the filter of the research questions which aided categorizing and setting aside of some interesting data that did not actually relate to the focus of the research. This is called data reduction and should eventually mean that the research has a "set of categories that answer the research questions in a meaningful, thick description that provides summarization" (deMarrias, 2004, p. 232).

In the case of the students, there was one additional source of data – the questionnaires. The interviews covered similar ground to the questionnaires but because of the opportunity to continue a line of questioning, more detailed responses were encouraged. Patterns were looked for and care was taken to seek clarification if there appeared to be contradictions; in addition, some data, particularly from the questionnaires was compiled in graph form allowing for a clear descriptive summary and comparisons between groups (Morgan, 1997). It became apparent that some issues were of particular interest to students and these were focused on. Emerging concepts were identified and compared with what surfaced from other data sources, such as the actual essays. In this way a fuller descriptive picture was built allowing for theory to grow out of it.

Instructors were vociferous sources of data demonstrating considerable willingness to discuss practices and perspectives. Analysis of this talk showed the emergence of patterns in the instructors' perceptions of students' responses to writing tasks and feedback. Concepts were grouped looking for consistency of response and what this showed. Although each instructor and their class was examined as a single case study unit, comparison and contrast with the ideas from other instructors and their

classes also helped to highlight conceptions of what was taking place in these classes and in the feedback/revision cycles.

Confirmation and contestation began to emerge through examining instructors' and students' different perspectives of the handling of feedback. Unanswered questions, perplexing concepts or challenging remarks emerging from the data led to repeatedly exploring what interviewees appeared to have been conveying and checking back with participants where possible or searching written sources of available data such as essays and questionnaires, and so exploring the issues further. This exploration of data helped to expose and clarify connections between ideas emerging from different sources and took the research beyond a purely descriptive account of the participants' experiences to one that allowed for a fuller understanding of the experiences of participants.

Although in-depth exploration was possible with instructors, the opportunity to draw on further discussion from the students dwindled at later stages of the research. Ultimately as key concepts emerged the need to further explore led to the inclusion of focus groups.

4.11.4 Focus Groups

In order to explore instructors' and students' ideas and experiences with feedback on written work further, focus groups were included as part of this multi-method study. While interviews provide the opportunity to go deeply into individual experiences, focus groups open up the possibility of getting information through interactions within the group (Morgan, 1997). They also allow for clarification in relation to issues arising from other sources of data,

Focus groups have been found increasingly in qualitative academic research as social scientists borrow from market research practices (Morgan, 1997). The advantage of setting up focus groups was that rather than having participants respond to the researcher's questions, which posits the researcher as leading the discussion, the participants interact with each other on topics supplied by the researchers (Morgan, 1997). It is this group interaction that has the potential to reveal new insights. According to Morgan (1997, p. 3), focus groups fit well into an ethnographic model, which has "traditionally involved a blend of observation and interviewing". However, focus groups have been questioned on the basis that the moderator can influence the group's interaction even unintentionally, but it is unlikely that the moderator impacts

the data any more than an interviewer does in the usual interview situation (Morgan, 1997).

The degree to which the focus group is managed by the researcher varies, although it is possible to conduct focus groups in which the participants are encouraged to manage the exchanges and develop confidence in keeping the momentum going (Morgan, 1997). The researcher needs to make it clear that as much information as possible, and all opinions, are welcome. Creating the right atmosphere is crucial and in this research the fact that all the instructors knew each other well, and respected each other as colleagues made this a reasonably easy task with instructor focus groups. Clearly, confidentiality is not possible in this situation, so trust becomes even more important.

Although, ideally the focus group develops a momentum of its own, questions are needed to get the discussion started. Care with the development and delivery of questions may limit the researcher's impact on the way a focus group develops. In addition to the types of questions asked, the sequence of questions is important as it should allow participants to reflect not only on what they have to say but also on what the other participants have to say (Krueger, 1998). This feature of the exchange possible in focus groups is entirely missing from interviews and may be the one main feature of focus groups that makes them potentially productive. Participants reflect on their own understanding and/or actions in the light of the reflection encouraged by listening to the other participants. And focus groups provide researchers with the chance to "observe a large amount of interaction on a topic" (Morgan, 1997, p. 8), which has the potential to provide insights not gleaned when working with individuals.

4.11.4.1 Instructor Focus Group

The instructor focus group for the participating instructors, which ran for slightly more than one hour, was easily arranged as all the instructors were willing and cooperative participants. In order to allow the researcher to withdraw into the background and let the participants set the direction, instructors were given copies of materials taken from teacher and student interviews all related to a theme, which were used to prompt discussion and get participants exchanging ideas on it. These themes covered such ideas as the views students have of themselves as writers, and the instructors' perceptions of the effort students make to act on feedback.

This was recorded and transcribed in the same way as with the interviews. Following the focus groups, individual questions were put to instructors either directly

in conversations or through email to gain further clarification of comments they had made. On occasion additional material, such as final grades for the classes and student evaluation forms, was requested as a result of ideas emerging from the group. In this way a clearer picture of each case study unit was built up.

4.11.4.2 Student Focus Groups

The aim with the student focus groups was to get students together to discuss their experiences with feedback on essays and their strategies for handling this, what else may have helped them and why sometimes they do not act on the feedback (Appendix N). It was also hoped that discussion of these ideas and of some apparently contradictory data from the questionnaires would help to build up a fuller and sharper picture from the students' viewpoint.

Initial attempts to get together a focus group were disappointing. Of the 51 students contacted three agreed to take part and then emailed at the last minute to say they were busy with assignments. The three students who responded were all from the class that had most recently taken part in the research indicating that the time that had passed meant that earlier participants had become completely disengaged.

As a result of this setback, the current WRI 101 students from one class for two of the three participating instructors were asked to take part. One instructor found it impossible to schedule this. Therefore, small groups of approximately six students from two instructors' classes got together and discussed the written feedback they were receiving on essays and issues that they had with it (Appendix O). Although they didn't know me, they knew each other as they had been together for 14 weeks of a 16 week semester and were relaxed enough to express themselves with relative ease.

4.11.5 Data Analysis of Focus Groups

Morgan claims that the analysis of data from focus groups must not get caught up in concerns over the group versus the individual as the unit of analysis but rather needs to consider the "interplay between these two levels of analysis" (1997, p. 60). This is because both the individuals in the group and the group context itself are influences on what is said. This was apparent in the instructor focus group where there was hesitancy getting started and where one participant, Lydia, was inclined to dominate possibly because she is generally outspoken and quite dominant in the department. Although the microdynamics of group interaction such as turn-taking, eye-contact and speech patterns could shed more light on what happens in focus groups and

in fact were noted by the researcher to some extent, full detailed analysis of these factors was beyond the scope of this research (Morgan, 1997).

Clearly, researchers analyze data from focus groups according to the needs of their research, and in this instance interpretive summaries of the data were the primary concern. Because groups of this kind produce a lot of data, selection and rejection is necessary. Length of discussion may indicate interest in the topic, but according to Morgan (1997) may not relate directly to the importance of the topic. The instructors tended to have a lot to say, so it was necessary to look at which topics were referred to often and how much attention was paid to the topic by the individual members and how much energy and enthusiasm was put into it (Morgan, 1997). Also, the appearance of the same topic in individual interviews and the attention paid to it in that setting was a way to see that this was significant enough to be a recurrent theme for the participant.

The students were not as wordy as the instructors. In addition, their focus groups were of a shorter duration, so there was less material to deal with. The selection process was substantially the same for the students' groups as for the instructors. Care was taken to identify repeated ideas and ideas that had appeared in earlier interviews in an effort to find what was of interest or concern to the students.

4.11.6 Informal Observations

Interactions with others in the social context are a rich source of material to assist understandings of what people do and why, and observations are one way of seeing these interactions in context (Cohen et al., 2000). However, there are circumstances where observations do not provide a clear picture such as when research wants to understand inherently unobservable processes (Morgan, 1997). The decision-making instructors and students are involved in when dealing with giving and reacting to feedback on written work is one such unobservable process.

The role of "participant-as-observer" was not unfamiliar to me; however, my status as researcher was known to all participants and ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity were strictly adhered to in all circumstances (Cohen et al., 2000). The potential for the occurrence of critical incidents, "particular events or occurrences that might typify or illuminate very starkly" an attitude or behavior, were the reason for taking advantage of remarks in casual settings or from discussions (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 310). As the opportunity to observe such moments was linked to social and professional interactions, these 'critical incidents' were more likely to occur in relation to instructors than students. However, 'critical incidents' can occur fleetingly in many

situations including interviews and therefore were incipient features of the analysis of all data.

4.11.7 Instructors' Emailed Comments

Prompts in the form of general trends emerging from the data gathered were compiled and shared with departmental faculty (Appendix P). Information was gathered from the faculty through email exchanges with the researcher. This approach was resorted to when it became apparent that there was little interest in taking part in focus groups to consider emerging data. The alternative approach taken was to email groups of 3-4 statements/questions to the whole department and invite a response. As DWS faculty are used to communicating through email, this produced responses at a satisfactory level. Not all instructors participated but 12 did and on more than one occasion. By that point the department had 21 full-time faculty including the researcher. The emails were examined for ways in which these individuals' responses confirmed or contradicted findings emerging from the other sources of data. They added another dimension to the findings. Ultimately, these insights were added into the discussion chapter taking care to preserve anonymity.

4.11.8 Data Analysis of Students' Essays

For the students participating in interviews, the essays written during the semester were discussed with the student as part of the interview process. They were also examined again later at the researcher's leisure and where necessary, discussed with the participating instructors. Primarily, the focus was on the feedback-revision cycle.

Students' essays were analyzed in several ways. The examination of the feedback revealed what the instructor responded to and what was ignored. Comments by instructors were coded to differentiate between diverse types of comments. Firstly, they were coded according to whether they focused on content, spelling and mechanics or form. Clarity was also considered with some comments coded as 'uncertain' or 'other'. As well as this, content comments were coded according to length and clarity. As the instructors' feedback varied considerably in terms of the types of written comments, the comprehensibility of the comments and the purpose of these comments, the intention was to see which of these types of comments were more likely to lead to productive revisions. The revised essays were examined to determine what advice the students had actually acted upon with what degree of success or if revisions appeared to be impelled by some other consideration on the part of the students. Goldstein

recommends that researchers examine texts rather than relying on what students report doing as there will be a disparity (2005).

What was revealed in terms of the feedback/revision cycle was examined through the filter of both the instructors' and the students' actual comments on what they believed they had done and their expressions of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the results. The intention here was to try to establish the extent to which feedback had influenced revision and led to a higher quality essay.

Later analysis of data led to questions being put to instructors through email exchange in an effort to clarify points of interest. Care was taken to ensure that any revelations, which may have revealed a conflict of opinions between students and instructor, were not brought to the attention of the instructor until after the students had completed the semester to avoid any potential risk to the student. This reanalysis of these essays proved to be a powerful catalyst for gathering data as conflicting understandings emerged about students' level of commitment and willingness to act on advice.

4.12 Making Sense of a Plethora of Data

There were many data sources and inevitably much data to deal with. The process of selection was extremely time-consuming and quite taxing. All sources of data had to be examined, coded, grouped, and periodically re-examined. Inevitably, considering that most interviews were 5,000 words or more once transcribed, there was a lot of data that fell by the wayside and was never referred to at all. This process of elimination is an inevitable part of dealing with the volume of data produced in qualitative research. A delicate balance is necessary between the need to provide the reader with enough access to the real voices of the participants without creating a disconnected series of quotations taking the report into the realm of stream of consciousness (Morgan, 1997). The other part of this balance is not to summarize so much that the reader is too removed from the real experiences of the participants (Leki, 2000; Morgan, 1997).

Clearly, putting the voices of numerous participants together in a meaningful way so that the end result represents the perspectives of the individuals and presents a reasoned approach to answering the research questions is a delicate and daunting task. Most emergent researchers have some comprehension of this at the beginning of the process but, I suspect, would have been profoundly in awe of their own audacity in

launching into such a project had they been more fully aware of the challenge and the complexity of the task at the outset.

4.13 Summary

The setting of the research is fully explored in this chapter, which gives details of the department where the research was conducted and the participants in the case studies. The research design is set out exploring the research problem, instructors' doubts about the usefulness of written feedback on written work, and the research questions. The methodology is examined in detail revealing the use of case studies in an ethnographic approach. The instruments and data analyses used are discussed in detail revealing the wealth of data that must be managed in this type of qualitative research.

This chapter gives details of the research methodology. The next chapter presents the data collected from the instructor and the students in the first of three case studies. It covers the data gathered from: questionnaires, interviews and focus groups with the instructor and the students, and from students' essays.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

CASE STUDY ONE: LYDIA AND HER STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR WRITING/REVISING EXPERIENCES

The case study approach taken in this research, centering as it does on the instructors' and students' perceptions of classroom interactions, with particular emphasis on feedback procedures, has produced an abundance of material. Making sense of it and, through a process of selection and rejection, reducing it to a manageable amount still left a lot of material to be dealt with. As each class was dealt with as an individual case study with a particular dynamic of its own, it seemed appropriate to report the findings in separate chapters. In this way, each specific classroom culture and actual experience with feedback procedures as well as the participants' perceptions of the feedback/revision cycle they experienced are illustrated more clearly.

5.1 Introduction to Case Study One

The writing instructor for this class, Lydia, and her students Huda, Rana, Mahar and Abdulla (no real names were used) will be the focus of this chapter. The intention was to build up a rich description of the classroom experience, and show the struggles the participants went through managing the teaching and learning environment, specifically the feedback/revision cycle. The focus was on the perceptions of all participants and the actual practices. The data referred to here revealing Lydia's views comes from two interviews, informal discussions, emails exchanged as more questions arose from an examination of the data, and the focus group that was held with all three participating instructors. In addition, data from students' essays, questionnaires and interviews gave insights into the students' perspectives in an effort to fully represent the experience of the participants in this semester-long case study. Eventually, as member checking with the original students became impossible as they moved on through their course, a focus group was set up with the instructor's current WRI 101 class to clarify some points of interest.

5.2 The Impact of the Instructor's Teaching and Cultural Background

The data collected through the case study approach and the ethnographic focus of the research gave access to detailed information on the teaching and learning experiences of Lydia and her students. Lydia was a vociferous communicator and willingly shared her views on teaching in this particular setting. Initially, some difficult to unravel contradictions appeared in the data. There seemed to be no rational link

between the unenthusiastic assessments Lydia offered of the students in terms of engagement with the course and other data about or from them. For one thing, despite Lydia's criticisms of the students, they reported positively on their experiences with the instructor. And for another, the grades received did not seem to match Lydia's view of the students' efforts. Some contradictions were explicable when the instructor's prior teaching experience and struggle adapting to a new culture of learning were taken into account.

Experience teaching in a North American setting is one of the main criteria used for selecting instructors for GSU. Prior to her arrival in the UAE two years before this research began, Lydia's teaching experience had been in the USA with freshman writing classes. She had no ESL training and had not taught ESL or non-native speakers (NNS) before coming to the UAE, so it is reasonable to assume that her teaching practice had been with students who understood her expectations of them as independent, responsible learners. However, in the UAE the dominant culture is more group-oriented. This difference in cultural orientation has an impact on classroom interactions and could be unsettling for an instructor new to the experience. It is rare to see students exhibit independent learning behaviors as they tend to anticipate a lenient approach and a lot of support from the instructor and each other.

In addition, Lydia had not been well informed about the experience of teaching in the UAE. She had been told at the interview for the job, conducted in the USA, that the students at GSU were roughly similar to those she had been teaching, which neither took account of differences in culture nor of the fact that they are largely ESL students. And initially, she was disillusioned and despondent; echoes of this despondency come through in some of her observations on students' poor learning behaviors.

One other aspect relevant to Lydia's response to the experience of teaching in the UAE was her motivation to come to the UAE, the degree to which her expectations were met, and the adjustments that Lydia had had to make to accommodate some disappointment. Lydia had come to the UAE with economic and academic goals that had not been fulfilled. She had anticipated being part of a richer intellectual community than her experience had provided access to. She was also surprised to find that American culture, which she was critical of, had a more powerful influence on her way of thinking and being than she had previously realized. Living and teaching outside of the USA appears to have been more of a culture shock than Lydia had anticipated and

one that she was still adapting to. The struggle to accept the limitations of the job she was asked to do and the students' engagement with what she had to offer was evident.

5.3 University Classroom Culture: Expectations and Obligations

Lydia had not worked with students who had the difficulties in writing that many of the GSU students presented her. Yet her response when asked to assess whether they were ESL/EFL students indicated that she had chosen not to take account of the fact that for most of them English was a second language. When I had posed this question, I had anticipated a discussion on whether or not they were ESL or EFL students; therefore, I was surprised at Lydia's response.

> Lydia: Ah, you mean, those are my choices? ESL/EFL or in some other way?
> Interviewer: Or in some other way, yeah, I mean, how do you see them?
> Lydia: I see them as freshmen university students.
> Interviewer: You do? You don't see them as ESL/EFL students?
> Lydia: No, I refuse to acknowledge that. I make it a big deal actually because they have chosen to go to university in an English based learning environment. That means they have to produce at that level. And I make no apologies for that, nor any excuses for them. They just have to rise to the occasion.
> (Lydia, first interview)

Admittedly, some students were bilingual or nearly so, but this was not the case for most of the students.

It was evident that Lydia was claiming to approach her classes as if the ESL needs of the students should be dealt with by the students. She maintained this position consistently throughout the study, and over time, the likely motivation behind these comments came through. For example, in the instructor focus group, Lydia indicated that from her perspective, through choosing to attend an English medium university, the students were under an obligation to meet the standards set, and she was under an obligation to maintain those standards.

> They have a right to expect an American education. They have a responsibility to be able to perform at that level. We can make some concessions in preparing them to do that, but very few.
> (Lydia, instructor focus group)

Also, in response to another instructor's comments about students from government schools lobbying for easier reading assignments, claiming they were unable to handle the work because of the low level of English instruction they had received at government schools, Lydia was uncompromising.

> This is a university freshman writing course. Deal with that. If you can't or don't want to, go and talk to mum and dad because you need to transfer to a different university or at least out of my class.
> (Lydia, instructor focus group)

These resolute comments indicate that Lydia was guided to a large extent by what she felt the students had a right to expect and an obligation to rise to. She saw it as her responsibility to provide the students with access to an academic experience very similar to that provided in universities in America. Putting these comments together, it emerges that for Lydia, having the students adapt to her conception of university education, even though it was a challenge for all participants, represented her commitment to the students; however, the difficulties she faced striving to make this happen were audible in the comments.

5.3.1 Molding Behaviors

Although it is apparent that Lydia wanted the students to adapt to her concept of classroom culture, she acknowledged that she was different from the teacher she had been in the USA in ways she was uncomfortable with and posited students and their behaviors as the source of the changes.

> I find that my teaching has changed a lot here in a way that I don't like. I blame this on them [students]. They've made me into a teacher I don't want to be which is incredibly strict, a bitch, you know. . . . I use public humiliation every day on somebody. I just make huge examples, embarrassing examples of students who are misbehaving that looks anything like not being a university student. And I do it with a smile on my face and I laugh but I kick them out. And you know, they get it. And they stop any sort of immature, irresponsible behavior but it's not the sort of pedagogy I would applaud. If I was observing me I would say – Wow! That's not, I don't know, can't you get more bees with honey?
> (Lydia, instructor focus group)

The picture, illustrating a punitive response to the students, looks grim, but the words may not fully represent reality in the classroom. Firstly, it is clear that all participants' behaviors – the instructor's and the students' - are undergoing some modification. Secondly, Lydia admits that she would be quite shocked to see another teacher relate to students this way, so the question is why does she give herself permission to do this? I can only conclude that it is unlikely that she would continue to do it if the classroom atmosphere was suffering. Thirdly, Lydia appeared to be trying to set standards that would make it possible for learning to take place and have students meet those

standards. Admittedly they are the instructor's standards informed by her prior experience and take little account of the students' culture of learning.

5.3.2 Negotiating and Adapting

Lydia's statements showed a strong desire to have the students make the compromises and little evidence of an awareness of the benefits of an ecological approach to teaching taking in the totality of the lives of the participants and their educational experiences and expectations (Tudor, 2001). On the contrary, Lydia comes across as a tough talking, autocratic teacher, determined to have students operate her way for their ultimate good. However, despite this effort to maintain the standards she was used to, there was evidence that Lydia had made adjustments to fit into the learning environment, some possibly unrecognized. For instance, the following comment in response to a question about what she saw as the focus of WRI 101 showed that she was still struggling to see the students as university students, but she was appreciably taking on responsibility for getting them to where she wanted them to be.

> My goals and objectives are multiple and have far less to do with writing than they probably should be. But, they are: one, to bring them into the world of university life; to teach them, give them the opportunity to practice, and become aware of their responsibilities as young adults attending university. I spend a fair amount of time on that.
> (Lydia, first interview)

It is apparent in this comment that the students' level of readiness for the tasks ahead of them was well below what Lydia expected and that she was taking steps to scaffold the transition she had in mind. Even simple tasks like organizing the materials needed for class were issues that Lydia had had to contend with in ways she had never experienced before. She mentioned that to deal with the lack of basic materials, she had gone so far as to make having books, pens and paper a practical quiz in order to ensure students had some hope of getting organized.

When problems arose with some aspects of the textbooks, since they relied heavily on background knowledge of American politics and history that the students did not have, Lydia made an effort to supplement them with Middle Eastern writers' materials. Also, the instructor showed evidence of cultural awareness and sensitivity preparing students for writing tasks. For example, when preparing students for writing personal narrative, she made specific reference to a trip to Mecca as an event that could be significant to them, clearly acknowledging the importance of Islam in the lives of

the students. This responsiveness came from a teacher who at first appeared adamant that the culture of learning she represented was the one that must dominate in her classroom. Despite the talk of an uncompromising demand for the students to come rapidly into the realm of university behavior in a manner expected of L1 university students, Lydia's dominance was not as strong as it appeared initially and behaviors had changed on both sides of the desk.

5.3.3 Adding to the Picture: Students' Impressions of the Instructor

Although, this instructor's demands for adherence to her view of culturally appropriate classroom behavior may seem harsh to proponents of an ecological perspective of classroom culture, it seemed to work. Certainly, the students' evaluations of Lydia were better than the departmental average, which would be unlikely if the classroom experience had been unpleasant (Table 5.1). Affective comments about her teaching practices were warm. For example: she is perfect; her method of teaching is unique and gorgeous; she adds excitement to the class (unidentified students, Lydia's class). Negative comments related only to work load, a common feature of students' evaluations of DWS faculty.

Table 5.1

Evaluations by Students: Lydia, Department & College

Individual or group	Evaluation Scale of 1-4[a]
Lydia	1.51
Department Average	1.77
College Average	1.70

[a] Closer to 1 is better

5.3.4 Grades and Evaluations

One addendum that may have influenced students' evaluations of the instructor was that, ultimately, more than half the students scored B- or above for the course (Table 5.2). There was no information available that suggested students knew their grades at the time evaluations were conducted towards the end of the semester. However, when so many in the class are passing so well, this could be reflected in evaluations of the instructor. Also, there appeared to be an interesting contradiction

between these grades and critical comments about the students and their willingness to work at university level peppering the instructor's talk.

Table 5.2

Lydia's Class Final Grade Range

	A/A-	B+/B/B-	C+/C/C-	D	F
Number Awarded [a]	7	9	2	1	1

[a] n=20

5.3.5 English Fluency and Literacy Issues

One issue that concerned Lydia was her belief that many students had little understanding of their level as writers. Lydia had felt it necessary to sell the course since the students tended not to see the value of WRI 101 partly because they thought they could communicate quite well as it was. Being able to speak English well enough to communicate in many different contexts in their daily lives meant that students tended not to realize that they needed to acquire the skills to communicate with precision in writing. This may have led some students to be unwilling to accept the instructor's evaluations of their writing.

> I've never run into such an inflated sense of ability as I've run into here. Nowhere ever, in any field of experience, have I run into people who are so inappropriately over-confident.
> (Lydia, instructor focus group)

Going back to Lydia during the data analysis phase for more input on the matter of overestimating writing ability and challenging grades, it emerged that she had come to believe that this behavior was to do with the previous educational experience students had had with English.

> I am certain that in many instances students' overestimation of their English literacy skills emerges from learning English from non-native and/or non-fluent (L2, L3, L4, etc) English speakers because these teachers themselves have poor English literacy skills, thus are unable to accurately assess the skills of their students.
> (Lydia, personal communication, August 27, 2007)

Lydia believed that earlier inaccurate assessments of their writing meant they experienced difficulty accepting the current evaluations.

Further evidence on this matter came from the students themselves. Few GSU students reported that they enjoyed reading, and criticism of the students' reading skills

and willingness to read was a common theme among DWS instructors. Lydia made reference to lack of literacy amongst the students repeatedly.

> You know the fact is that they don't read, and they don't know what makes for good writing because they don't read it.
> (Lydia, instructor focus group)

Classroom interactions between the multi-cultural, but predominantly Arab students, and the American instructor were manifestly complex. There was ample space for misunderstanding and misinterpretation of actions and motives. The expectations of all participants appeared to have gone through a continuous process of adjustment as this group of individuals adapted to each other, a process, which presumably is started anew to some extent every semester.

5.4 The Writing Process Approach

In the interviews, Lydia expounded enthusiastically on the process approach to writing. Over the course of the interviews, Lydia frequently used a commerce metaphor, possibly reflecting her background in business, with reference to getting the students to accept what she was offering. She talked a lot about selling the course to the students; her commitment to the writing process approach, willingness to make bold statements about its efficacy, and her desire to have the students "buy into" what she was offering were explicitly articulated.

> And I guarantee that to them, if they use the writing process, they will be a better writer at the end of the semester. Not because of me, but because of them.
> (Lydia, first interview)

Lydia's conception of the writing process emphasized the need to convey to students the importance of an awareness of audience and purpose. The instructor spoke about the need to expose the students to academic discourse and the difficulties managing this were a source of frustration.

> We're still not showing them academic discourse for the most part, so I think that's a problem with our curriculum.
> (Lydia, first interview)

Although the curriculum is mentioned as a limitation, Lydia made an effort to locate and use materials that demonstrated academic discourse. However, the immaturity of the students, which Lydia attributed to their privileged lifestyles, meant that there were difficulties getting students to engage with tasks and was evident not just in a lack of preparedness for academic tasks, but also in little ways such as coming to class with an expensive mobile phone on display, but without a pen.

5.4.1 Actual Use of the Writing Process

Although this instructor expressed considerable faith in the process approach to teaching writing, actual practice indicated that in the particular semester that data was gathered, the feedback/revision cycle was gone through fully only once with the class in the study. The second graded essay was returned during exam week. As the feedback/revision cycle was the focus of the research, and I had anticipated interviewing the students as they completed each feedback revision cycle, this was a little daunting for me.

Lydia had appeared to be very enthusiastic about the study at the beginning and took part enthusiastically in the interviews. However, I began to realize that the class was not moving at the pace I had anticipated when seven weeks into the semester the instructor had not, as arranged, notified me that the students had completed or nearly completed the first essay, the plan having been that the relevant questionnaire would be administered at that point. On contacting the instructor, I found that the students had not yet written a first essay. Normally in a 16 week semester, it is reasonable to anticipate that the first essay is on the way if not completed by week seven and that the remaining two will be spread out over the last nine weeks. As it turned out this was not to be, and due to delays, it was only possible for me to interview the three student volunteers once in the time frame available.

Table 5.3

Timeline Essay One

Activity Essay One	Date
Prewriting	Tuesday, November 1
Discovery Draft	Wednesday, November 2
Feedback Draft	Tuesday, November 8
Peer Review (In-Class)	Tuesday, November 8
Self Evaluation	Friday, November 11
Final Draft	Monday, November 14
A Polished Draft	Tuesday, November 15

The notification for essay one outlines seven steps to be taken in the process, and a time frame that has the 'polished draft' handed in by November 15th (Table 5.3). This would have been 12 weeks into the 16 week semester, late enough for a semester

in which three essays are usually written and responded to. As it turned out, the first interview was conducted on December 12, week 16 of the semester, as it was not until then that the students received the essay back complete with feedback.

Obviously, this situation unfolded gradually and I found myself feeling as though I was hounding the instructor for the agreed material and access to students along with essays that had been through the feedback/revision cycle. But I felt it necessary to keep asking if I was to salvage anything out of this first semester.

Although the students did receive a grade and feedback on a second essay after the semester ended, they were into exam week at that stage and unwilling to take part in interviews. One student made the time to see me six weeks later but with incomplete data, so there was little to be gained from this interview. Presumably, the other students felt they had completed their obligations to me as best they could during the semester and had moved on to other courses and other interests. Also, they were told in the consent form that they could withdraw from the research process at any time; they were exercising their right to do just that.

In a follow-up interview in the semester after the data collection process, Lydia mentioned that she had concentrated more on reading and having students write summaries in the previous semester during the time I was gathering data.

> Last semester's 101 class learned more than probably any other class I've ever taught here. I think that that is because of the reading element and that I used teaching summary.
> (Lydia, second interview)

At the time this research was conducted, reading was 20% of the final grade in contrast to writing which was 35% (Appendix B). Although this is a coordinated course with 17-20 instructors teaching multiple sections, there is flexibility in how instructors teach as long as the syllabus is covered. However, it was difficult to reconcile the enthusiasm expressed for the writing process with actual practice.

As the difficulty I had had getting access to written feedback on essays was touched on, Lydia indicated that I may not have briefed her appropriately on what I was looking for with my study.

> I don't know, I don't necessarily need to say this, but maybe we could have, you know, talked about, at the beginning, how I'm gonna use assessment and just that, and then I maybe could have been more focused throughout the semester on how I used assessment and their particular responses to it.
> (Lydia, second interview)

However, all the material available to the participating instructors made it clear that feedback on written work was the focus of the research (Appendixes D & E). Secondly, this had been discussed before the study began, in the interviews, and each time I asked what stage the students were at on their first essay. Thirdly, I had made it very clear that I did not want to influence the instructors' usual feedback patterns, therefore had no intention of specifying a feedback style.

Although this was not the first time I had gathered information for research purposes, it was the first time I had been dependant on a colleague to make this happen. It was a steep learning curve and in subsequent semesters working with other instructors I was much more forthcoming about the timetable I had in mind in terms of essay completion. As it turned out, although I did not experience the same degree of difficulty again, I did not get to see all three completed essays in any one of the three classes I gathered material from as the final essay was usually returned in the last week of semester or the first week of exams, at which point students were not available for interviews.

5.5 The Instructor's View of Responsibilities in the Feedback/Revision Cycle

Lydia made it clear that she concentrated on teaching communication, and that the students were responsible for working on their sentence skill weaknesses. She reported that she neither saw herself as a language teacher nor as being strong at teaching grammar. When asked what she expected to see the least improvement in during a 16 week semester, the response was fluency and grammar because these were not things she taught. She felt that personal responsibility came in to play here and the onus was on the students to engage with this task and tackle grammar problems. This was to be achieved primarily through reading and taking note of how other writers achieved their goals, what she called reading like a writer. She saw her role in terms of grammar as that of a coach the students could come to for support.

> What I tell them is that if they want to fix those things, **they** need to fix them, and they need to read in English.
> (Lydia, first interview)

Lydia mentioned that she gave little feedback on grammar although she might line edit a paragraph and offer a comment such as advice to work on comma splices in the 'points for revision' section of the grading sheet.

The instructor saw herself more as a teacher of written communication interested in global, content related aspects of writing.

> I do consider myself someone who teaches writing or communication skills, written reasoning, and critical thinking. . . . And I teach each course, whatever level it is, focusing on my strengths while also sharing with them that it's their responsibility to bring the actual, you know, sentence level stuff up to par.
> (Lydia, first interview)

Referring to the types of comments she offered, Lydia reported that she kept her written comments short, rather general but relevant to classroom instruction.

> Awkward, rephrase or I'll often write logic, development, something like that. I have tried to change my word choice. They still only get one word. It kind of reflects the sort of thing I talk about in class.
> (Lydia, instructor focus group)

In this comment Lydia attempted to explicitly link classroom instruction to the brief content feedback given. Lydia claimed to offer brief written feedback, and had reasons other than time or labor saving to justifying her approach. She reported that it was more a case of putting responsibility on the students themselves. The root of this position was that having instructors do the writing for them did not make the students better communicators.

5.5.1 Reaction to Requests for More Feedback

However, there was another way to see Lydia's handling of feedback and that was to see it as a reaction to the level of use students made of the feedback. Evidence from the literature suggests that feedback is what students want on all aspects of their writing (Ferris, 1990) and the GSU students were no exception. In the instructors' focus group, Lydia responded strongly to being informed of comments that students had made in the questionnaires about needing more feedback in order to overcome their weaknesses in writing.

> I'm your reader. I'm telling you it didn't work. You failed. Deal with it. You need to communicate your ideas to me and anything short of that, I don't care if it works for you, that's a non-issue because you have an audience that you're suppose to communicate with.
> (Lydia, instructor focus group)

Further discussion on the clear and consistent desire of students for more feedback than they were currently getting was met with the retort that they would get it if they did something with what they were currently given. And Lydia consistently maintained this stance throughout the duration of the study. The implication seemed to

be that it is the students who are failing to take advantage of what is on offer, evidence of a lack of responsibility for their own learning, rather than the feedback itself being in some way unusable.

Wanting to explore this matter further as this perspective emerged from the data, I asked Lydia if she had any additional thoughts on what she saw as a lack of response to feedback considering it was something she commented on consistently during the time of the study. Her reaction was that for one thing, students do not see their writing course as either important or a priority, an issue that is explored further below, and may not even see that their writing needs improvement. And for another, they managed their time poorly, so they did not allow enough time to make appropriate use of suggestions on how to improve. Efforts in class to assist the students to manage their time and build planning for revision into their approach to writing, reportedly, failed as the students saw this as just another activity, divorced from any actual work they would do. Although Lydia experimented with ways such as this to get students to revise, she did not mention trying a different feedback approach.

5.5.2 Varying the Feedback Offered to Students

A further factor that influenced the feedback Lydia offered was the issue of offering different feedback to different students. Lydia acknowledged that although everyone got the same feedback initially, this changed over time with the students who made the most changes getting more feedback. The essays these students received, according to Lydia, tended to look as though they were set to be given a failing grade if judged by the amount of 'red ink', but this was a sign of the instructor providing what the student had been judged ready to handle. The justification for this was that these eager students made the effort to spend time with the instructor seeking more support, therefore demonstrating readiness for this type of feedback, and they made attempts to use it. Lydia also mentioned that other students received little feedback and a suggestion that they come to the office to discuss the paper as she judged them likely to give up if fuller written feedback was offered.

5.5.3 Disappointment at Students' Approach to Writing and Revision

The students' lack of responsibility for their own learning in various ways was a recurrent theme in the discussions with Lydia, and this was especially evident in relation to the level of commitment to the task as well as the response to the feedback offered. A concern was the level of work the students considered appropriate.

> In 101 at this university, I've never seen such pathetic essays. Five paragraphs with each paragraph having about three sentences each.
> (Lydia, first interview)

Lydia compared these efforts to her previous experience in the USA and found the essays handed in by the 101 students sadly lacking. It was not the grammar that was the issue; it was what appeared to Lydia to be a lack of commitment to sticking with the project until a piece of writing that had something to say was produced. As mentioned, the idea that the course had to be sold to the students was a concern for Lydia as she felt that few students were able to see the value of what they were being asked to do. This was a particular concern in relation to revision.

> Revision, they don't want to deal with global revision. They marry their sentences the first time off the keyboard.
> (Lydia, first interview)

Explaining it further, Lydia pointed out that for one thing, the students seemed not see that what was in their heads was not on the page. They also did not want to throw away any parts of what they had written.

A further disappointment was the approach students took even when they had taken the time to seek help. Office hours, which were set by the department at four hours a week, were a time when Lydia expected students to come and ask for individual help. However, experience showed her that often when students came to her office they took a passive role, which frustrated the instructor. Although students listened intently and expectantly, they recorded nothing.

> They're staring blankly across my desk back at me and I'm like, "Not gonna write it for you".
> (Lydia, instructor focus group)

The instructor sensed some resentment over her stance as she was subjected to what she interpreted as intimidating glares from these students and felt the pressure of expectations to do more than she considered appropriate. It was evident that for some students the transition from school to university, and coming to terms with all that was expected of them, was difficult.

5.6 Actual Feedback Offered

The material created by students as they went through the writing process receiving feedback and making revisions was examined to see what feedback was actually given and how students responded. It became evident that Lydia had two main approaches to feedback on essays. For one thing, a detailed rubric was used (Table 5.4).

Columns allowed each item to be assessed as mastery, competent, shows promise, needs work, or unsatisfactory. A section entitled points for revision at the bottom of the two page rubric provided boxes for three brief comments. Close examination of the actual feedback given on the essays available to me showed that Lydia did indeed keep her summary comments brief. More significantly, her comments were of two main types: urging students to work on thesis statements or organization or, on second drafts, offering praise at some point (Appendix Q).

Comments on content were made both in summary and marginal form but as Lydia had predicted were very much in the minority. The thesis statement comments were formulaic. For example, a typical comment on thesis statements was "create a clear focused thesis statement". This is the type of comment that could be equally applied to any essay, and indeed, in this particular feedback/revision cycle, was applied to other students' essays, with the only changes being exchanging the word 'create' for the words 'develop' and 'compose' (Appendix Q). Although some students were urged to prepare the readers better for the direction of ideas, or to show rather than tell, no examples were offered. A request to develop the support was also general. These comments reflect what Lydia had said about feedback and her opinion that the students had to work it out for themselves.

> But I honestly don't see that as our job. They ultimately have to take responsibility for their inability, or lack thereof, to communicate effectively.
> (Lydia, instructor focus group)

Lydia was clear that giving more feedback was not her intention.

Table 5.4

Summary of Grading Rubric Divisions Essay One

Divisions of the Rubric
Structure and support
Unity, coherence and cohesion
Rhetorical strategy
Audience and purpose
Grammar, mechanics and English language fluency
Formatting, documentation and presentation
Meeting the requirements of the assignment

It was difficult to see how the general summary comments could help students to see where to work on their essays and what to actually do. What was offered did not represent Lydia's original aim:

> I consider what I am doing a form of annotation and I will engage in a conversation with them in the margin.
> (Lydia, first interview)

However, Lydia had a lot of faith in her teaching in relation to getting the students to develop their writing through: the reading required, the summaries written, the focus on audience and purpose, and the discussions on the readings. She commented specifically that the students had improved as writers and that this was due to learning to read like writers. Feedback on writing was not included in this list.

Another interesting point in relation to Lydia's feedback is the extent of the grammar feedback. Lydia was quite adamant that she did not see herself as a language teacher, yet a lot of the feedback was related to local errors. A scarcity of comments on ideas is commonly found when researchers examine feedback, and Lydia demonstrated this response style. Checking back with Lydia as this sentence level feedback pattern emerged, she maintained that it was a low priority for her, so she may not have realized that she was doing it. If I had found evidence, she suggested that it must be a habit and was at a loss to explain it.

5.7 Students' Perspectives of the Feedback/Revision Cycle

In addition to Lydia's perspective of the writing and feedback/revision cycle, the students' views were explored. Multiple sources of data were used to get as full a picture as possible of the different participants' perspectives. Three questionnaires were administered and aimed to gather data from the whole class or those students willing to take the time to answer the questions (Appendixes I, J & K). For this class, that was 12 out of a possible 20. In addition, three students consented to answer questions in interviews and a later focus group of Lydia's students consented to discuss their experiences with feedback. All these sources of data were drawn on.

5.7.1 Students' Responses to Questionnaire One

The purpose of *Questionnaire One Feedback Received from the Instructor* was to find out how satisfied students were with the feedback they had actually received on the essay. The questionnaire was administered on-line through SurveyMonkey after the first feedback revision cycle was completed. The intention was to get an impression of

the experience of the whole class to add to the in-depth information sought through interviewing three students. It was disappointing that only 12 students responded. However, interesting trends still emerged.

5.7.2 Students' Impressions of the Preparation for Writing

The responses to questions two to six showed that for the majority of students the writing assignment was clear, they understood what they were expected to do, and on receiving the feedback, they read and understood what was offered (Appendix R). Only one student expressed difficulties in this area. There was less clarity in relation to the grading system and the majority of students responded negatively to this question, question four (Figure 5.1). They were given a detailed two page grading sheet, as explained above, but not until after the instructor had read the first draft.

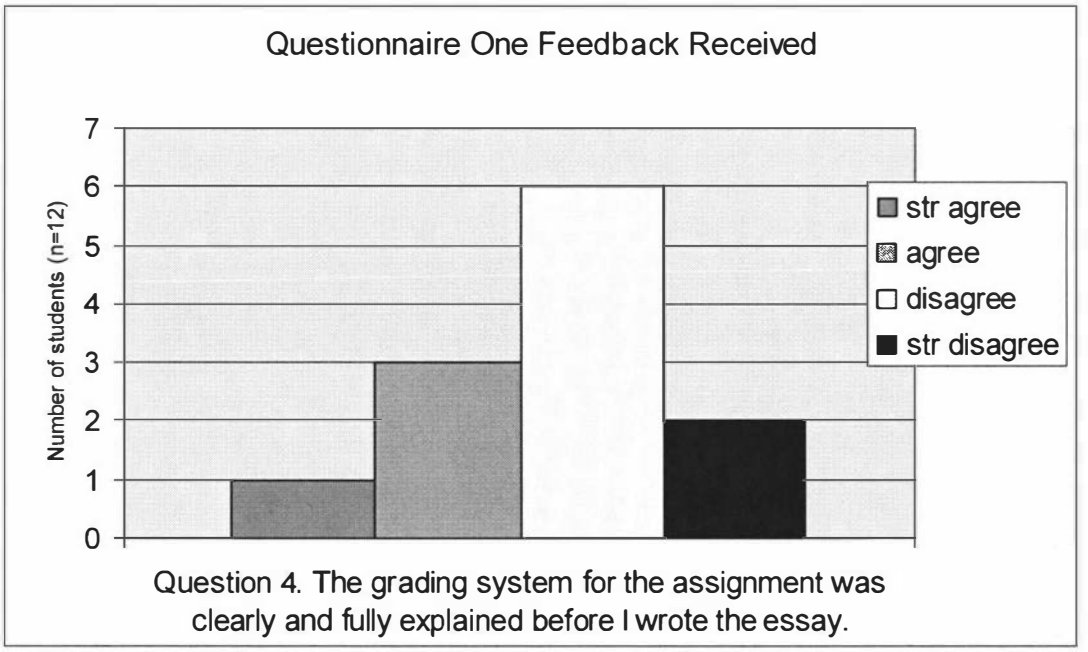

Figure 5.1. Lydia's students' views on the clarity of the grading system

Responses to question seven showed that most of the students, eight out of a total of twelve, felt that their first draft had not been particularly good, but a mitigating factor in this assessment is that they made this assessment of their work after receiving the instructor's feedback, which could have had a negative influence on their assessments (Appendix R). Lydia mentioned in an interview that she did not put grades on the first draft, but in this instance she had. Even though I did not see all the first drafts, the final grades were low in comparison to the other two instructors' grades,

so it is reasonable to assume that the grades on the first drafts were correspondingly lower (Figure 5.2). Lydia mentioned in the interviews that students had challenged their grades at times during the semester and that they often lobbied for increases on the basis that they had done a lot of work.

However, despite disagreements over grades, a small majority of the students were confident that the feedback they had received had helped them to identify weaknesses and strengths and to improve most areas of their essays, but almost as many were not confident that they had been helped (Appendix R). Looking at the actual feedback given, which is done in depth below, it was similar to other feedback patterns discussed in studies (Stern & Solomon, 2006). Only question 17 about help improving grammar elicited more disagreement than agreement, which is not surprising considering how concerned students generally seem to be to receive grammar feedback and Lydia's lack of focus on grammar (Appendix R).

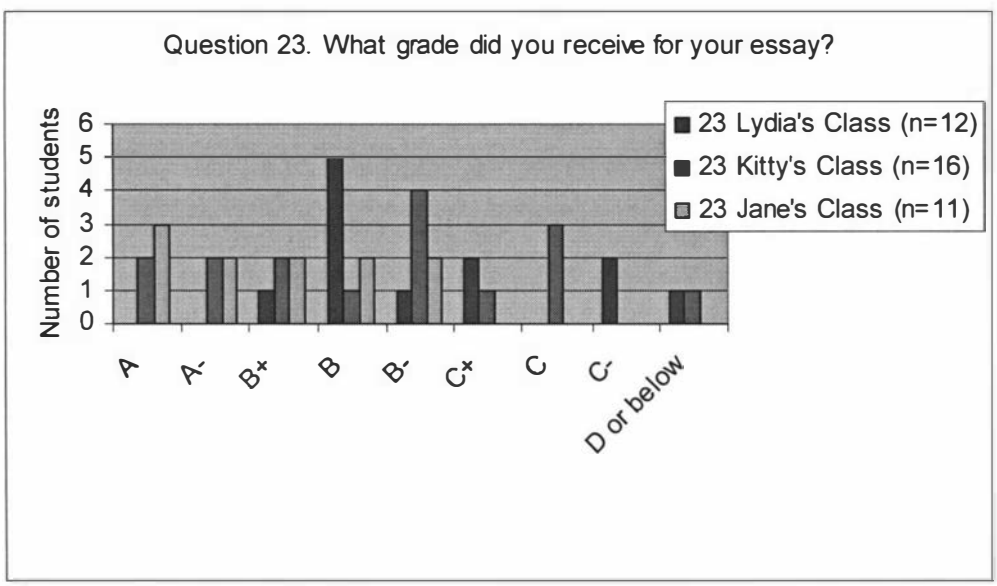

Figure 5.2. Questionnaire One: A comparison of essay one grades by instructor

The general tone of the responses indicated that the feedback given was well received. Yet, not all students were satisfied with their final grades; in response to question one, four students expressed dissatisfaction, but the two that answered open-ended question one with more than a single word expressed the belief that they were responsible and able to do better.

> No, she was fair in her grade but i don't think my mark satisfies my level,my level than that I don't think I proved my self till now
> (Unidentified student, Lydia's class)

In effect, they assumed responsibility for their own disappointment and had managed to hold on to a belief that they could do better.

The open-ended questions 20-22 sought information on what more help the instructor could have given or what the students themselves could have done. One student made it abundantly clear that the instructor was already doing a lot for them considering they were university students. But five students made requests of one kind or another for more specific help.

> If she explained in more details the feedback she gave us.
> (Unidentified student, Lydia's class)

In response to question 23 one student wrote the following:

> this has been a unique experience for me: before this I had never had such peer and instructor evaluations in such depth
> (Unidentified student, Lydia's class)

This comment clearly shows what a different experience the demands of a 101 academic writing class is for the students. Although Lydia had been frustrated by GSU students due to what she perceived as a lack of responsibility, nine of the respondents to question 21 came up with strategies they could have employed to better prepare themselves. This is still less than half the class, but it represents 75% of the respondents to the questionnaire conceding that they had weaknesses. Overall, the responses of the students to this questionnaire indicated that they had appreciated the help received, could see a need for more specific advice in some areas and recognized some of their own weaknesses in preparing the essay.

5.7.3 Students' Responses to Questionnaire Two

A further questionnaire, *Questionnaire Two Instructor Feedback Wanted*, was administered to see what students would have wanted if they had had a choice. The responses confirmed previous research findings that students overwhelmingly wanted clear, specific feedback on all aspects of their writing (Ferris, 1990, 1995; Ferris and Roberts, 2001; Straub, 2000; Leki, 1991). Every question about ways to help students learn more received positive responses from the majority, or the vast majority, of respondents (Appendix S). Three students did not want the instructor to make corrections to grammar errors, but all students wanted to have these errors indicated for

them. The only part of the questionnaire where there was any degree of disagreement, although still in the minority by far, was in relation to being recommended to seek help from a non-human source, but the writing center was an acceptable alternative to the instructor (Figure 5.3).

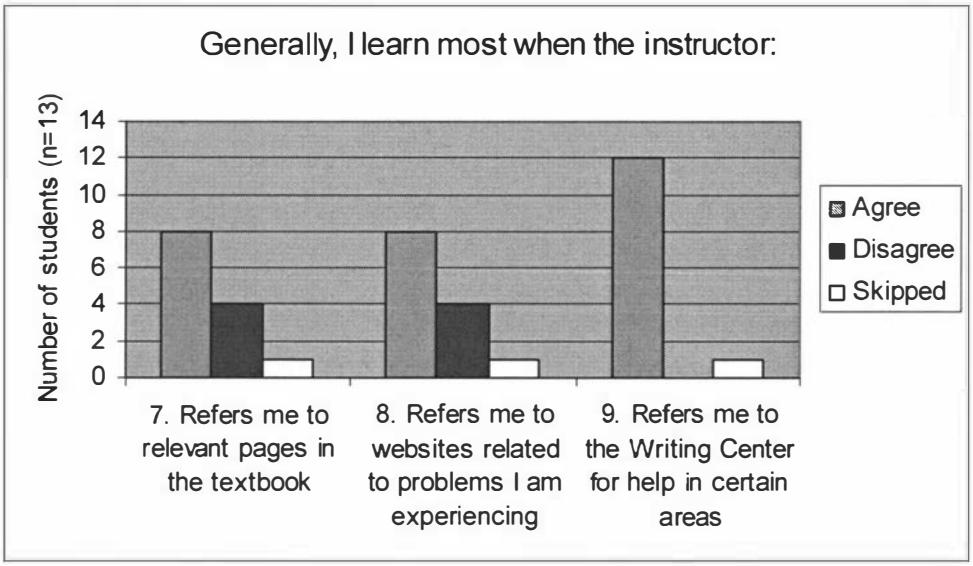

Figure 5.3. Questionnaire Two: Lydia's students' preferences for additional help

One apparent anomaly in the responses to this question was the response pattern to questions 16 and 17 (Figure 5.4). Initially, it appeared that the students may not have understood the distinction between these two questions and the assumption I had made designing the questionnaire this way, that the students would be forced to choose one or the other option. This did not happen and in Lydia's class the majority of students requested both that the instructor indicate the errors and correct them, which did not make sense, initially. This response pattern was consistent across all three classes, and I was ready to assume that the questionnaire was flawed, but later data provided a different view.

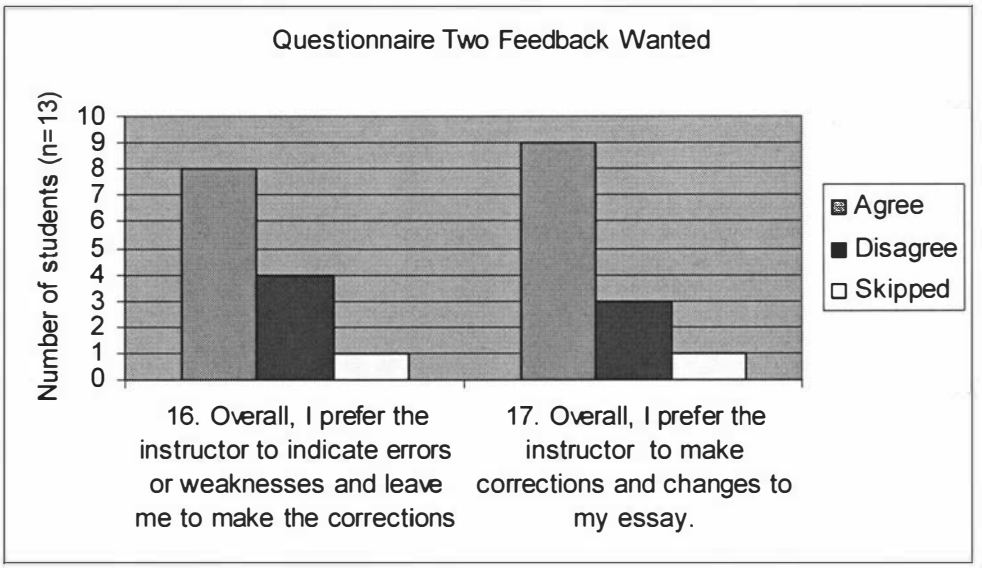

Figure 5.4. Lydia's students' overall preferences of instructor feedback

5.7.4 Focus Group Response to Overall Preference Questions

Later in the research process, I spent time with a focus group made up of students from Lydia's current WRI 101 class. Though they were not the original students who had taken part two semesters earlier, their experience was likely to have been similar and their views were of interest. I administered questions 16 and 17 with this group, got a similar result to that mentioned above, and discussed with them how this apparent contradiction came about. They offered me several explanations that showed that the questionnaire had forced them to respond as they had because under some circumstances they wanted the error indicated only, since it was something they could handle, and in that situation they would want to do it themselves. But sometimes they would be mystified and need extra help; then, they wanted the instructor to make the change. The other points these students made were that they needed a little explanation or demonstration, perhaps using actual errors in front of the whole class to guide them.

> Because of the nature of the choices you gave. Because most of us would want to be pointed like this is a mistake and then work on our own, but at least the first one the professor would show you how the correction should be. So with only two choices you have only to combine both, then they agree to both of them.
> (Unidentified student, Lydia's students' focus group)

Evidently, the students wanted the instructor to be capable of knowing when to respond in different ways.

5.8 Information on Feedback and Revision from Interview Students

The information students offered in interviews helped to build up a fuller picture in relation to their responses to written feedback on their essays. However, it was limited in this instance by the delay in getting access to the students' graded essays, which meant that they were not willing or able to manage more than one interview with the exception of one student.

5.8.1 Students' Self-Assessments and Previous Writing Experiences

Three students, who will be known as Abdulla, Rana and Huda, took part in interviews following the completion of the first feedback/revision cycle. One further student, known as Mahar, had agreed to take part, supplied the drafts of his essay but stopped responding to messages, and in the end, he did not come for an interview. His essay was analyzed without any commentary from him. Abdulla never actually supplied the final draft of his first essay, but he made himself available at the beginning of the next semester to discuss the second essay as it had not been received until exam week. However, this essay had received little feedback, being squeezed into the end of the semester, so was of little use for analysis. The other students were not willing to make the time for interviews in the following semester, and as they moved on to other courses, I lost touch with them.

Table 5.5

Lydia's Students' Self-Assessments of Writing Ability and Final Grades Awarded

	Self-Assessment in the Interview	Final Grades
Huda	Good	A
Abdulla	Average	B+
Rana	Beginner	B-

Huda had attended an English medium school and rated herself as a good writer (Table 5.5). In grades 10-12 she had written essays and read English literature.

> We read some stories like, about Socrates, "Wuthering Heights", novels and "Gone with the Wind".
> (Huda, first interview)

Despite this encounter with literature, she had not written essays in response to what she had read, although she did mention writing a comparison paragraph between

"Socrates and King Caesar". It is not possible to say without further investigation, which was not part of this research, but Huda's experiences may represent similar experiences to generation 1.5 students in that she had some exposure to literature but it seems somewhat inconsistent and superficial.

Also, Huda had not written multiple drafts before. So for her, as well as for the other interview students, this freshman class was her first encounter with the process approach. She reported a favorable response to the idea of multiple drafts and the chance this gave to explore ideas and to improve the grade.

Abdulla seemed to recognize the link between reading and writing that Lydia promoted and commented:

> I am not a good writer partly because I've never read a lot in my life. I don't enjoy reading.
> (Abdulla, first interview)

It appears that he had 'bought into' the program as Lydia had hoped and begun to see the connection between reading and writing but not enough to have found a love of reading. Nor was he sold on the writing process approach to writing having done well with minimal attention to prewriting in his prior writing experiences, which he believed were extensive. This could have made him somewhat dismissive of the demands of the WRI 101 course and contributed to his grade (Table 5.5).

> I've been learning English and writing in English all my life. The essays that we do here are not of the level that I have been doing in the past in the sense I've been writing research essays on literature books, world literature books and stuff like that. 1500 words, etc.
> (Abdulla, first interview)

In fact he consistently reported that he produced prewriting after he had written his essay and this only because he was concerned that it might be graded. Abdulla openly admitted that he was entirely grade driven, and that was his sole motivation when prewriting and planning. This attitude persisted to the end of the 16 week course.

Rana assessed herself as a beginner and connected this to the fact that she had studied at a government school in the UAE where she had had little exposure to written English and had never written an essay before nor heard of terms such as thesis statement and topic sentences (Table 5.5). Because of her limited experience writing in English, Rana did not know what was meant by multiple drafts even though she had been writing them, but having clarified the point she said that she liked this approach to writing and saw the value in it.

5.8.2 Perspectives of the Relevance of WRI 101 to Other University Courses

Some research indicates that L2 students seldom put in the requisite amount of work to improve their writing for the love of writing (Guennette, 2007). Instructors must rely on other means of motivating students, and acknowledging the relevance of the writing course to their academic progress is one potential source of inspiration. However, none of the interview students could see the relevance of what they were studying to the work they were involved with in other courses, which confirmed Lydia's gut reaction in relation to this issue. Abdulla was willing to concede that it may prove to be relevant in the future, but at the time of the interviews all his courses outside of the writing class used multiple choice questions to test students. A similar response emerged in discussions with Huda and Rana. Also, Huda felt that any reading and writing required in other classes was easy. Lydia had mentioned that she felt that this lack of immediacy in terms of other courses requiring writing was a factor in the students taking the writing classes lightly.

5.9 Tally of Feedback Received and Individual Students' Responses

The feedback for one initial and one revised draft, where available, was examined to see what actual feedback the student had received and what they had done with it. The data analysis looked at the feedback given including underlining, circles etc as part of what was categorized as feedback points (Hyland, F., 2003). Feedback was identified in ways to distinguish the different focuses, for example form or content (Appendix T). Form feedback came from what was written on the actual essay paper and summary comments. Few codes were used, but both direct and indirect form feedback was given although direct form feedback was favored by the instructor. Although the instructor used a rubric for the first essay with tick in the box type options, and this appeared to serve to give students an idea of how successful they had been so far, it was difficult to follow how it was used as part of the revision; therefore, it is seldom referred to in the study. The summary comments in the boxes at the bottom of that rubric were taken into account. Note was taken of the length of comments with anything over six words designated long, the longest individual comment being fifteen words. Sometimes it was not possible to accurately categorize the feedback or it was format related, and for these reasons a column, uncertain/other, was used (Appendix T). Of the two students who handed in copies of essay two after the semester ended, neither handed in a rubric. Only the final graded draft was handed in and in each case

the feedback was restricted to a summary comment and a grade. Therefore, there was nothing to analyze.

Although three students handed in the first and second draft of essay one, only Mahar's second draft had received feedback (Appendix T). Nevertheless, efforts to examine the extent to which these students used the feedback were made where a second/polished draft was in hand. Where direct feedback was supplied, this was usually incorporated. Where a feedback item was unattended to in the revised essay, or the error persisted despite an attempt to correct it, this has been examined and commented on below. Also, in terms of feedback on content, reference is made below to the extent to which students revised.

5.9.1 Huda's Revision Process

Huda appears to have gone through line by line and edited her essay paying close attention to the markings made by the instructor. She had not worked alone on this essay as she had sought help from the writing center, especially with semicolon use. The two errors that persisted were understandable. The first was as a result of a misunderstanding, which led Huda to replace a preposition instead of eliminating it. However, it indicated that the instructor's use of a line striking out the word was either unclear or unacceptable to Huda, and if the latter, could indicate resistance to the suggestion if it did not fit with her conception of correct usage. The other feedback item not resolved was the result of an unclear direction; I, also, was not able to work out what the instructor had wanted. She had underlined the words *the Quran* and Huda had removed the word *the,* creating an error. However, there appeared to have been no obvious error previously, unless the instructor wanted the word spelt differently or she may have wanted the student to say *the Holy Quran.* Neither option was specified.

Apart from editing, Huda had added a thesis statement that fitted the support she had, and following the marginal comment– *show don't tell* – had written a complex sentence that added more information. In the interview, she mentioned that she had gone to the writing center to get help with this comment. Huda had also completely rewritten her conclusion responding to the instructor's comment – *this is not what we know about Jerusalem.* Originally Huda had written a conclusion promoting a romantic notion of love and peace in this disputed city. Her revised conclusion summarized her essay without the romanticized view of peaceful coexistence (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6 *Huda: Revision of Conclusion Essay One*

	Student's Sentences
First Draft	In this small city three religions meet they believed in one powerful God each religion had its own belief yet the people still lived peacefully together. Every Saturday you hear the Muslim sheik, the church's bells and Jews praying against Suleiman wall. I learned a lot of things from this journey one thing, is understanding other people and their beliefs. I am very proud and honored to visit this holly land. May peace and love live among these three religions.
Final Draft	In this experience I had an idea about how my ancestors lived in the old city, side by side with two other religions Christianity, and Judaism. The architecture of the old city took me back in time, and to me was something original and amazing. When I prayed in Al Aqusa Mosque I accomplished one of my dreams and I asked God that the day to let peace be upon Jerusalem. I'm proud and honored to have visited this land. Although you might go through a lot of difficulties to reach Jerusalem but it was true when my dad said a trip to Jerusalem is worth it.

In the interview, Huda claimed that she had understood the feedback and any help she had needed she had got either through the instructor's in-class explanations or from the writing center. She was clear that the instructor concentrated on content matters such as idea development and did not think she needed help with grammar. Looking at the essay there was evidence that the instructor had responded to grammar errors and made changes. Asked if she liked this direct feedback she commented that it was good because it was easier. Asked if she thought direct or indirect feedback would be better in helping her to learn she replied:

> No, I'll learn if it's done for me or if it's not done for me. It's the same. (Huda, first interview)

It became clear that there were still gaps in her understanding of the intent of some feedback points, even the direct feedback. For one thing, she was using two transitions in one sentence (although . . . . but. . .), a common example of transfer from Arabic. The second transition had been struck out and Huda had accurately carried this through in her revisions, but discussion revealed that she did not know what the error actually was. Clearly, she had not reached that point yet in constructing her own

grammar and the teacher's direct feedback had not led to identifiable understanding as yet.

When asked how she felt when she got the first draft back with the feedback and a grade of B-, Huda said that that was fine as she had not worked hard. Further discussion revealed that she had been under pressure with work for other courses.

> I . . . had to do the homeworks, the other homeworks.
> (Huda, first interview)

This explains a little why students do not seem to have made the necessary effort in terms of writing.

Huda, who was confident of her writing ability, resisted any urge to be downcast by the low grade. She appreciated the chance to improve her writing through the use of multiple drafts. By the time the final draft was complete, she estimated she had spent four hours writing.

5.9.2 Rana's Revision Process

Rana was not a particularly confident writer and wrote out the whole essay by hand before typing it on the computer. This was the first essay she had written and she felt that she would have liked more information about how it would be graded before she handed the draft in.

> I really want to know how will the grades be. . . I don't have an experience in writing essays so I didn't know that it will be graded like this, so I just, I just sat there.
> (Rana, first interview)

Rana was rather timid, so she did not ask for information and it seems from the comment above that she could not have asked because she did not know what to ask for.

Rana had received a C- for the first draft of her essay and this may have been the spur that led to the extensive revisions she made adding details about a car accident she was involved in. However, not all the revisions were what the instructor had anticipated. A close examination of a section of Rana's text (Table 5.7) shows that she was inclined to omit material, an example of avoidance behavior, if she did not fully understand the instructor's intent (Hyland, 2002; Truscott, 2004).

Table 5.7

Rana: Avoidance Behavior in Response to Feedback

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	Parentheses, question mark and underlining added by instructor	(Hot! Hot! Hot!!! Hot and dry!!! The day was at the Sahara Desert.) ? The temperature was 110 degrees Fahrenheit.
Draft Two		The temperature was 110 degrees Fahrenheit.

This was the opening line of Rana's essay; in the feedback the instructor had used symbols to indicate some problem with the opening sentences, feedback points categorized as 'uncertain' (Table 5.7). Stern and Solomon (2006) found similar examples of feedback that could not be easily understood or classified. Although Rana felt that she had understood the feedback, thinking it indicated a problem with the sentence structure, she chose to remove it rather than improve it or seek more information on what to do. Whether or not avoidance behaviour was a common practice in her writing was difficult to ascertain as she had revised extensively and changed the essay in many areas.

Rana claimed she had got the general idea of the feedback even if she did not fully understand some individual items; therefore, she had not sought help from anyone other than a friend. The issue that arises at this point is the extent to which the revisions were made or inspired by the friend rather than the feedback or classroom instruction. Rana claimed she had come up with the new ideas herself. Certainly, the added thesis statement, some of which came from the conclusion of the first draft and still contained the word *prospective* that she had had pointed out as a misspelling in the first draft, was her own work (Table 5.8).

Table 5.8

Rana: Thesis Revision in Response to Feedback

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	Summary - *Create a clear, focused thesis statement*	No evidence of a thesis
Draft Two		The journey to this place has taught me a valuable lesson, a lesson of life that changed my prospective on how to live my life to the optimum ably.

Note. Italics in tables indicate instructor's comments

One of the directions on the draft, *work on sentence structure,* was written as a marginal comment near the introduction. Rana had interpreted this to refer just to the sentence she had omitted, discussed above, even though sentence structure was pointed out as a weakness in the rubric.

> Rana: I think it was that sentence, 'hot, hot and dry.'
> Interviewer: Really? Only that?
> Rana: I think, because she didn't mark any other sentence.
> (Rana, first interview)

This casts doubt on the student's ability to use the rubric. It also suggests that Rana was unwilling or unable to trawl her essay for sentence skill errors. The summary comment on the final draft of essay two suggested that her difficulties with finding and correcting her own errors persisted (Appendix Q).

5.9.3 Mahar's Revision Process

Mahar did not present himself for an interview despite agreeing to do so and handing in his essay file; therefore, it is only possible to look at the feedback he received, the extent of his revisions and to speculate on what inspired him. Although there were few feedback points on Mahar's first draft, something inspired him to revise extensively. The written feedback on the first draft, placed mostly in the summary boxes of the feedback sheet was very non-specific (Appendix Q). The rest of the feedback was offered at sentence level and in fact there was very little of that on the first draft (Appendix T). Although this seems very little in the way of conducting a conversation from the margins, different approaches work for different teachers, and research suggests that what is offered as response needs to relate to what goes on in the classroom (Straub, 2000). It was not possible to ask Mahar if he had spoken to the instructor and the instructor did not remember whether or not he had sought additional advice. But, perhaps this feedback did relate to the teaching and inspire the student; however, this research did not examine what was being taught in class that may have inspired students to revise their content.

In fact, the student had revised the essay considerably, not just making word choice changes but expanding points throughout (Table 5.9). He added a thesis to the introduction and at least a sentence or part of a sentence to every paragraph. The language level remained consistent suggesting that it represents his own work, a factor which has to be taken into account considering the revision was done in the student's

free time. Presumably, the student had 'bought' into the ideas Lydia had promoted through her instruction and understood the need to keep revising throughout the process. Mahar's grade had been a C on the first draft, but it rose to B following the effort made. Although sentence skill errors persist, it is clear the student has wrestled with the text, added more precise wording, worked on the thesis and generally tried to improve the segment.

Table 5.9

Mahar: Changes to the Introduction

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	Marginal - *Unclear*! Summary - *Compose a clear focused thesis*	Places can be the changing elements in one's personality. They can change us into either better people or into bad people. According to the nature of that place and to the governing rules and laws, we change. As for me the place that changed me into ~~what~~ *who*
	apostrophe circled	▲ I' am was the place where I lived in when I was in Egypt which is Al-Rehab city.
Draft Two		Places can often influence us as human beings. It may change our personality to the best or to the worst, this depends in the place itself. According to the rules and regulations that govern the place, we change. As for me the place that influenced me and changed me into the person I'm today is the place where I lived in when I was in Egypt which is Al-Rehab city. This place changed me a lot in a lot of ways. It made become an environmentalist, a quiet person, a boy that cares about others and give other people the priority and finally a social person.

Another interesting point was that Mahar's final draft of the essay was extensively edited by the instructor, with 14 direct feedback points on the introduction, despite Lydia's claim that she did this for a paragraph at most and seldom if ever added this type of feedback to the final draft. There was also extensive summary commentary praising his efforts (Appendix Q). Checking with Lydia about the extensive use of direct feedback on the final draft as the data was scrutinized, admittedly four semesters after the data was originally gathered, it transpired that

a) she did not think she had given feedback on final drafts

b) it must have been an aberration

c) it was the stage she was at, at that point in her evolution as a teacher.

5.9.4 Abdulla's Revision Process

Abdulla did not get around to actually supplying me with his revised draft, so it is not possible to speculate on what he did. His first draft received a grade of B. In the interview, he mentioned that he had been to the writing center three or four times throughout the semester and that he was concerned to 'perfect' his grammar. He also noted that although the instructor stresses organization in class, she mainly commented on grammar in the feedback. Abdulla wanted more grammar feedback on his essay, and appeared to have opted for this independent of the instructor's actual classroom focus. When asked what he thought led him to revise, he had the following to offer:

> Depends on how severe the criticism is. If it isn't very severe, just one or two comments in the paper then I will mostly change it as far as possible. But uh, if it is extremely severe criticism, then I will take it very seriously.
> (Abdulla, first interview)

It seemed Abdulla wanted a scare tactic or two to shake him out of his apathy. Despite presenting himself as lazy, he did admit to continuing to think about the essay after handing in the first draft and to rereading the entire essay before beginning the revision process. Nevertheless, he felt he seldom spent more than 20 minutes on revision.

Table 5.10

Lydia's Class Essay One Grades

	A/A+	B+/B/B-	C+/C	D	F
Number Awarded[a]		7	4	1	

[a]n=12

It was not immediately clear from looking at the feedback these students received whether or not it acted as the impetus to revise. It was brief to the point of brusque and came short of the aim to engage in a conversation in the margins. Despite this shortfall in delivery students had revised. Grades overall were low on the first essay (Table 5.10) in marked contrast to final grades for the course (Table 5.2). Perhaps these acted as the necessary impetus for some. Rana and Mahar had received low grades and both made considerable revisions. Huda seemed to be inspired by a mildly worded criticism of her conclusion to write an entirely different and more apposite

version. However, looking at the actual written feedback, it was difficult to see it as inspirational.

5.10 Focus Group In-Put on Feedback

The decision to include a focus group from the participating instructors' current classes, although they were not the original student participants, was made in order to try to get more information from students on receiving feedback from the particular instructors and working with that feedback. The focus group with Lydia's students took place near the end of the semester because I wanted to wait until they had had experience with, and therefore opinions on, getting feedback and revising the essay. However, the day I conducted the interview was the day they received their first draft of the first essay with the feedback. I assumed that they had had feedback before, but apparently the instructor had been experimenting with a different technique that a student commented on.

> [We have had] one reading journal, but it was the only one. The professor wouldn't give us the others because she wanted us to learn our own mistakes without her commenting.
> (Unidentified student, Lydia's students' focus group)

Although this was initially disappointing, it worked out well as the students were eager to get feedback, perhaps because of the drought in this respect. They had a lot to say, gaining confidence in the group, and the discussion was animated and informative. The instructor mentioned later that she had been experimenting with a technique one of her own professors had used in college of not giving grades in the hope that the uncertainty would make the students work harder. Whether it worked or not is not part of this study, but the students showed definite relief at getting an indication of how well they were doing.

> Student 1: For me it was good because she put a, some sort of a grade on the paper as it is, so I know where I stand and I can project where I want to go. And she puts comment on how I can get to where I want to go so that was very helpful to me. And if I don't do any work now, ok I say I'm done, I know what grade I'll get.
> Interviewer: You've got a B or a C or a D or whatever?
> Student 3: To me that was the most helpful thing. I know where I am and this to me is like a road map to help me go where I wanta be from here.
> Interviewer: What about the rest of you, do you want to get the grade on this draft.
> Many voices: Yes, of course, for sure.
> (Unidentified students, Lydia's students' focus group)

So initial grades had been given and they were appreciated. One student reasoned that without a grade, and with little commenting on the paper, it was possible that a student would misinterpret this as meaning the paper was in the A bracket and make little effort. Individual differences do come into play here, but some students wanted an honest and straightforward approach from the instructor. One student wanted to be told what was 'bad' and why it was 'bad'.

> Yes, because we are just beginner writing. This is my first time I take a writing course. So, I don't know why it's bad and why not. I need someone to tell me why and even help me how to correct it.
> (Unidentified student, Lydia's students' focus group)

This was a loud call for feedback and strategies for revision. And further discussion revealed that this student wanted to get the help from the instructor rather than the writing center. Also, considering that he had tried, for example to add support, he wanted to know why it had not worked. It is in comments like this that the lack of writing experience comes through. It seems likely that a number of students make it into the freshman classes on the basis of scant experience writing in English. Then these students struggle with expressing themselves in written English and yet have the demands of their major courses to meet, too.

One student admitted that what she wanted was detailed written feedback that pointed out exactly what was wrong, but she was realistic and acknowledged that she did not expect it. But students did want to be shown how to correct some errors.

> Yeah I don't expect them to do everything. I have to learn to do something. Yes, but somehow they have to show concern and point me to the right resources. But there are some things you want them to, you know, help you directly. There are some things they can point you in the right direction. Then you, you know work on and that's the process of learning. (Unidentified student, Lydia's students' focus group)

They clearly want instructors to respond in a variety of ways offering more or less help as needed, the kind of varied, individual support that research suggests may be the best option (Stern & Solomon, 2006), but also the kind of support that is only possible with low class numbers, certainly below a semester load of 80 plus students.

One of the student's suggestions showed considerable grasp of good teaching technique.

> So when you show the example, show the person doing it in front of them, so he will try to follow the example the same way or try to find his own way that make him better to correct it
> (Unidentified student, Lydia's students' focus group)

Perhaps the student conceived of the idea through experience of this kind that had been beneficial.

Other students' comments made it clear that although the students are often quite fluent speakers of English, they have had limited experiences with writing, which instructors need to take into account. Their comments showed the desperation and frustration they feel at times and the sympathy they have for each other's struggle.

> It depends on the needs of the students. Some students, this for them the first time they do writing so they need at least one example.
>
> If this is my first time doing writing and you give me this is your mistake and I don't know what this mistake is because you don't tell me you have grammar mistake or you have something like related ideas or supporting ideas which is not related to the topic and you mention to me, I can't do it by myself. I can't handle it.
> (Unidentified students, Lydia's students' focus group)

These students did not want someone to do it all for them. They had no intention of ignoring the feedback they had received. They were thankful for an honest appraisal of their work especially if some effort was given to showing them how to overcome the weaknesses. Although not talking about Lydia, one student said that refusals to help had given her a bad impression of an instructor and reduced her confidence.

> I mean it's like you lose courage in your thoughts. You lose your enthusiasm.

I doubt that this is ever the intention of an instructor, but with vulnerable learners, it does happen. This focus group showed that denying the students grades created a certain amount of anxiety. While anxiety can work as an incentive, it can also have the opposite effect. The one point that came through forcefully was that the weaker the student, the clearer the advice needed.

5.11 Peer Review Practices in Lydia's Class

Instructor feedback was not the only feedback students received. In Lydia's class the peer review activity was conducted in the classroom and students were instructed to bring two copies of their essay, one for peer review and one for the instructor. Knowing that any feedback given and received was likely to be superseded by the instructor's feedback, because of the way these two activities coincided, may well have acted as a disincentive to engage with the peer review activity for both the reviewer and the writer (Kischner, 1995).

5.11.1 Responses to Questionnaire Three

Responses to *Questionnaire Three Peer Feedback Received* indicated that although students were confident that they had performed the task as required, there was less certainty in terms of the benefits of the activity (Appendix U). Most students assessed themselves and their partner as managing the time well and taking the task seriously, but there was ambivalence over the help received (Figure 5.5). And there was clear dissatisfaction with peer review in terms of what was ultimately offered that could be used to work on the essay draft in the areas of content and sentence skills (Figure 5. 6).

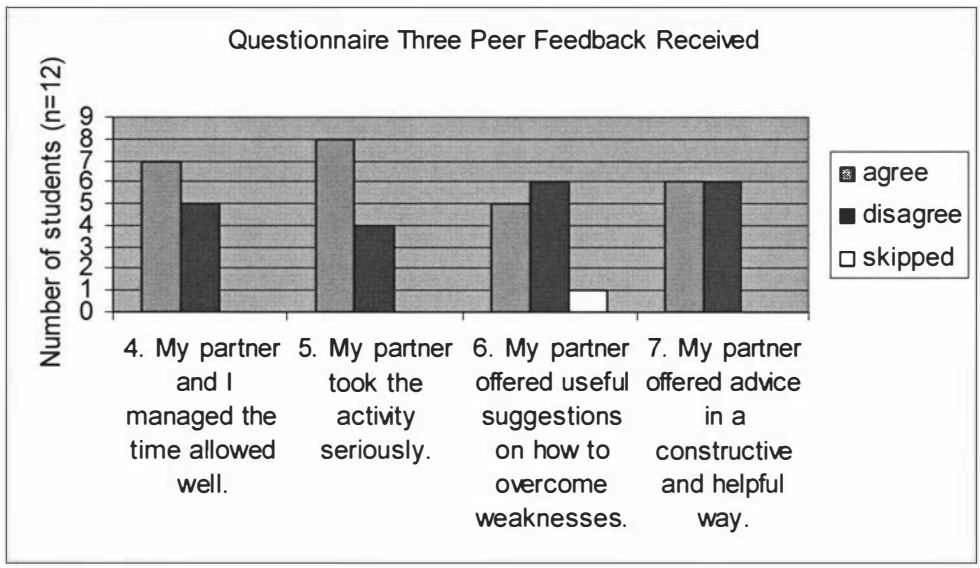

Figure 5.5. Lydia's students' assessments of their roles in peer review

Open-ended questions 12 and 13 asked students to suggest what sort of help they would have liked and any other information on peer review. Some students wanted help with specific areas such as thesis statements or the conclusion. Two wanted help with grammar. One student wanted more than just praise.

> My partner didnt help me , he only said that my eesay is good and thats it
> (Unidentified student, Lydia's class)

Interestingly, one student wanted to be fair to the reviewer but also knew what help was required and not given.

> Although my partner might have made an honest attempt to evaluate my essay, all he told me was it needed improvement in language, a few more details would have been better.
> (Unidentified student, Lydia's class)

As with instructor feedback, vague comments are not seen as useable and students had a clear idea of what they wanted. Other comments showed that the students did not believe their peers had the knowledge to help and that getting help from the instructor or "people who are smarter in writing" were preferred options.

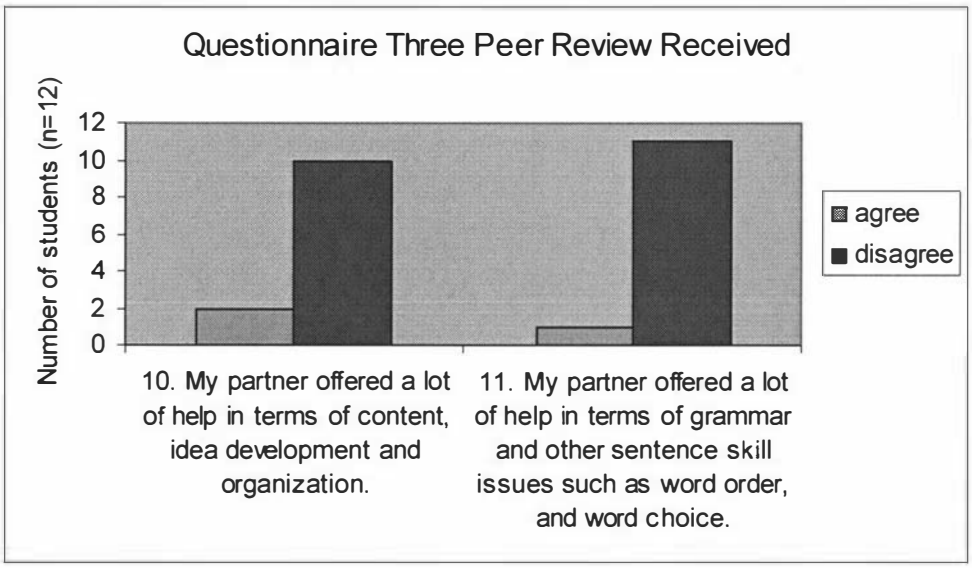

Figure 5.6. Lydia's students' assessments of the help received through peer review

5.11.2 The Peer Review Sheet

The peer review sheet began with an opportunity for students to say what they liked about the essay, and the last prompt invited the reviewer to come up with one change that they would like to make; however, at least one student did not respond to that prompt. Other sections asked the reviewer to locate certain key elements of the essay such as the thesis and topic sentences. Questions also prompted reviewers to offer advice on these. However, some of the prompts invited yes/no responses and that turned out to be what they got (Appendix V). It is hardly surprising that unconfident students would take the easy way out rather than attempt to offer usable advice. This was particularly clear in the brief responses from reviewer two (Appendix V).

5.11.3 The Interview Students' Comments

The interview students did not have confidence in the feedback they received as it was too vague to guide revision, and they were not sure that the reviewer knew more than they did. Huda was disappointed because her peer reviewer did not suggest anything she could do. Abdulla's peer reviewer had told him it was a good essay but offered no help as far as he was concerned. Abdulla (peer reviewer three) had assessed

himself as having given full and helpful feedback, which proved to be partially accurate as his was the best I saw in this class; however, his advice still lacked specific ideas on possible changes (Appendix V). Huda had experienced some conflict with her reviewer over the factual nature of the ideas in her essay. Also, she had assessed herself as far better than the person whose essay she reviewed and concluded that there was little chance of other students in the class being able to help her. Obviously, it takes a lot of confidence for reviewers to offer advice on an essay if they know the original writer is stronger than them. And conversely, assuming you are a better writer than others is not conducive to accepting advice.

5.11.4 The Instructor's Attitude to Peer Review

For Lydia, her experiences at GSU had led her to believe that there was no point in continuing with peer review. By the time this study was drawing to a close, she had decided that peer review in the traditional sense had no value, but it might serve a purpose as a means to help students learn to become better self-evaluators.

> I don't think it's a useful tool for providing concrete feedback to students to improve their writing; I do think it's useful for developing editing and self-critique skills.
> (Lydia, personal communication, November 25, 2007)

Lydia had decided that this new conception of peer review would hold true for her in any teaching situation including the USA as actual teaching experience had led to her ideas and teaching practices evolving.

5.12 Summary

The semester during which the initial material was gathered was a difficult one, but may well be typical of the experiences of an optimistic beginner. Somehow the projected timeline for the semester was not adhered to and that made getting access to material awkward. Despite the bumps, Lydia shared her thoughts willingly as did her students. Not all the students who initially agreed to take part in the research saw the process through to the end, again a normal phenomenon. Those students who completed the questionnaires showed that the majority believed they attended to and valued the instructor's feedback.

Once the data was subjected to examination, contradictions arose between what Lydia planned for, what she had thought she had done and what she actually had done. Some of the more difficult to reconcile contradictions centered on the issue of the

instructor's assessment of the students as academically immature, as well as lacking in responsibility, and the awarding of relatively high grades in the end. Although it is only possible to speculate, some of the instructor's dissatisfaction may have been related to problems adjusting to the vastly different teaching and learning environment.

However, another area of confusion is centered on the feedback/revision cycle. Lydia gave quite brief feedback, more grammar related than content related, and indicated that the students made little use of it. However, the essays examined had undergone considerable revision on content, beyond that indicated by the feedback. And yet, this had escaped the attention of the instructor, or at least, was not acknowledged in the discussions. As there was no observation of classroom interactions, it is not possible to be sure where the impetus for this revision came from, but it seems reasonable to assume that something in the classroom interactions inspired the efforts seen. Peer review practices appeared to have had little success in Lydia's class, but to some extent this related to the design of the prompts and the timing of the activity. Neither Lydia nor the students indicated much enthusiasm for the activity.

This chapter explored the experiences and perspectives of Lydia and her students with written feedback in a freshman academic writing class. The next chapter introduces the second case study, the participating instructor, Kitty, and her students. A similar approach is taken to that taken in this study.

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS

CASE STUDY TWO: KITTY AND HER STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR WRITING/REVISING EXPERIENCES

As with the first case study, this case study centers on feedback procedures drawing on the instructors' and students' perceptions of classroom interactions and the feedback/revision cycle. An attempt has been made to provide comparable information to that gathered from the previous case study participants whilst also allowing the particular dynamic of this case study to emerge.

6.1 Introduction to Case Study Two

The writing instructor for this class, Kitty; and her students Dima, Maitha and Mustafa (not their real names) were the focus of this chapter. Again a process of selection and rejection has reduced the wealth of material to the point where it is manageable but still reveals aspects of the specific classroom culture of Kitty's class and the participants' experiences with feedback and revision.

The data referred to here revealing Kitty's views comes from two interviews, informal discussions, emails exchanged as more questions arose from an examination of the data and the instructors' focus group. In addition, data from students' essays, questionnaires and interviews gave insights into the students' perspectives in this semester-long case study. Although member checking was possible with the instructor, inevitably the students moved on and stopped responding to email enquiries as is their right; therefore, a focus group was set up with the instructor's current WRI 101 class to clarify some points of interest.

6.2 The Impact of the Instructor's Teaching and Cultural Background

The data collected through the case study approach and the ethnographic focus of the research gave access to detailed information on the teaching and learning experiences of Kitty and her students. Kitty had an informed perspective in terms of the teaching and learning situation in the Gulf region as she had lived and attended school there and experienced it both as a student and as an instructor. In addition, she was at least bilingual. Her considerable experience in the area meant that she had realistic expectations of the students; nevertheless, discussions indicated that she too had moments of frustration trying to encourage the students to engage with the writing tasks set.

Kitty had had ESL training and had only ever taught in the UAE, so her experience was entirely with students similar to those encountered at GSU. She had taught in language schools and had had previous experience in the UAE in a university that was run along similar lines to some of the schools here in the sense that *wasta* was used to negotiation over grades. Therefore, she had had experience with an administration that was willing to make compromises to appease students as well as with students lobbying for grade increases to an extent that would be unacceptable at GSU and in other reputable universities. The relatively firm approach taken at GSU, in terms of the administration of the university adhering closely to American standards and principles, was welcomed.

6.3 University Classroom Culture: Expectations and Obligations

Kitty's extensive experience with ESL students and her own experiences as a successful language learner meant that she was familiar with the challenges the GSU students faced as well as the ones they presented instructors with. When asked whether she saw them as ESL/EFL students or in some other way, she acknowledged that there was quite a range but that few could be considered proficient in English.

> Well most, I would say half my students come from English medium backgrounds, or English schools, so English is really their second language, whereas most of the local students are Saudis. They use English as a foreign language, so I would say 50/50.
> (Kitty, first interview)

It became apparent that she considered that students from Gulf countries, referred to above as 'the locals', were likely to have had less experience in English than students who had attended English medium schools here in the UAE. The use of the term 'locals' is common when differentiating between UAE citizens and UAE residents. UAE citizens have special status as there are so few of them, and they generally like to be distinguished from other residents through such symbols as their traditional dress. It was interesting to hear the term used the way it was as I had not heard it used to refer to Gulf citizens who were not citizens of the UAE before.

Although aware of the ESL/EFL needs of the students, Kitty felt that in general the students were not prepared for the type of academic environment they had entered. In the focus group, when the idea that the university expectation was that the students attain the same academic standards as American university students was brought up, Kitty had little to add though she felt that almost all of the freshmen were under-prepared no matter what school they had attended.

> They come in with, even ***** School or English medium schools, and most of them, some of them, don't do any better than someone coming from an Arabic speaking school. I think it comes down to study skills and a lack of it and not knowing how to function in an academic environment.
> (Kitty, instructor focus group)

The problem was not so much the lack of language skills but more a lack of the skills needed to take advantage of the new learning environment, something that may be true for many freshmen students all over the world.

6.3.1 Manipulation and Response

Kitty had a unique way of answering questions or responding to prompts as there was often a storytelling element to her response. To illustrate how the students' struggle to fit into the academic environment she had an anecdote.

> And then they say, "Oh but the books are heavy. I don't want to carry them." I say – get a mule. I mean honestly, all they have are these poxy little books and then they tell you they're too heavy for them. Park your donkey out here and we'll carry them for you.
> (Kitty, instructor focus group)

This may have been seen as unsympathetic by some students, but it is difficult to know what they expected her response to be to such complaints.

However, she was not always so unsympathetic. Although Kitty was familiar with the teaching and learning environment in the UAE, she admitted to submitting to the will of the students and responding to their subtle but effective techniques to get the kind of nurturing support they wanted out of her.

> I turn into such a pampering person because it's like I'm in this class and it's like these hopeless immature students and I say oh my God, I cannot find one that I could say he's university material, like he's ready for university.
> (Kitty, instructor focus group)

Although she did not like what she saw herself doing, her sympathy was clearly with these lost young people and she had taken a parental approach. Perhaps this empathy was a consequence of having been an ESL learner herself at some time in her education. But clearly, she was capable of taking a hard line if pushed beyond a certain limit.

6.3.2 Adding to the Picture: Students' Impressions of the Instructor

Given that Kitty assessed the students as academically immature, it is possible that this assessment had been communicated to the students in some way despite her

pampering as the students' evaluations of her were below the departmental average (Table 6.1). Students' comments on the evaluations were positive and negative. For example, while one student said she "was nice to us and fair", another said "patience, to smile and calm down as much as you can" (unidentified students, Kitty's class). Possibly, the frustration she felt at the students' lack of ability to manage their time and prioritize had caused some friction.

Table 6.1

Evaluations by Students: Kitty, Department & College

Individual or group	Evaluation Scale of 1-4[a]
Kitty	2.03
Department Average	1.78
College Average	1.66

[a]Closer to 1 is better

6.3.3 Grades and Evaluations

The evaluations of instructors do not take place in a vacuum and it is not only classroom interactions that impact ratings and what students say. Kitty's students advanced through the writing process at a measured pace receiving feedback and evaluations along the way. Therefore, it can be assumed that these students knew what their current standing in the course was at the time of the evaluations and this may have had a significant influence on how they assessed the instructor. The coda to the evaluations is that Kitty's students' final grades were lower than the other two participating instructors with only two A grades and four fail grades, the rest being bunched around the middle (Table 6.2).

Kitty mentioned that she felt it was rather difficult to maintain reasonable standards with grades when other members of the department appeared to inflate grades. She was aware that students discussed grades and that final grades were posted where anyone could see. A comment by one of the interview students disappointed by her grade illustrated this point well.

> They told me that this instructor she gives such marks, she wouldn't give higher.
> (Maitha, first interview)

The all-knowing 'they' refers to other students and the remark placed responsibility on the instructor, not the student's level of work. It was also common knowledge in the department that students tried to get into certain instructor's classes on the basis of what sort of grader they were considered to be and the corollary of this was that they tried to avoid other instructors. Kitty felt that a lot of misleading information circulated and may have led to disappointment when expectations of the instructor as an easy grader were not met.

> They come to your class because they heard something from other students about how you teach. . . . different expectations and sometimes unrealistic expectations, because of what they hear from other students. . . which could be completely wrong.
> (Kitty, first interview)

The chair of the department had instituted a policy of having all DWS classes posted with no indication of instructors' names.

Table 6.2

Kitty's Class Final Grade Range

	A/A-	B+/B/B-	C+/C/C-	D	F
Number Awarded [a]	2	8	5	2	2

[a]n=19

6.4 Initial Evaluation of the Students' Writing Skills

When asked what she thought of the students' writing ability at the beginning of the semester, Kitty reported that the students were pretty poor and her main reason for this assessment was that they tended to write as they spoke, "on and on, without any structure or organization." It was Kitty's intention to introduce them to the writing process and have them work with grammar in context as they learned how to structure a piece of academic writing. Grammar problems were an issue but not Kitty's main concern. While she made little in the way of a prediction about students' grammar skills improving over the semester, as it was not a specific focus of the course, Kitty was confident that she had had success with organization in the past and anticipated a similar result.

> I think they definitely learned how to organize their essays. They definitely learned how to support it properly. They could see what makes it coherent and well built.
> (Kitty, first interview)

Working with the syllabus, Kitty had a goal in mind and that was to get the students putting together a well organized and supported essay, but concerns over grammar were also discussed repeatedly.

6.4.1 Expectations, Resistance and Prior School Experiences

Kitty had encountered reluctance on the part of students to accept her evaluations of their writing. Some students simply did not find it possible to accept the feedback, although it seems that the feedback had targeted gaps in the writing that made the meaning elusive.

> Oh, they just try to tell me why I'm wrong and why they are right and what they were trying to say here.
> (Kitty, first interview)

The students were explaining their writing in order to make it comprehensible, yet they felt they deserved higher grades. Even though this clearly annoyed Kitty, her experience allowed her to come up with a philosophical explanation for the behavior.

> In this part of the world everything is negotiable.
> (Kitty, personal communication, October 2, 2007)

It seemed to Kitty that the students expected to receive only praise and when this did not happen they were not happy. I had observed a student in Kitty's class glance at the grade on getting the essay back and then thrust the paper away out of sight, a practice she had reported in the interview. She had told me she needed to get over the shock of the grade on the first draft before she could absorb the feedback and this would come later when she got home.

There was also evidence of resistance to the instructor's feedback in what Kitty said, a behavior that is discussed fully in the analysis of students' revision processes.

> So instead of looking at it as a, a positive feedback or a positive criticism they take offence, you know, "but this is what I want to say" or "this is how I want to say it."
> (Kitty, second interview)

This was reported as a response that came from a couple of students, whose writing appeared to Kitty to be vague, or lacking logic and coherence. Kitty felt that they were just unwilling to learn.

One of the problems Kitty identified repeatedly was that the students assessed themselves as much better than they were at writing and to a large extent she put this down to their experiences in high school.

> In many high schools teachers inflate students' grades so when they come to GSU their egos are inflated as well. They get pissed off with a low grade when in high school they were A students. I mean, I find that a lot of them have very unreal expectations. They say, "Oh but I was an A student, I had a 97%, I had A's in English all the time." And I say, "Oh but that was high school." And again I can't criticize their background. . . but, they have completely unrealistic expectations from what is expected of them.
> (Kitty, second interview)

Kitty's response was interesting here as she showed sensitivity over the issue of judging their school background. Having been educated in an English medium school in the UAE, Kitty had considerable knowledge of the variation in the quality of experience provided. She appeared to aim to get the students to recognize that considerably more was required of them in the current educational setting and to see that they had to try to reach that standard rather than hark back to past successes.

However, some students just could not accept the grades given and resorted to blaming the instructor for their failure to meet the required standard. Kitty reported being told that either she had not explained well or the student had not known what she was expecting, making their problems the instructor's fault.

6.4.2 The Reading/Writing Connection

The lack of interest in reading was a concern for Kitty, one which she saw as related to their struggle improving their writing skills. She mentioned that students complained that they could not read the set readings from the textbook because they did not read in English, preferring to read in Arabic or not at all.

> If you want to read in Arabic then you're in the wrong place. And they were jumping up and down. "Oh we don't understand because English is not our first language. And it's too tough. And we never read in English before."
> (Kitty, instructor focus group)

Although Kitty acknowledged that the students were being asked to accept a lot of responsibility for their own learning for the first time in their lives and to engage with tasks they had not been asked to deal with before, she was adamant that reading was a must.

Kitty saw this lack of willingness to make the necessary effort to read and deal with words having repercussions in the students' writing as well.

> Even when they read, they don't understand something they don't bother looking it up. So I mean it's the same thing in their writing. They don't look up the words. . . . What about the big dictionary? They don't look

> up the words; they don't go over it. They just forget about it. It's a problem I can't solve, forget about it.
> (Kitty, instructor focus group)

Kitty appeared to have identified an unwillingness to persist when the work was not easy. This may go back to the ease with which many students have encountered good grades. As freshmen, it seems, many students were slow to realize that they were going to have to take a different approach to their studies to ensure success.

6.4.3 Face-Saving Behavior

One of the frustrations for writing instructors is that giving written feedback on written work is time-consuming and can even be quite demoralizing if the students appear not to have put much effort in prior to handing in drafts. Kitty had noted that the students either put little effort into their writing or reported putting in little effort. This became apparent when she gave negative or unwelcome feedback on writing. Students tended to respond in a way that suggested they were protecting themselves and limiting the damage a negative evaluation had the potential to inflict by indicating that the writing had just been something they had thrown together hastily in the cafeteria during lunch break. Asked if she thought this was a face-saving thing, Kitty felt that that was possible but that some students really did make little effort.

> I think so, yeah, with some of them. . . But I also believe them; that's the sad thing, that they do actually just spend an hour, half an hour on their essays because this is probably the bottom of their priority list, their writing. Yeah and I think it's also being cultural because you know failure here is, is, you know in this culture it's very important what other people think of you. And if you don't do well in front of your peers, I mean that's, they always tell each other what their grades are. As soon as they receive it, they'll announce it to the whole class, so I think if they get a bad grade, yes, to save face they'll say "Well, I just did it in half an hour."
> (Kitty, first interview)

When asked if she thought that some students who assess themselves as weak in writing, protect themselves from too much damage by basically doing little or nothing and in effect setting themselves up for failure, Kitty commented that she had not thought about it that way but it seemed possible.

6.5 The Place of Writing across the Curriculum

Even though Kitty could see that some students may report less effort than they had actually made for face-saving reasons, she also expressed concern that many students made little effort, and had little regard for writing. One of the reasons Kitty

thought that this happened was the low regard students had for writing classes in general. She reported that the students think of it as 'only English'.

> They say, "It's considered an easy subject". They just think they can do it with minimum effort.
> (Kitty, first interview)

Kitty elaborated further on this, indicating that the students do not see the course as important in comparison to their other courses and this is demonstrated through absenting themselves to prepare for tests and complete projects for other courses. It is not uncommon to hear students openly offer this as an excuse for an absence.

She also felt that the low regard WRI 101 was held in by the students was exacerbated by instructors across the curriculum not emphasizing writing. The frequency with which students could get through a course with minimal writing due to the prevalence of multi-choice exams was one way in which Kitty saw the efforts of the writing instructors being undermined. She felt that there was a need for all instructors to require writing to a set standard if the students were to see the writing courses as offering them skills that they needed. As the situation was, she felt that it was perceived as a 'necessary evil', not a nuisance but not something that they could benefit from either.

6.6 The Writing Process Approach

Kitty was enthusiastic about the process approach to writing. In the first interview Kitty expressed the hope that the students would learn to plan in the hope that this would lead to better structure in the essays. Some students wanted to go over their work, getting advice and responding to it. However, this was not the case for all the students.

> No, I'm quite sure they do not realize the amount of work that is expected of them. They just think that whatever they do in class should be enough and the fact they have to write something and write it again and again and again, it's just probably difficult for them to understand.
> (Kitty, first interview)

In comments such as these, the preoccupation Kitty had with the degree to which the students are under-prepared for the tasks ahead of them due to lack of experience was illustrated. Kitty felt that not all students had understood the benefits of reworking an essay and some, because they received grades on the first draft, opted not to submit a second grade if they calculated that they were passing.

6.6.1 Actual Use of the Writing Process

The writing process was an essential part of the assignments, but students did have the option not to resubmit as they received a grade on the revised first draft (Table 6.3). The first assignment was completed within the time frame anticipated at the beginning of the semester. The peer review process was conducted on the Saturday and the students had two days to revise based on this advice before handing in to the instructor (Table 6. 3).

The first essay was completed by week seven and the instructor graded and returned the papers with reasonable speed, enabling the first interviews to be conducted in week nine and the second interviews, on completion of the second essay, in week fourteen. It was not possible to get access to the students to discuss the third essay as this was returned right at the end of the semester when the students were preoccupied with exams.

Table 6.3

Kitty Timeline for Essay One

Activity Essay One	Date
First Draft	Saturday, Feb 25 Week 6
Peer Review (In-Class)	Saturday, Feb 25
Revised First Draft (Graded)	Monday, Feb 27
Final Draft (Graded)	Monday, March 6 Week 7

Kitty reported that she had curtailed the number of drafts but was still prepared to give the students plenty of assistance. Originally, she had been reading and commenting on three drafts of the essay and three essays a semester, but with 80 plus students per semester, this had proved to be too much.

> Having large classes makes 'quality' marking very difficult. I also have stopped giving 3 drafts of an essay as I simply cannot keep up with the marking load. One main reason I like to drop students for non-attendance is to have less marking. Why bother grading someone's essay who does not attend regularly and will fail anyway?
> (Kitty, personal communication, October 2, 2007)

A comment like this, demonstrated clearly that the department was putting the instructors under too much strain with detrimental results.

6.7 The Highs and Lows of Engagement with the Feedback/Revision Cycle

In the second interview with Kitty, it became clear that the simple act of taking part in the study had influenced her feedback procedures.

> I never thought about the grading and how the students look at my feedback. But since you know I'm part of this project, I have started to think about it more.
> (Kitty, second interview)

It had not been my intention to influence usual feedback procedures, but it was inevitable that this happened. Kitty had noticed that some students really wanted to know what she meant by her comments and came to her at the end of class or to her office to get more information. Also, some students looked for the same level of feedback on assignments that do not normally receive such detailed feedback, such as summary writing or reader responses, and would come and ask for it.

This level of enthusiasm was not seen from all students though. Kitty also noticed that some students simply ignored the feedback even though she had made it plain that without changes there was no chance of the grade improving. For Kitty, this was an indication that the course was not considered important. Several times she mentioned that she had spoken to students about not making any of the changes she had recommended. And in one instance, frustration came though when, at the end of the semester, she realized that a student still had no idea how to use the coding sheet for the feedback points. For Kitty, it was 'heartbreaking' to put the time and effort into giving feedback and see it go unused.

In the instructor focus group discussion about students wanting extra feedback, Kitty had said little, but she mentioned that she had had experience with students who just could not overcome their errors based on what she had written for them and these students wanted to be told what to do quite specifically.

> They just copy what you say. Or they just come to you and say, "What do I write? I don't know how to correct this." . . . And you tell them you just have to rephrase that in more direct ways. "But how do I do that?" And they have no idea and again they delete it.
> (Kitty, instructor focus group)

She recognized that if she gave them an example, that example would appear in the essay. But, she also realized that there was a chance that they would lapse into avoidance behavior if the help offered was inadequate.

As the study progressed and the data was analyzed, I realized that Kitty had said little in the focus group so contacted her for more information on the desire of students for more feedback and their use of written feedback.

> I think maybe they do not want more feedback, but perhaps different. . . . . The way we provide feedback we expect the students to make a considerable effort and their own input in order to improve their next draft. We are not holding their hand when they are writing their next draft.
> (Kitty, personal communication, October 2, 2007)

The point Kitty made was that it was not the amount but the type of feedback that the students wanted changed. They wanted to be told exactly what to do rather than be given hints and suggestions on how to proceed.

The frustration of giving feedback that went unused was clear as Kitty felt that if the students took the time to read the feedback she gave, it would be helpful. However, her experience had shown her that even though students insisted that they appreciated the feedback, they did not actually read it carefully enough to make use of it. Although she indicated some frustration over this, she could see no other way to help the students.

> I mean, we got to be able to tell the students basically how, what is wrong and so far I think the best way to do that is to just giving them feedback in writing.
> (Kitty, first interview)

Although Kitty persisted with the written feedback option, she also mentioned that for cultural reasons, this being a society with a strong oral tradition, oral feedback may have been more suitable for some students, but the time to give this feedback was not available.

6.8 Actual Feedback Offered

In the interviews, Kitty explained that she used an assignment sheet that gave the assessment criteria and that this was explained in class when the assignment was given out. She also mentioned that she gave indirect feedback using a code system. With reference to direct feedback, Kitty reluctantly admitted to actually making the changes although she preferred the students to come to her office for help of this kind.

These sessions were described as more like an individual coaching session much like what the students could get from the Writing Center.

Although a lot of the discussion on feedback was related to ways of giving grammar feedback, Kitty also mentioned that the quality of the writing was important.

> But if somebody writes to me something that is, umm, perfectly written but makes no sense, I guess, you know, for me that is worse than writing something, you know, with good communicative quality, but with grammatical errors.
> (Kitty, first interview)

Examining essays revealed that there were marginal comments on the essays calling for additional information and feedback on grammar. Kitty used a grading rubric that covered global aspects of the essay and sentence skills with three columns to indicate level of success and one to point out what was not done (Table 6.4); it had space, about a third of an A4 sheet of paper, for summary comments. Kitty reported that she used this exclusively to write comments on content on both the first and the final draft; the final draft comments were generally brief. This was a mostly accurate description of what was found on the essays as little reference was made to grammar at this point (Appendix Q). Feedback written directly on the final draft tended to be confined to grammar codes and ticks where improvements were noted, but weaker students got additional directions on content.

Table 6.4

Grading Rubric Essay One

Divisions of the Rubric
Planning
Unity
Content
Introduction and Conclusion
Coherence
Sentence Skills
Evidence of Revision

6.9 Students' Perspectives of the Feedback/Revision Cycle

The class provided information of a general kind through three questionnaires administered at appropriate times throughout the semester (Appendixes I, J & K). For the most part, sixteen of the nineteen students who completed the course responded although some students skipped some questions. Three interview students discussed the experiences they had had receiving and responding to feedback on two of the three essays completed during the semester, and a focus group was formed later in the research process to gather additional data from another group of WRI 101 students being taught by Kitty at that time.

6.9.1 Students' Responses to Questionnaire One

The purpose of *Questionnaire One Feedback Received from the Instructor* was to find out how satisfied students were with the feedback they had actually received on the essay. In all classes the questionnaire was administered on-line through SurveyMonkey after the first feedback revision cycle was completed. This information gave a broader sweep than possible from the interview students and indicated general trends in thought.

6.9.2 Students' Impressions of the Preparation for Writing

The responses to questions two to six showed that the majority of students felt that they were well prepared for the writing assignment, instructions were clear, they understood what they were expected to do, how they would be graded, and on receiving the feedback, they read and understood what was offered (Appendix R). Five students had difficulty with the grading system, but they were in the minority (Figure 6.1). Kitty had handed out an instructional sheet and a grading sheet before the students began to write. The interview students mentioned that the grading sheet was explained fully in class.

One of the garrulous interview students, Dima, had a lot to add about the extent to which she was prepped for the essay assignment.

> We read the four choices we have and we discussed each and every choice and she started giving us examples and explaining exactly how to compare and contrast. And she gave us more than one way in comparing and contrasting and how we divide our paragraphs and then we discussed the way we need to type the thing, write the thing, the size, the font, the words. And make sure how to make our essays effective avoiding plagiarism. We discussed the sheet . . . before we started the thing, each and every point here, what does it mean and how you can get

an excellent, how can you get a weak. So, after she gave me back my paper I referred to this sheet to improve my essay.
(Dima, first interview)

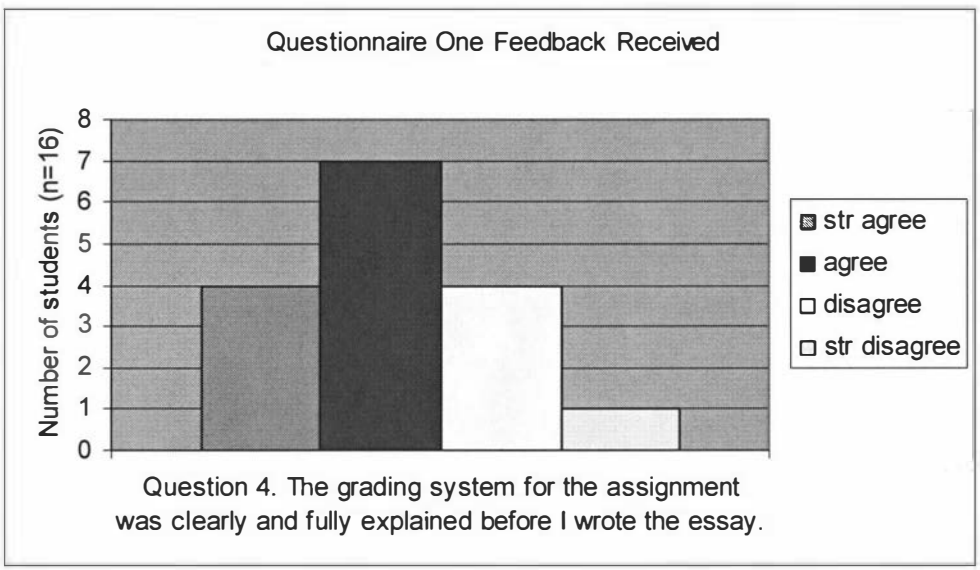

Figure 6.1. Kitty's students' views on the clarity of the grading system

She felt that all that needed to be said had been said and the details she provided showed that many aspects of writing and being assessed were covered. She also felt that she had been given full information before the second essay was written.

However, Maitha, who was not confident about her use of written English, had not understood the grading sheet and had spoken to the instructor. Despite this, she had still not fully understood how she would be graded. After she had written the essay and had help from the Writing Center, she felt that she had come to understand aspects of the grading sheet, such as the reference to coherence, a lot better.

Nearly, half the students reported that the first draft needed little change (Appendix R). In terms of the ways in which the feedback helped students to improve their essays, most students were satisfied that the feedback had worked for them with a small minority reporting some level of dissatisfaction. However, five students reported that the feedback did not help them to see the strengths in what they had written (Appendix R).

Question one asked students how satisfied they were with the grade for the essay. All sixteen answered this question, seven were satisfied and nine were not although the grades allocated are spread across the whole grade range with a cluster in

the B range (Table 6.5). They appeared to represent an even distribution compared to the other two instructors' classes where grades were grouped either at the middle to lower or upper end (Tables 5.9 & 7.3). One of the negative comments showed that the student did not accept the instructor's grade and felt there had been an error.

> no, I can tell from my essay that I have to score more than what she gave me .
> (Unidentified student, Kitty's class)

Table 6.5

Essay One Grade Range Kitty's Class

	A/A-	B+/B/B-	C+/C/C-	D	F
Number Awarded[a]	5	4	6	4	1

[a]n=20

Another student felt that the two hours he or she had spent on writing the essay deserved more reward and that the grade reflected an emphasis on grammar and vocabulary. This was written in a mixture of text message language and flawed English. Other complaints were about the time spent for a low grade, the failure of the Writing Center or just that there was an expectation of getting a higher grade. The students who responded positively felt that they had received what they deserved or had been graded fairly.

> Yes, because the mark I got is what is really deserve, and it gives me a push to do better
> (Unidentified student, Kitty's class)

In response to the open-ended questions 20 and 22 about additional help wanted, two students asked for help generating ideas and one asked for a chance to discuss essays individually. Both these requests were within the students' power to make happen by going to the instructor's office. One student wanted to be told "what EXACTLY is bad in the essay". Another student showed a lack of willingness to monitor his own level of activity and commitment as the response to the question about additional help wanted was for the instructor to:

> Made me more active to improve my writing
> (Unidentified student, Kitty's class)

It is difficult to imagine what this particular student had in mind apart from some kind of stand-over technique not a part of university practice.

However, the picture is not all depressing. Twelve students wrote responses to question 21 about what they could have done to prepare themselves, all coming up with clear, sensible ways they could have managed their time or prepared through prewriting. In addition, there were also complimentary comments about the feedback and the efforts the instructor had made.

6.9.3 Students' Responses to Questionnaire Two

A further questionnaire, *Questionnaire Two Instructor Feedback Wanted*, was administered to see what students would have wanted if they had had a choice (Appendix J). The number of students responding to this questionnaire dropped to fifteen. As anticipated, the students wanted all the help they could get, so feedback was welcomed on all areas of the essay. Only two or three students responded negatively to the majority of questions with the exception of question eight about being directed to websites, which six students responded to negatively (Appendix S). Although the students seem to be enthusiastic computer users, website use was not a favored option, but being directed to use the textbook was acceptable to most. There were five students uninterested in using the Writing Center (Figure 6.2).

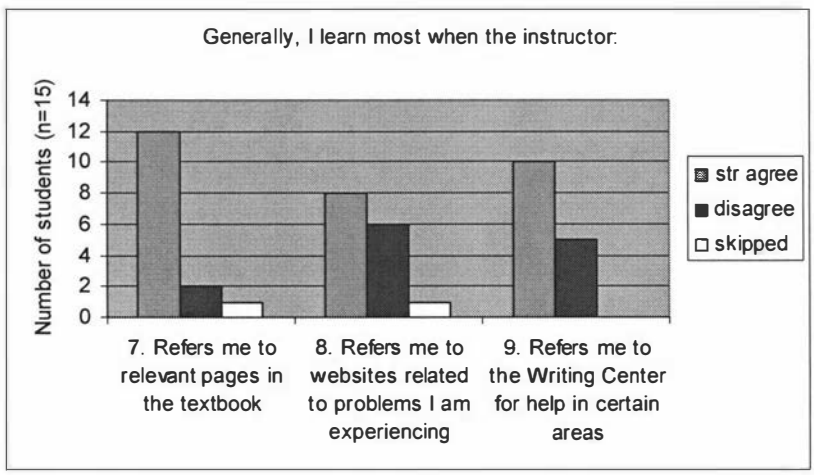

Figure 6.2. Questionnaire Two: Kitty's students' preferences for additional help

The results of questions 16 and 17 again indicated that most students wanted everything although there was a slight preference for having the instructor make changes to their essays (Figure 6.3). This slight preference for the instructor to make the changes may be a reflection of a tendency to be dependent on the instructor.

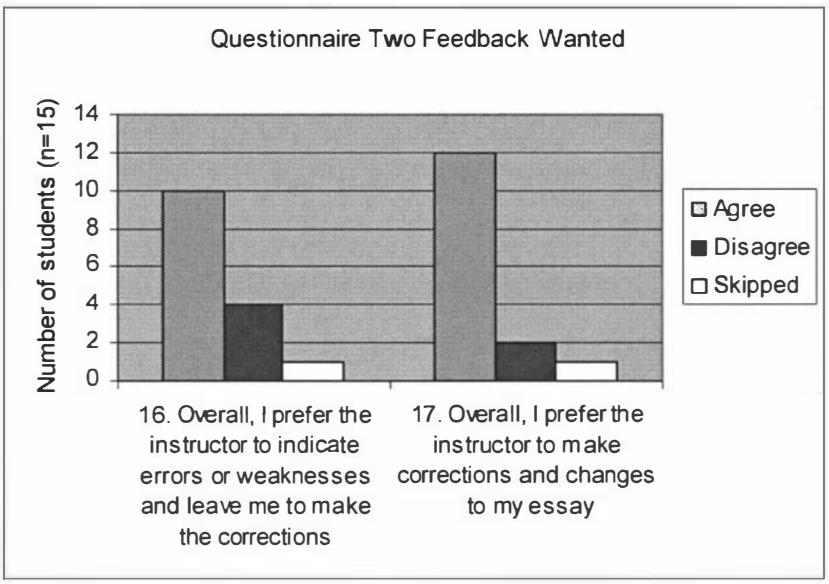

Figure 6.3. Questionnaire Two: Kitty's students' overall instructor feedback preferences

Although there were few responses to open-ended question 18 about other assistance they may have wanted (Appendix J), the anxiety students feel over grades was clearly expressed in one response.

> please please please please in the next essays, give us proper grades, thank you, I want my parents to be proud of me :)
> (Unidentified student, Kitty's class)

The method of expression is immature, and it fits Kitty's idea that everything is negotiable.

6.9.4 Focus Group Response to Overall Preference Questions

The focus group assembled of Kitty's current students, two semesters after the original data gathering process, answered the same questions, 16 & 17, but showed a different pattern of response (Figure 6.4.). They had a preference for being left to make the correction themselves and in fact this was the type of feedback they had received a lot of (Appendix T). It is possible the different tendencies reflect group dynamics with the earlier group being more dependent on the instructor than the focus group. This group indicated that they had struggled to make a choice, but the first option either made sense or was interpreted as referring to two different types of errors.

> The first one might represent minor changes, which I choose to make them or not to correct them. While the second one would be the major sentence structure which I expect the professor to correct them, so that I know if it's my grammar mistake or adjectives, adverbs.
> (Unidentified student, Kitty's students' focus group)

This student indicated that he wanted some autonomy, but he also wanted help where it was necessary with the errors he would not have been able to sort out unaided.

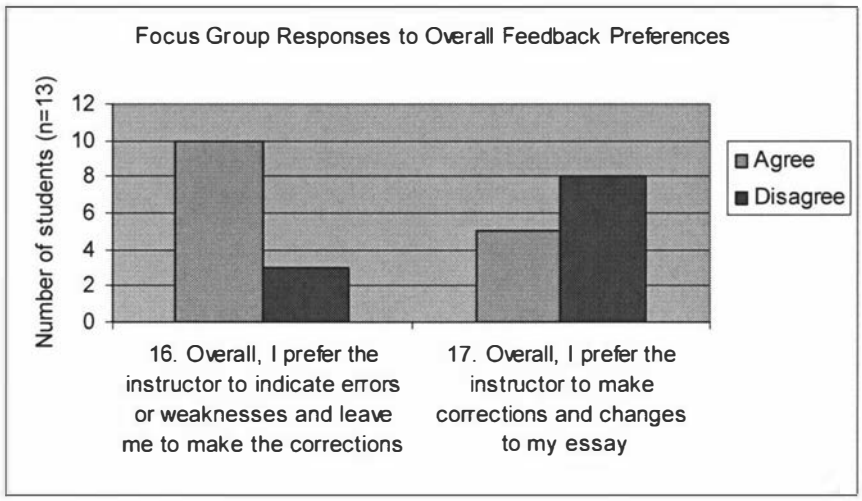

Figure 6.4. Kitty's focus group students' instructor feedback overall preferences

6.10 General Information on Feedback from Interview Students

The information students offered in interviews helped to build up a fuller picture of students' responses to written feedback on their essays. As planned, three students took part in the interview process, discussing their essays after they had received the final grade. They will be known as Dima, Maitha and Mustafa. Six of the essays supplied had gone through the writing process. However, there were limitations in the use I was able to make of two of them due to the fact that two students had unusual problems with their essays that necessitated extensive rewriting; therefore, they had not used the writing process in quite the way the instructor had anticipated as hasty drafts were put together and there were hasty responses to the feedback. Nevertheless, there were plenty of instances of responses to grammar and content feedback from these students. Although they each wrote a third essay, it was too late for us to meet by the time it was returned just before exam week, and by the next semester the students had moved on to other courses.

6.10.1 Students' Self-Assessments and Previous Writing Experiences

Dima had gone to an English medium school and rated herself as a good writer (Table 6.6). She reported that she had done very well in high school. She mentioned that her high school teacher was strict on grammar, and she appeared to have been introduced to the writing process at school. She continued to use it at university

indicating that she made at least a partial outline of her essay before she started and adjusted the outline as she worked on the essay. If she had not made an outline to begin with, she made one at the end and appeared to see this as useful.

Table 6.6

Kitty's Students' Self-Assessments of Writing Ability and Final Grades Awarded

	Self-Assessment in the Interview	Final Grades
Dima	Good	A-
Maitha	Not too good, not too bad	B+
Mustafa	Between good and very good	C-

Maitha was cautious about her writing ability, but she was interested in writing for herself, not for university requirements. She kept a personal diary where she recorded her thoughts. She had attended an English medium school where she had been introduced to brainstorming but not the process approach to writing as there was just one chance to hand in and have the essay checked. She saw benefits in multiple drafts.

> Interviewer: Ok, so did you get much feedback from your teacher at school?
> Maitha: Yeah she gives us feedback on the last, like there is no another chance to write, but I think the idea of more than one draft, it's better.
> Interviewer: It's better, you like doing that. Why is it you like it?
> Maitha: You can fix what you did, you know; like when you started only once like that's your last chance. You can't improve. It's just one time, and then that's it. While on that [current essay] you can fix, like you know how to organize more your thoughts or you know how to write it again to fix some stuff. I think it's better.
> (Maitha, first interview)

She had heard of such terms as *thesis statement* but had no firm idea of what they referred to even though she had attended an American curriculum school.

> When I came here and the teacher was saying "thesis statement, thesis statement" [unclear] I heard of it but we weren't, like, into it.
> (Maitha, first interview)

Mustafa described himself as between good and very good, but he barely passed the course. He had attended an Arabic medium school and had had little experience with English. In the first interview he expressed concerns about his ability to speak

English as he lacked fluency. And throughout the interviews he used the words "what's called" when hesitant. But he had a lot of confidence in his writing skills. It was difficult to see how he could reconcile these two different perceptions of his competence in English, but he managed to maintain his confidence even in the face of consistent low grades in written English. He had had no experience with the writing process previously but reported that he could see benefits in this approach to writing.

> It gave me, what's called, the chance to see my mistakes, to correct the mistake to get a higher mark and to know where's my, what's called, to see where I had problem in my writing.
> (Mustafa, first interview)

It was interesting to see students display an understanding of how the process approach could assist them.

6.10.2 Perspectives of the Relevance of WRI 101 to Other University Courses

Kitty had expressed concerns about how seriously the students took the WRI courses and whether or not they saw what they learned as applicable across the curriculum. In contrast, Maitha, a multimedia student, reported that WRI 101 was directly useful for her in her major as the instructors required reports, and while they would help with the facts, they did not help with the writing. The focus group students also reported that they could see the writing classes as providing useful information applicable across the curriculum and particularly mentioned report writing. However, when asked if they wrote reports, the response was in the negative. Of the six students present only one, an engineering student, claimed he had to write for his major, in this case laboratory reports. Two female students argued that they would need what they were learning in WRI courses in the future either in the university or in their jobs, but one of them felt two courses, rather than the requisite four, would be sufficient.

Also, despite Maitha's earlier acknowledgement that writing classes helped her in writing for her major, she set English low in terms of priorities.

> It's [work for her major] too much sometimes and I don't really have time for math or English you know. It's like my secondary priority.
> (Maitha, first interview)

Interestingly, this idea was echoed by Dima, who was majoring in the same College. She confirmed Kitty's hypothesis when asked how useful WRI 101 was to her.

> Well, I'm a design student so what I take is drawing and design. It [WRI 101] plays a part and help me in maybe 50% but it's like an extra course

> . . . . Math, all these course are like to help me with my GPA when I am in the design building.
> (Dima, first interview)

When she refers to math, she is implying that all the GER courses are seen as GPA builders rather than courses with useful content. In a further comment she indicated that she may have benefited from the writing courses for research purposes had she not already had a good background in school.

> We do researches for our design courses we do, but because I have a lot, a very good background about researches and stuff, if I didn't have a background maybe the WRI course would help me a lot.
> (Dima, first interview)

Dima's comment, made at the beginning of the semester, suggested overconfidence and a lack of understanding of the demands of academic writing.

Mustafa, an engineering student, felt that the writing course could help him in report writing for other classes, but he had earlier commented that he did not have to write for other classes. He also seemed to confirm a lot of Kitty's fears. He made it plain that sometimes he was too busy with other courses to put the required effort into the writing course.

> Mustafa: At last someone told me that I had to submit my final draft, so, and also I had a midterm on that day. So I just run out, type it and submit it without reading.
> Interviewer: So can I ask you that same question again, was it a good plan?
> Mustafa: For sure no. But look when I have a midterm on any day of the week I just ignore any activity on that day regarding that day and just go on to the midterm.
> (Mustafa, first interview)

Even though at the time of this conversation, he knew that the consequence of his chosen action was a fail grade on the essay, a significant part of the WRI course, his comments suggested that he would do the same again. In these comments there was evidence of poor time management and study skills, as well as a lack of understanding of the extent to which GER course provided a broad base on which to build.

6.11 Tally of Feedback Received and Individual Students' Responses

The feedback revision process can be a complex interaction between instructor and student with many opportunities for mistakes and misunderstandings as the essays that were analyzed from Kitty's students revealed. Kitty used a feedback rubric for all

essays, as described above (Table 6.4). The feedback from that sheet, with the exception of the summary comments, was difficult to accurately assess in terms of what the students did in response to it, but where it was mentioned the comments have been referred to.

Having sorted and tallied the comments on the essays and the summary comments, it was clear that Kitty gave considerably more feedback to the weaker students. There were anomalies evident in the way she had responded to some of Mustafa's and Maitha's drafts. These are discussed below.

Kitty used codes for the indirect form feedback and made some changes to students' grammar or word choice. She wrote long comments in places, the longest being 20 words on the final draft of Mustafa's first essay; comments of 10 words or more were common. Evidently, she stuck to her policy of providing little direct feedback in most instances, but Mustafa received this type of feedback (Appendix T). All the feedback was easily categorized although there were places where I was not able to agree with the code given for a particular item, for example a preposition indicated as an error that seemed right to me. Positive feedback was given and ticks used as shorthand for praise on the essay (Appendix T).

6.11.1 Dima's Revision Process Essay One

Dima was the most successful of the interview students and received less feedback than the other two on the first essay. Although the summary feedback asked for better organization, more details, examples and support, there were no specific strategies given. Dima was also urged to proofread. Dima reported that she always acted on all the advice given as well as going to the Writing Center, and in a subsequent comparison of the two drafts, it was immediately clear that she had revised both the grammar and the content. With the content, she had gone beyond the written prompts offered. Dima reported that she used the Writing Center for English and for other assignments.

Dima had worked initially on her grammar errors and claimed that they had come about while typing fast, rather than being a representation of her competence. However, the new passages had similar errors to the previous writing (Table 6.7). In the second draft, Kitty gave a little grammar feedback on the errors in the new passage and pointed out several errors she had not dealt with previously. It appeared that Dima had not searched for similar, unmarked errors in her writing. But this was what Kitty had hoped would happen. There was only one example of Dima finding and correcting a

sentence unaided and that was by adding an article that had not been indicated by the instructor.

Table 6.7

Dima: Sentence Skill Revision

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	Added *sp* Underlined words *rewrite*	*sp* We barley gather and sit all together on one table.
Draft Two		We hardly gather to sit altogether and chat.

Note. The words in italics are the instructor's feedback.

Dima did, however, make sentence skill changes everywhere there was a prompt even a non-specific one, and most were successful. Sometimes the way Dima chose to make the changes looked a lot like avoidance, but in this example the idea did not actually vanish and the ensuing sentence was much clearer (Table 6.7). Whether this had been reworked alone or at the Writing Center, was not certain. She had added to the introduction, doubling it in size by starting with an anecdote. The addition of examples and details was seen in four places: the introduction, twice in the body paragraphs (the latter two being in direct response to marginal comments requesting examples), and in the conclusion (Table 6.8). The addition in the conclusion had arisen from a prompt to remove a section, and this she did as well.

Table 6.8

Dima: Content Revision Adding Clear Details

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	Marginal Feedback – *provide examples*	In other words there was a limit on how much they could spend and most of the money was spent on basic needs because of their priority.
Draft Two		For example, my grandmother used to save money in order to spend it on food and supplies at the end of every month, while now I personally don't think of saving money instead I spend variable amounts of money on basic and luxury goods.

In the discussion with Dima about dealing with feedback, it became clear that she had struggled to accept that she was not a straight A student. As Kitty had anticipated, she had had an inflated sense of her own writing ability communicated to her by her high school grades. But she had come to terms with the new reality after a time of adjustment.

> I'm used to good grades. But it's not now I'm in university. It's a fact. It's not like what was in high school.
> (Dima, first interview)

Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that Dima had originally been shocked by the essay when the first draft was returned. She had reacted to the grade 7.5, a C, and put the essay away.

> I got shocked 'cos I think I wrote well. So when I got like pissed off at the beginning because I am used to get always good grades in high school. . . . I closed my essay and I continued the class normally. . . . I found out that everything makes sense, you know. Parts where I was asked to put more details and give examples, it's true because me, myself, I know what I am talking about. But anyone else looks at it, he doesn't know or she doesn't know what I am talking about.
> (Dima, first interview)

Dima had originally not been convinced that the introduction and conclusion needed any attention, but discussion with the instructor convinced her. This fitted Kitty's theory that the students benefited from discussions with the instructor because Arab society has a strong oral tradition. It also showed that Dima, while resistant at first, was willing to listen and learn.

Having discussed the revision process, Dima shared with me her feeling that she was capable of getting full marks.

> I think yeah, if two hours weren't enough time to spend fixing my second draft but I was happy with a 9 but I knew that if 7.5 improved to 9, 7.5 could have improved to 10. So but you know, time is my problem in life.
> (Dima, first interview)

She had remained confident and identified time as the factor that was limiting her grade. She had certainly done a lot of what Kitty had hoped students would do: read the feedback, used the Writing Center, sought oral feedback and revised extensively.

6.11.2 Dima's Revision Process Essay Two

The second interview revealed some interesting responses from Dima about the feedback/revision cycle. For one thing she claimed that she had worked a lot harder on this essay, and this may have been a response to the initial low grade she received on essay one. Dima had received little grammar feedback this time. The one instance where an error persisted, turned out to be as a result of feedback being given on two errors side-by-side and Dima only realizing there was one mistake.

One content related question in the margin asking for specific information led to considerable revision. Kitty had written, "Why are people starving and poor?" This was discussed in the interview revealing how useful it can be to draw students' attention directly to a lack of examples.

> When I reread the paragraph, I noticed that yeah, I mentioned only starvation and didn't even explain it or give an example because I understand what starvation is. But a person reading my essay doesn't know what I am talking about and needs to know exactly how people were suffering and stuff.
> (Dima, second interview)

Dima explained how this question, directing her to a specific gap in the information, had helped her; she had written extra details by hand on the paper and added them to the paragraph.

She was not always so willing to respond to the feedback though. With reference to feedback added in the second draft on a matter that had also been brought to her attention in the first draft, Dima was obviously annoyed that the instructor was persisting with commenting on this wording.

Table 6.9

Dima: Resistance to Sentence Skill Feedback Essay Two

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	*WW*	In fact, they turned them down forcefully rather than closing them peacefully.
Draft Two		In fact, they turned them down forcefully rather than closing them peacefully.

The problem was the inaccurate use of the words 'turned them down' (Table 6.9). Through lengthy discussion it became apparent that she had meant to say 'closed/shut them down'. It transpired that she was trying to include what had happened to the people and the companies in the one sentence and that was why she was resistant to advice on how to improve the sentence.

> Maybe because I am talking about companies but I have the people in mind but I continue as if I am talking about the people, maybe I had to add a sentence or change it to 'shut them down' if I am talking about companies.
> (Dima, second interview)

Eventually, she was able to see it in a way that made sense to her. And we went through the same lengthy process with analyzing a sentence fragment.

> Oooh, I shouldn't have put a new sentence because it's a fragment, yeah, yeah, yeah.
> (Dima, second interview)

I had not anticipated that I would be in effect teaching at the same time as getting the students to talk about what they had and had not done, but that is what happened. It became apparent that it was important for Dima to be perceived as a competent writer and she had to struggle to accept that there were errors in the second draft. She had worked hard on it, was interested in the topic and wanted readers to find it interesting, too.

6.11.3 Maitha's Revision Process Essay One

In the first interview Maitha had pointed out that she did not fully understand the divisions in the grading sheet. When we discussed the actual feedback she had received, it was clear that she was able to use the feedback written directly on the essay more easily than the summary comments on the grading sheet.

> No it was just general and there [in the essay] she points out the real mistakes. Even between paragraphs she's still pointing them out. And here she spoke only about everything.
> (Maitha, first interview)

It seems having your instructor speak 'only about everything' is somehow unsatisfactory. However, what she appeared to be saying was that specific feedback related directly to aspects of the essay worked for her.

Maitha made it clear that she had known she could get individual help from the instructor if she went to her office, but she had not gone. However, she had read the feedback carefully, including the summary comments where she was told about problems with organization and had gone to the Writing Center.

> First, I looked in the essay and I saw on each paragraph she tells me it has to be more organized. And I'm not putting the paragraphs in a good way. Like I talk about one thing in two different paragraphs and they have to be connected and stuff. So I went and I spoke to the lady there [Writing Center] and I wanted to understand why is this wrong and she told me. I asked the questions and she used to answer, but they don't really help. They don't really tell me what to do. If I ask, then she'll tell me.
> (Maitha, first interview)

Maitha found the level of support offered at the Writing Center unsatisfactory. She appeared to have anticipated more giving and less effort on her part, which is not how the GSU Writing Center operates. After a little discussion Maitha added a comment that showed that it was only later that she realized the extent to which she had been helped.

> It made me like think more and after I went home I did that. I sat and I thought with myself about that I can figure out the answer, you know. I don't need people to tell me.
> (Maitha, first interview)

Initially, Maitha had been surprised to see this first essay with the extensive feedback. It was clear that she overestimated her writing competence. She had worked hard and anticipated the grade to reflect her effort rather than her level of success although she did want her instructor to show her the errors.

> I felt disappointed. Because you know I felt I put everything into it and then it was all red. It was so weird. And then when I did it again I felt now this is the perfect one, you know. I'm gonna get a ten and then I got 8.5.
> (Maitha, first interview)

She felt she could work out the sentence skill errors herself if she read her writing more than once and she had taken more care with the final draft, reading it through after printing. However, she admitted that she needed help with the more global aspects of her writing.

Although at times Maitha made sentence skill changes that were apparently unprompted and at other times errors disappeared as part of the revision, there were a couple of instances of avoidance behavior in response to grammar feedback (Table 6.10). In this instance Maitha's response was to remove pronouns.

Table 6.10

Maitha: Avoidance Behavior in Response to Grammar Feedback

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	Underlining and marginal comment - *be consistent with your pronouns*	Some of us would think of getting married to someone they love and raise a family.
Draft Two		Some would consider getting married and raise a family.

Although she struggled to deal with some feedback on content, Maitha actually made an effort to make changes and to add details in some places when asked to. The example below shows that she made an effort to make her language more precise and give specific details (Table 6.11). But, in one place she chose to remove sentences when asked for details, possibly an example of avoidance in response to feedback.

Table 6.11

Maitha: An Example of Adding Detail but Reducing the Content

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	Marginal comment - *provide examples*	They get to work in high positions and they have showed that they are good and qualified enough to hold important roles in the society.
Draft Two		They work in politics, have good positions in the government and have their own firms and companies.

On another occasion, when told that she was not contrasting the same things when looking at her grandparents' and her life, she chose to make no changes. In fact, in the interview it became apparent that this was an example of resistance to the feedback because she had things she wanted to say and could not figure out another way to do so. She was not willing to give up on those points that were important to her.

> No I understood . . . but there I didn't know how to write because there were stuff in the past I wanted to talk about them while they are not really there in the present. I don't know. I didn't know how to do that.
> (Maitha, first interview)

A note of frustration was evident in comments like this. She also resisted some suggested word form changes, such as a suggestion to change the word *dependable* which should have been *dependent*.

> Sometimes when I am convinced in something I don't change it. . . . I don't see it's wrong.
> (Mustafa, first interview)

We discussed why she had not made some of the suggested changes or had taken steps to avoid them and she repeatedly made explicit comments that displayed resistance to making the changes because she did not see what was wrong or because it was something she wanted to say.

Also, in the interview, she reacted irritably to the marginal comment 'So what did they have?' on the final draft, which sought more information about the lack of professions in the past.

> But I don't get it. Why does she always want, she wants examples everywhere. Like, get the idea!
> (Maitha, first interview)

It appeared that she expected the reader to 'know' and had not accepted the need to clarify her ideas with examples and explanations. A lot of Maitha's frustration seemed to be related to the pressure she was under as a multimedia student, as she mentioned that she did not have time to do everything that was asked of her. But sometimes she just got sick of revising.

We discussed whether or not the instructor graded fairly and although she was reluctant to say much, she did eventually admit that it was probably fair. The discussion came to a close with Maitha realizing the value of oral feedback for her.

> Well if she would sit with me like you and maybe show me one example like how you did, maybe I would see it better because I really didn't notice this until now when we spoke about it.
> (Maitha, first interview)

However, the comment implies that the instructor failed her, when in fact, she had simply not gone to the instructor for help.

6.11.4 Maitha's Revision Process Essay Two

There was little to be gained from attempting an in-depth analysis of Maitha's second essay. As can be seen, she got little feedback on either draft (Appendix T). On checking with the instructor I found that the first draft had not used the rhetorical strategy set. This was a minor problem compared to the subject matter. Maitha had chosen as her topic, the spread of Islam around the world. Kitty, an experienced resident of the Gulf region and fearing the consequences of giving negative feedback on such a sensitive topic, chose not to get too involved. There was precedent for this caution. An instructor in the department had been verbally reprimanded for using a textbook with a print of an ancient Turkish painting of Mohammad as it is forbidden in Islam to represent his image.

Rather than deal with this issue, Kitty had stopped giving feedback on page one of the essay. She had not filled out the grading sheet but had written a brief summary comment indicating that it was a narrative not a cause and effect essay. On the final draft comments were limited and the essay received the grade 8/10. The interview provided little information as Maitha had had little to work with.

6.11.5 Mustafa's Revision Process Essay One

Some difficulties were encountered examining Mustafa's revision process in both his essays. For the first essay, he had written a comparison and contrast essay using point-by-point to organize the ideas and then decided to change it to one side at a time for the final draft. He was not prompted to do this by the instructor, but he decided it would be 'fine'. He had had extensive summary comments on the essay and the grading sheet telling him that the essay was flawed.

> The ideas in the body paragraph are often confusing, you need to better organise your argument.
> (Mustafa, first interview)

This may have provided the impetus to change the essays' pattern of organization.

Initially, Mustafa had been very confident about the essay. He had not paid much attention to the grading sheet and felt that the essay would be easy because a lot of material related to the essay had been covered in class.

> We took the lesson for the how to write an essay, so for coherence and content and aah and sentence skills. We already took it in the class. So I didn't have like, I didn't look at it because I know what's going on.
> (Mustafa, first interview)

However, when he got 5/10 on the first draft, he decided to revise eventually achieving 6.5/10, which is still a fail grade. Although Mustafa said he liked to get comments and he liked to discuss them with the instructor, he had not done this.

> No, because it's clear *yahni.* I don't need to go and bother him. Total clear.
> (Mustafa, first interview)

Interestingly, Mustafa referred to his instructor as *him* repeatedly although the instructor was female. He had made an appointment with the Writing Center but not gone for help due to time constraints. However, he had attempted to attend to all the feedback.

Looking at the changes he had made, it was clear that he had made many changes and incorporated most of the direct feedback. He mentioned that he was more interested in getting grammar feedback than content, but he made changes to both grammar and content. Because of the organizational shift, some sentences were deleted so it was not possible to accurately assess how many feedback points went unattended but some were still present. In fact he removed a total of eight complete sentences and a lot of feedback along with it.

One of the errors that persisted may have been due to unclear feedback (Table 6.12). It seemed that the instructor's feedback led Mustafa to create a fragment as he failed to realize that this would be the result if he did not add a subject and a verb.

One of the problems Mustafa had had was with verb tenses, but again this was a misunderstanding as he explained that he had thought it was acceptable to write the whole essay in the past tense as if he had now grown up. In the revised draft he had corrected all of the verb tense problems that had been pointed out to him.

Table 6.12

Mustafa: Confusion over Feedback

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	*new sentence* Added – *poverty*	. .and also they were studying under hard *new sentence* *poverty* circumstances such as war, poor life, and lack of sources needed in their education.
Draft Two	*sentence fragment* Added parentheses to indicate where	. . .and also they were studying under hard *sentence fragment* circumstances. *(*Such as war, poverty, and lack of sources needed in their education.*)*

Despite summary feedback asking for more support, there was little evidence of this having been attended to. Mustafa had added a few words here and there to an existing sentence to make it fit the new organization pattern, but there were no clear details added despite the addition of a couple of sentences, the first of which was a fragment and difficult to decipher (Table 6.13).

Table 6.13

Mustafa: Two Examples of Material Added to Essay One

	Student's Sentences
Discussing the Past	Since it was difficult to find a part time job that could offer you reliable, comfortable, and well paid job.
Discussing the Present	So you do not have to worry about working and finding a good part time or a full time job it's easily found.

In fact, the revised essay seemed to be shorter than what he had written originally. Part of the summary comment on the final draft was a plea from the instructor for Mustafa to come to her for help.

From the interview, it was clear that Mustafa had difficulty accepting responsibility for the poor quality of his work. First, he claimed he had not worked hard

because he had not had time, so he had typed the essay in 30 minutes. Second, he blamed the computer for some of his problems

> It's not a good software. . . . But look before I print any essay on my PC I just click the spelling and grammar check, I don't know, and it appears for me that your essay is fine and there is no spelling or grammar (unclear).
> (Mustafa, first interview)

Considering the initial evaluation he had offered of his writing ability, it seemed that he was adept at finding face-saving explanations to assuage any negative evaluations of his writing. But he was also experiencing serious time management problems and difficulties organizing materials. It transpired that he had not saved the first draft on the computer and he had retyped the whole essay. He reported his emotions on receiving the final grade as ranging from surprise to anger.

> I'm not an instructor here and the instructor's bigger than me and he knows more than me. That the rule of life. I can't, I can't argue with my instructor. If that's the comment, that's good one for me.
> (Mustafa, first interview)

Although he was disappointed in the grade, he accepted the instructor's evaluation. He seemed to have a clear view of how power relations operate.

6.11.6 Mustafa's Revision Process Essay Two

Once again Mustafa's process was complex and difficult to follow. He was writing a causal analysis essay and had chosen to write on the rising crime rate in the UAE. This first attempt had not been well received by the instructor. Although he showed me the essay with the marginal comments and grammar feedback, there was no accompanying grading sheet. There was a good deal less feedback on this draft than on other writing I had seen belonging to Mustafa (Appendix T). It appeared that Kitty had recognized that there were serious problems with the essay early on while giving feedback and had reduced her responses. This had acted as an indication to Mustafa that the essay was free of grammar errors and better than the previous essay, and he was confused as to why the instructor wanted him to select a different topic.

> There is no like structural mistakes. There is no any ideas mistake but is just she needs to know the source or some, she told me that it is based on assumptions. . . . But it's a reality; you can ask anybody.
> (Mustafa, second interview)

He spent a long time justifying how he had asked people their opinions and thought the ideas through logically. His indignation was tangible. Nevertheless, by the time of the interview, he had already changed topic and written two more drafts.

The discussion of the second attempt he had made at writing the essay, this time on dishonesty in the university, started with the same face-saving comments about typing in a hurry and to this Mustafa added that he had emailed it to Kitty for feedback because he was under pressure to get it done. For this reason, he felt able to accept the grade of 6/10 and did not see the extensive grammar feedback as an indicator that he had a weakness in grammar. It was all due to speed.

However, there was some evidence of resistance to the instructor's feedback. Even though this essay was on a different topic, Mustafa had kept the original opening sentence, one that had received a negative comment for not being connected to the ideas in the essay; he maintained it in the final draft adding to it in pencil, seemingly at the last moment, the words "such as dishonesty in university".

> Mustafa: Well I told her I can't be, any essay, even if it's not connected to this sentence, but I usually begin my essay with the sentence, "The world is filled with many unusual things". If you checked, even my essay number one you're gonna find that, not this one, the one, one, you're gonna find the words – many unusual things.
> Interviewer: So why do you always start with that?
> Mustafa: I don't know. It's a habit. I like to start my essay, even if it's not related I like to start with it.
> Interviewer: I see your instructor has written here, "I still don't like your opening." So you still didn't accept her advice that it wasn't working.
> Mustafa: Well I don't know, but it's a habit. I don't know.
> (Mustafa, second interview)

It is possible that he simply forgot to change it as he had a lot of grammar feedback to deal with. One of the features of the feedback/revision cycle in relation to the feedback Kitty gave to Mustafa was that he received a lot more feedback especially in terms of grammar. This was evident even though the other two students also had a lot of grammar errors in their essays. It appeared that Kitty identified Mustafa's errors as more damaging to the readability of his ideas.

On contacting Kitty for information on whether or not she thought she varied the feedback it emerged that she had quite a few reasons for doing this.

> I try to give plenty of feedback for the first draft. However, once I get to know the students I tend to give more feedback to those who really want it. I also give (reluctantly) more feedback to the students who complain all the time about their grades. I like to give them a feedback covered in

> red ink just to shut them up. So I really try to find all their mistakes. (I am only human) Finally, I often write nothing on hopeless papers that I find 'incorrectible'. I just write to the students "Come and see me" cause it is much easier to talk the student through his/her essay. I can provide instant feedback and explanation about all problems: grammar or content. My written comments on a really bad draft just won't make any sense. Unfortunately, not many poor writers follow my advice and turn up as requested.
> (Kitty, personal communication, October 8, 2007)

She identified three main ways she varied what she gave for three different purposes. The last of the three reasons, clearly a response to the belief mentioned earlier, that a lot of students respond well to oral communication, some even doing better if she simply reads what she has written for them.

Table 6.14

Mustafa: Grammar Revision and Misleading Advice Essay Two

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	Marginal comment - *sentence fragment*	And eventually leading these students to cheat when they face their midterms or their finals.
Draft Two	*pron*	Eventually, facing the midterms without *pron* study leads the student to cheat in their exams.

A comparison of the two drafts of the essay about dishonesty showed that he had responded to most grammar feedback points although some had been removed as he adjusted the essay and deleted whole sentences, but it was unclear whether or not this was avoidance behavior. Sometimes he had made adjustments or added information and added new errors, but in this case it is possible the error was leaving the 's' off the noun *student*, not a pronoun problem (Table 6.14).

Also, there were five instances where he had made minor changes that had not been prompted by feedback. These were not always successful. One change, which could be an example of avoidance behavior, was located.

> Interviewer: Spelling error here.
> Mustafa: Rely (spelled relay)
> Interviewer: What were you trying to say?

> Mustafa: "Students tend to rely" – I mean to depend. Maybe there is many words.
> Interviewer: Oh you changed it to "depend" instead of trying to get the spelling right. That was a bit tricky.
> (Mustafa, second interview)

Although he ignored some prompts asking for examples, in the third draft Mustafa had attempted to add details, adding three quite lengthy and sometimes unclear sentences to the third paragraph. Discussing this, Mustafa offered a plausible and quite charming explanation.

> Maybe in here Miss, I thought in Arabic and I just went from Arabic to English. . . . Most of the incidents happening here in Arabic. I didn't face any time an English incident.
> (Mustafa, second interview)

Certainly, students do end up with word order problems and awkward expressions when they think in Arabic and write in English. All in all, Mustafa had presented challenges to his instructor, and as a participant in the study, as there were difficulties with both essays, but he was a willing participant.

6.12 Focus Group In-put on Feedback

The focus group participants, made up of Kitty's current students, were satisfied with the way the class was run and felt that all students were treated fairly. One comment was that an effort was made to involve the weaker students in discussions and the students appreciated this. The students, like the interview students, felt that Kitty gave feedback on both content and form. Students who went to the instructor's office to query or discuss the feedback were satisfied with what they found out about their essays and how they could improve them. But the main point that came out of the discussion was that students wanted more specific feedback, and often the students that wanted this had not gone to Kitty's office for further explanations.

> I think instructor must give us more explanations about our weakness. More details and more information for our weakness.
> (Unidentified student, Kitty's students' focus group)

Being adamant that feedback was wanted, several students felt that any perception by the instructor that little use was made of the feedback could be related to students knowing what their weakness was but not how to correct it or the feedback being too indirect to use.

> For example, the student doesn't know his weakness is in this area and the instructors like, you should do this and this and that. The entire time

> the student's just gonna be confused. Why is she giving me some kind of feedback? I don't even know what my weakness is, so why am I supposed to change it not knowing what I am doing? This can be one of the reasons.
> (Unidentified student, Kitty's students' focus group)

Another explanation that was offered was that students may be lazy. When I offered the possibility that students may run out of time, this was dismissed as they were sure enough time was given.

One student mentioned that he had come up with a creative introduction that took 45 minutes to construct only to be told it was "airy-fairy". He planned to change it but the blow to his self-esteem was clear and had contributed to a hatred of writing. The student was not sure how the instructor could show him that his flight of fantasy had not hit the mark without demoralizing him. However, what the focus group did show was the consistent call for more specific feedback, and a greater degree of support.

6.13 Peer Review Practices in Kitty's Class

The first graded draft of the first essay was collected two days after peer review in Kitty's class and this allowed the students time to revise the essay based on the reviewer's advice. Kitty also gave a grade on the peer review sheet. Unfortunately, this caused problems for the data gathering process in this study as the peer review sheets were given back to the original reviewer after Kitty had graded them and only one was actually handed to me by the interview students during the course of the study.

6.13.1 Responses to Questionnaire Three

As with Lydia's class, in response to *Questionnaire Three the Peer Review Process*, most students felt they had been well-prepared and had managed the time (Appendix U). There was also a strong belief that the activity had led to useful suggestions being offered (Figure 6.5). But this confidence reduced when the students were asked to assess the amount of help they received in terms of content and sentence skill issues (Figure 6.6). It seems that while they felt the process had gone well, little practical help had come out of it.

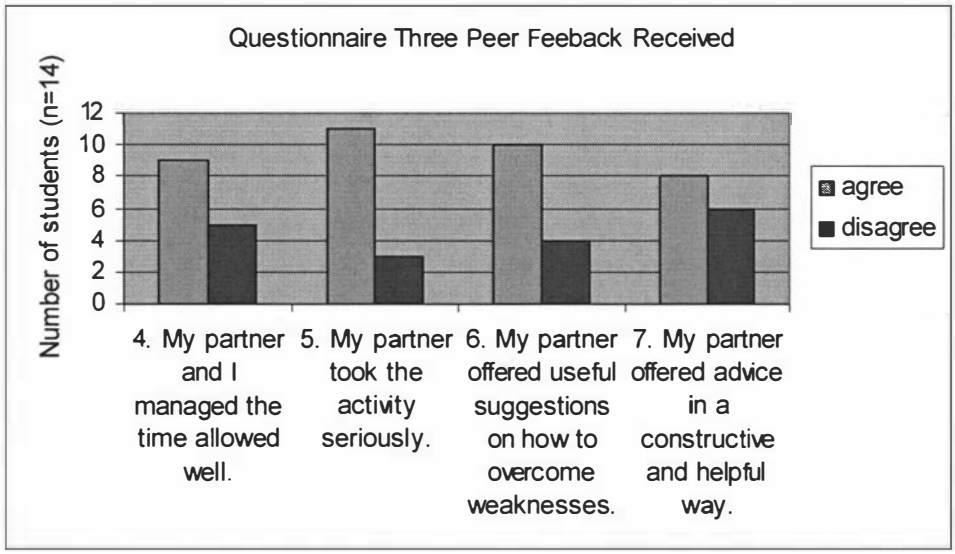

Figure 6.5. Kitty's students' assessments of their roles in peer review

The open-ended questions netted many responses this time. There were 14 responses to question 12, so every student had something to say about this process.

> I neede more detailed suggestions. I neede her/him to write on the actual essay paper, and to tell me what is correct in grammar, spelling ... i needed her to suggest more details and tellme WHY?
> (Unidentified student, Kitty's class)

Overwhelmingly, the students had wanted more help with grammar. But some students wanted it all.

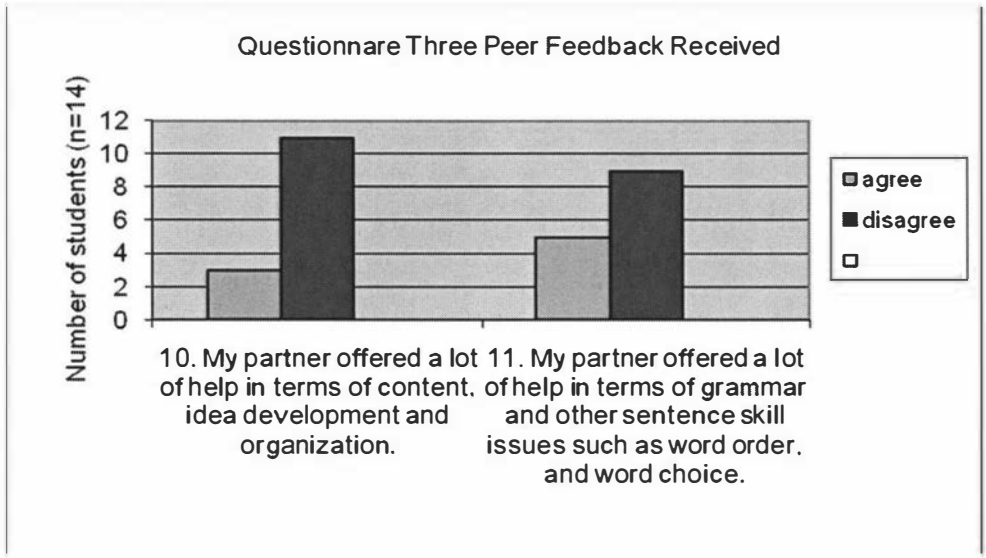

Figure 6.6. Kitty's students' assessments of content/grammar help received through peer review

The responses to question 13 asking for any other comments gathered some interesting views of peer review that revealed that students do have useful ideas to offer if they are asked. For example, there were two suggestions that peer review be done on computers for efficiency, and one student thought peer review between two sections, not just within one class, was better. Some students felt that they had not been helped and one student felt that he/she was not able to help.

> I dont think it is a good idea to help partners , becuase howcome i can edit my peers essay and i cant fix mine properly!!
> (Unidentified student, Kitty's class)

It was unlikely that a student who felt such a lack of confidence in his/her writing abilities would risk offering specific advice. Indeed, one student had commented that the reviewer missed many sections of the sheet. So students who do not want to do the review or do not know how to do it, find ways to avoid completing the task.

6.13.2 The Peer Review Sheet

Looking at the peer review sheet, there were only two questions that invited yes/no responses and on the example I was able to examine, they received more than a simple yes response (Appendix V). The prompt on the thesis simply asked for the reviewer to write the thesis, but one reviewer had advice to give so added it to prompt seven (Appendix V).

6.13.3 The Interview Students' Comments

Dima had enjoyed the peer review experience because she was confident about her essay and her peer reviewer confirmed her confidence by saying good things about it. Apparently, he did not fill out the sheet fully, but this did not bother Dima as she had already decided to make no changes and wait for her instructor's advice before revising. Maitha made the suggestion that peer reviewing with another section would be better, and it is likely she also wrote this in response to the questionnaire. Her reason was that she found it difficult to be honest with students she knew well and so she did not feel she had performed the task well. Mustafa had received feedback that just told him his essay was good and he was disappointed.

> I think the guy who read my essay is not that stupid person to look at my essay and there is no verb tense errors or what's called word form or capitalized.
> (Mustafa, first interview)

It was clear that he did not think the student had made any effort to help him, and he did not consider the peer review advice when editing the essay. From these students'

comments two problems emerged: the reviewers did not or could not offer useable advice, and the writers did not consider using what their peers wrote, preferring the instructor's advice.

6.13.4 The Instructor's Attitude to Peer Review

Although Kitty thought peer review was potentially useful if students saw the benefits of it, few did and therefore expended less effort than was hoped for. According to Kitty many students did not take peer review seriously whether they were editing another essay or looking at the comments of a peer reviewer. In her estimation, many students rejected sound advice believing that there was nothing wrong with their essay. She "hardly ever [saw] students making changes to their essay based on a peer review" and this was confirmed by the students themselves (Kitty, personal communication, November 25, 2007).

6.14 Summary

Kitty expressed some frustration at the lack of preparation for academic study the students showed, but she also felt that she had to support them. She identified oral communication as a good source of feedback for many of her students but had problems in achieving this. She gave a lot of feedback through the rubric and the comments on essays, gave indirect feedback, and she made some direct changes to grammar errors at times. It was also clear that she varied the feedback to the students depending on the need and the level of use.

Although the three students who took part in interviews made a lot of changes using the grammar feedback, the two weaker students did not add much material to the final drafts of the essays. Maitha showed a strong tendency to resist the feedback if she felt it was necessary to say something in her own way. The content feedback offered came in the form of short and long comments; however, none of the comments gave specific examples or clear hints as to what needed to be added. This was something most students wanted.

Peer review, while the students generally believed they had been managed it well, did not actually provide students with assistance that was readily applicable to their essays. Kitty was clear that she did not see changes in students' essays as a result of peer review.

This chapter introduced the second case study and explored the experiences and perspectives of Kitty and her students with written feedback in a freshman academic writing class. The next chapter introduces the third case study, the participating

instructor, Jane, and her students. Once again, the approach is similar to the data exploration techniques used so far.

CHAPTER 7
RESULTS
CASE STUDY THREE: JANE AND HER STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR WRITING/REVISING EXPERIENCES

As with the other two case studies, this case study centers on feedback procedures drawing on the instructors' and students' perceptions of classroom interactions and the feedback/revision cycle. Individual differences between the case studies were evident despite gathering data using the same instruments.

7.1 Introduction to Case Study Three

The writing instructor for this class, Jane, and her students Najla, Leila and Suad (no real names were used) were the focus of this chapter. Through the same process of selection and rejection, the wealth of material was reduced to the point where it was manageable but still able to reveal aspects of the specific classroom culture of Jane's class and the participants' experiences with feedback and revision.

The data referred to in this chapter revealing Jane's views comes from several interviews and discussions both formal and informal, emails exchanged as more questions arose from an examination of the data and the focus group that was held with all three participating instructors. Jane was more interested in talking than writing down her responses and chose to come to my office for brief chats as the need for member checking led to further questions being emailed to her. In addition, data from students' essays, questionnaires and interviews gave insights into the students' perspectives in this semester-long case study. Although member checking was possible with the instructor, it was not possible with the students. At the time that focus groups were conducted in the other two participating instructor's classes, Jane was not able to make time for a focus group in her normal class time, and the students were not willing or able to meet outside the class. All in all Jane was more apprehensive about the research process and frequently asked, in an apparent attempt at a joke, whether or not I was going to make her look bad. I did not want her to be any more uncomfortable so stopped asking for further access to her students. In the end, it was not possible to do a focus group with any of Jane's subsequent classes.

7.2 The Impact of the Instructor's Teaching and Cultural Background

Jane was a native English speaker, had taught rhetoric in the USA. She had no specific ESL qualifications but had taken some relevant courses as part of her studies. She had taught ESL in both Korea and Egypt before joining GSU. So she had had

experience with Arabic speaking students at university level before. In Egypt she taught university students. Jane had had to be flexible and respond to considerable challenges as part of her international teaching experiences. These experiences living and working in other cultures appeared to have made it relatively easy for her to adapt to her new surroundings and to work with the GSU students although, as we shall see, she had her moments of frustration.

7.3 University Classroom Culture: Expectations and Obligations

When asked whether she saw the GSU students as ESL/EFL students or in some other way, Jane expressed uncertainty about what the difference might be, but after discussion decided they were largely ESL students.

> I have first language speakers, but I have to think of the class more in terms as ESL because there's also an equal if not greater measure of students for whom it's a second language. Maybe at home they speak Arabic. . . . . So when I think of the class, I have to consider all of that.
> (Jane, first interview)

While recognizing that there were considerable variations in terms of students' language skills and readiness for working in an academic environment, Jane also mentioned that the students were not what she had come to expect at university level in America.

In the focus group discussion, Jane was more forthcoming about her struggles with the students' level of preparation for university work than she had been in discussions with the researcher only. The group dynamics appeared to encourage her to speak out. She agreed with other instructors' comments that the students complain about the readings.

> I tell them, you chose to be here. No one has forced you to come here. Because they have the same reaction. The reading's too hard. The vocabulary's too hard.
> (Jane, instructor focus group)

Some of her comments suggested that she was caught in a struggle in terms of knowing how to meet the students' expectations and needs.

> You have the expectations of an American university but the capacity of the students is not up to that level. So, it's walking this limbo, never-land, between the two.
> (Jane, instructor focus group)

The struggle she faced dealing with the students' weaknesses writing and reading in English, and giving them access to an American education model is clear. There is also

a sense in the above comment that the university may have let the students down as it is promising to give them access to something they are not ready to make use of. And this was reinforced by further comments that suggested that Jane felt there was a need for the university to better prepare the students through introductory courses. However, rather than doing this, Jane felt that the university gave mixed messages through such actions as mishandling the drop/add week in ways which make the beginning of the semester seem unimportant. For example, although there is an attendance policy it does not apply during this week so students often did not attend. Jane contrasted this "laxness" to her experiences in the USA where assignments may be handed out on day one. However, the very existence of an attendance policy, an unusual move in tertiary education, is recognition of the university's obligation to introduce students to the demands of academic study, still a relatively new phenomenon, and to gently expose them to a different culture of educational practice.

7.3.1 Adding to the Picture: Students' Impressions of the Instructor

The information supplied by Jane about how her students evaluated her, did not include a comparison of her results with those of the department and the college. This was due to the new format of class evaluations of faculty. However, Jane did make the comment that at least this class seemed to have liked her, which suggested that she was anxious about how the students saw her.

The students' written comments made in response to the open-ended questions in the evaluations ranged widely from comments about how wonderful the instructor was, the best teacher ever, to complaints about grading, such as "be easy on grading our essays", and one student combined this with a complaint about lack of sensitivity toward ESL students' struggle.

> More understanding that English is our second language, that is why the instructor should not be strict in grading our essays. . . . I am sure the instructor doesn't know a word of Arabic although he/she is living in an Arabic country.
> (Unidentified student, Jane's class)

There were more positive or neutral comments than critical comments and all of the negative comments related to grades.

7.3.2 Grades and Evaluations

Jane's final grades were, like Lydia's, relatively high (Table 7.1). No students failed. Although, as there were only 17 students in the class at the end of the semester, at least three must have withdrawn or been forcibly withdrawn by the instructor.

Withdrawals are usually related to attendance issues but could be because the grade is so low that the student cannot pass. In that case the student is advised to withdraw. The university administration distinguishes between withdrawal and withdrawal fail, the latter reducing the student's GPA.

Table 7.1

Jane's Class Final Grade Range

	A/A+	B+/B/B-	C+/C	D	F
Number Awarded [a]	2	10	5		

[a] n=17

7.4 Initial Evaluation of the Students' Writing Skills

Jane had initially been teaching WRI 102 and COM 204 courses, so she was pleasantly surprised by the writing ability of the WRI 101 students she encountered during the semester the data was gathered. Being largely new students, the students in this class would have had to have slightly higher TESOL scores to enter the university than the previous classes she had taught as the administration had begun the process of raising the entrance requirement. She also noted that many students could communicate well orally, though not at the standard of American students.

Jane indicated that the students appeared to have reasonable vocabularies, but they had difficulty sequencing their ideas and tended to write in a style not unlike stream of consciousness. This was a repeated theme with Jane and she mentioned it in both the individual and group discussions.

> They assume that you can make this leap that they're making. I see it as connected to a lack of awareness of audience. They are not considering the step-by-step chain that a reader needs. . . . And I've had students in the past say, "Do I have to spell everything out?" And I go, "Yeah, because I don't know for sure if that's what you meant or not."
> (Jane, first interview)

Jane placed emphasis on bringing audience awareness to the students' attention as she had identified this as a weakness that could be addressed in the 16 week time frame of a semester. She also felt that it was important to make sure that the train of logic be clear and placed more importance on this than grammar errors, which she could tolerate.

Although organization was the weakness Jane wanted most to assist students with, she also felt it was likely to be the hardest to help with.

Jane also mentioned that she had had experience with students who used a lot of pompous inflated language that didn't really say anything but which they had been encouraged to think was acceptable.

> It's all "Since the beginning of time". I hate that kind of stuff. Be simple and direct and really communicate with me.
> (Jane, first interview)

She came down hard on this, too. This may have been a source of conflict with some students especially if they had received good grades for this type of writing in the past.

7.4.1 Expectations, Resistance and Prior School Experiences

Jane, too, described dealing with students who had had their expectations dashed by the grades she gave them and who found it difficult accepting her evaluation of their writing. In the focus group discussion on this issue she made the comment that students seemed to think getting ideas on paper was enough of an achievement. The seeming lack of awareness of the need to work on their writing, polishing it and improving it bothered Jane to the extent that she often used articles about the need for good writing skills in the workplace.

Despite the relatively high grades students received, in the instructor focus group, Jane mentioned that she had to deal with students attempting to persuade her to make grade changes.

> Then you get the cajoling and the negotiating and the, "Oh miss you're too strict". . . . "You're grading too hard and this is too hard for us." Or "I must have a B+ for my scholarship" or "I must get at least a C+ in this course." So the grade becomes not a reflection of their ability but a commodity that you're denying them.
> (Jane, instructor focus group)

There is a sense of relief in the above comment as she discovers that other instructors face the same problem. Further discussion revealed that even though Jane had not been in the UAE as long as the other participants, she had begun to understand how negotiable grades were in schools. She mentioned a reliable informant who had told her that private schools regularly instructed teachers to inflate grades usually because, as businesses, they did not want to risk losing clients.

7.5 The Place of Writing across the Curriculum

Being a GER, many of the students only took WRI 101 because they had to, and they saw no real value in it in Jane's experience although she anticipated having five or six students in each class who took advantage of the opportunity to learn. However, like the other instructors she had had experience of students making it clear that they put other classes ahead of the writing course.

> I often find that they'll come up to me and say, "Miss I have a project," or "Miss there's a test in another class," and I want to say well why don't you ask them to suspend their due date so you can get your writing done. Do you understand what you're doing to me, what you're saying to me? I'm supposed to change my schedule for the other professors' classes. . . . And they don't quite see. That other class is their major; that's what they're worried about, and this is a core – something like an obstacle class to get through.
> (Jane, first interview)

Jane's frustration at these requests is clear especially considering other comments she made about how she tried to show the need for improving their writing skills and the impact on their futures if they did not do this.

7.6 The Writing Process Approach

Jane had a slightly different brief from the other instructors in the course as she had been asked to specifically, but not exclusively, target the needs of architecture and design students. The course was different from other courses only in terms of readings and the writing topics, but everything else was the same. Jane hoped that the way the course was put together would make it more pertinent to the students.

Jane's comments on the use of the writing process show a tendency to include awareness of genre perhaps more typical of a rhetoric instructor than an ESL instructor.

> And I emphasize that, now you're part of a discourse community and you're reading at a more advanced level and so you need to write at a more advanced level. And you apply what you learn from reading other writers and emulate that and apply that to your own writing. . . . And academic writing requires more analysis than reportage so that you're expected to incorporate your insights. . . . So it involves a lot of thinking and talking and reading preliminary to writing the essay.
> (Jane, first interview)

When asked if there was any resistance to using the process approach, Jane reported that she made it obligatory to participate and go through the various stages. Although it was her intention to make using the writing process an intrinsic part of the students'

writing experience, she was not certain whether or not they transferred what they learned to other writing situations.

7.6.1 Actual Use of the Writing Process

Although Jane had a plan for essay one that indicated the different steps to be taken, no dates were specified. Looking at the instructions for the first assignment, there was no mention of a need to prewrite nor did any of the essays examined have prewriting in the files. One essay had a hand written draft but not prewriting. However, the preliminary draft looked like an amalgamation of a plan and the introduction for the first draft. This was responded to by the instructor as were the two subsequent drafts. In addition, there was time in class for peer review.

Table 7.2

Jane's Plan for Essay One

Activity Essay One
Preliminary Draft (Graded)
Peer Review (Graded)
First Draft (Graded)
Second Draft (Graded)

For essay one, all three drafts had comments from the instructor and a grade, but it became clear over the process of the research that the burden on the instructor was too great (Table 7.2).

> Yeah I look at them all. I know, it's hell.
> (Jane, first interview)

Although the same process was outlined for essay two, the preliminary draft did not appear to have been responded to by the instructor, but the first and second draft had received the same extensive feedback as the first essay. Jane had told me that because of the work load she had not been able to respond to all three drafts on the final essay and had resorted to restricting her response to the preliminary and final drafts although the students had done peer review.

> You know what really sucks is we've got 80 students. That's egregious; we're slaves. I mean I resent it, I resent it. It's like, you know, I want a life.
> (Jane, first interview)

In contrast to what she faced at GSU, previously Jane had had no more than 45 students; therefore, it was easy to see why the current load would be such a shock to her.

7.7 The Instructor's Perceived Obligations in the Feedback/Revision Cycle

Jane reported that she emphasized the need to work hard to make improvements in writing, describing writing as an art. However, she was reluctant to ask students how much time they spent on their essays. Clearly, some students have handed in disappointing efforts.

In terms of feedback offered, Jane reported: that she used pencil to make her corrections, that she gave both direct and indirect feedback, that she tackled word order problems, and that she used codes, a copy of which was supplied. It was an extensive document to which Jane had added seven additional codes in pencil, some of which were already on the printed part of the sheet. However, she actually used few codes, possibly because she tended to make the changes rather than use symbols to indicate an error.

She also claimed to use what she described as "stock phrases" to deal with grammar and content.

> You know how you have your stock phrases that we all use. So sometimes I'll do that or if the whole sentence, the syntax, is mixed up I'll circle it and say "Awkward syntax" or "Rephrase for clarity". And then I'll make comments and questions – you know. "What is the connection between this idea and that idea?" or "Isn't this an overgeneralization?"
> (Jane, first interview)

In addition to these types of comments in the margins, she reported adding three or four summary comments at the end of the essay.

Jane felt that feedback gave students a sense that they were being attended to, and she was aware that she was providing a lot of feedback. As this could have a negative impact on some, she reported that she prepared the students for this, telling them that she felt an obligation to point out errors in an effort to help, but that she did not want students to feel discouraged by the extent of the feedback. Also, she had had positive feedback from students that encouraged her.

> I have had students tell me that I have helped them and it's for their sake that I do it and if I don't do it, I feel bad. Do you know what I mean? Like I'm neglectful. . . . You know the frustration level sometimes gets high. And I think well how much can I say?
> (Jane, first interview)

Despite her commitment to the students, it became clear that the task was onerous at times and frustration levels rose if there was little obvious response from students. Jane mentioned that she had tried extensively editing one paragraph with the intention of encouraging the students to find similar errors themselves in the rest of the essay, but she had found that she continued to circle errors anyway. However, in the essays examined, there was little evidence of this, and most often direct feedback dominated or sentence skill errors were unattended to.

In terms of what she responded to the most, Jane indicated that she probably responded equally to both content and grammar, but it was content that influenced the grade the most. Indeed, looking at the actual feedback offered, she gave lengthy comments in the margins and at the end. She felt that she made the focus on content clear to the students in preparation for the assignment. She did not use a grading rubric, although when I asked her about this, she immediately commented that she probably should. Not wanting to influence her usual feedback style if possible, I asked her not to make changes just because of something I had said. Towards the end of the study the issue of using a rubric or not was again brought up by Jane. She had been discussing this with another instructor who claimed to use a rubric exclusively. Jane could see that this would dramatically reduce her feedback load, but she was still uncertain about taking this step.

While she was not able to say that she saw a marked improvement between drafts, Jane did think she saw an improvement over the semester. In terms of resistance to the feedback Jane only mentioned the students' with examples of inflated language as likely to object to being called out over this.

7.7.1 Varying the Feedback

One thing that concerned Jane was that she was aware that she did not give the same feedback to all students. She started out that way, but as she assessed the extent to which students were using or not using the feedback she pulled back with some students although she was not comfortable with the idea.

> Ethically I find it a little difficult but it's practical.
> (Jane, first interview)

The dilemma Jane faced was assessing whether or not the student wanted the feedback even if they did not use it, or whether they were resentful that she was finding fault, and there was the possibility that some just did not care.

This issue also arose in the instructor focus group where Jane took the opportunity to pour out her concerns.

> This is going to sound bad but over the semester I start to discriminate between students. The ones that seem genuinely more interested, I pay more attention to their papers and give them more comments, and the ones that up to that point keep turning in full of comma splices, full of run-on sentences, they're not paying attention, and it's like I don't comment as extensively on them.
> (Jane, instructor focus group)

It is interesting to note that it is grammar that she brings up here even though she claims to concentrate on content. At this point she had the support of her colleagues, but the doubts she had over this action came through and fit with the obligation Jane felt to the students.

7.7.2 Reaction to Requests for More Feedback

Jane was already, in her estimation, giving extensive feedback and to more students that she felt was reasonable, but she felt an obligation to the students; therefore, I was interested to see what her reaction would be to finding out that the students had made requests for more feedback in the questionnaire responses.

> It's difficult. I see what the student is saying but when you have a stack of essays and there's a lot of errors, a lot of vague language, it's going to take you hours to tell them why they need to rephrase everything. Some of it's because of syntax, some it's because you don't understand what they're saying, what the point is. I recognize that because sometimes I will circle a word and write rephrase. I want them to work it out. I don't want to write it for them.
> (Jane, instructor focus group)

Her response indicated the difficult position writing instructors find themselves in when they both understand the students' wants and are aware of the impossibility of the task of providing extensive feedback on every error. It also indicated that she believed that if she acknowledged there was a sentence skill problem, she had to prompt the student to solve it. This may be why she ignored some errors and resorted to direct feedback most often when she did respond, as will be discussed below.

7.8 Students' Perspectives of the Feedback/Revision Cycle

Three questionnaires were administered to Jane's class at appropriate times throughout the semester depending on what stage they were at in the feedback/revision cycle (Appendixes I, J & K). Of the seventeen students who completed the course between ten and thirteen responded although some students skipped some questions. This was a disappointing response but regular email contact with the students did not increase the number of responses. Two interview students discussed the experiences they had had receiving and responding to feedback on two of the three essays completed during the semester, and one student handed in the first essay and discussed it but withdrew from the interview process after that, as was her right. As she simply stopped responding to email contacts, I do not know why she withdrew.

7.8.1 Students' Responses to Questionnaire One

Questionnaire One Feedback Received from the Instructor was administered on-line through SurveyMonkey after the first feedback revision cycle was completed. This information gathered a broader sweep of information than possible from the interview students alone and indicated general trends in thought about written feedback.

7.8.2 Students' Impressions of the Preparation for Writing

Of the thirteen students who started to answer this questionnaire only eleven answered all the questions. The responses to questions two to six showed that the majority of students felt that they were well prepared for the writing assignment, instructions were clear, they understood what they were expected to do, how they would be graded, and on receiving the feedback, they read and understood what was offered (Appendix R). The majority of the students felt that the essay instructions were clear, but three (23%) disagreed (Appendix R). The instruction pack for essay one, which was an analysis of a cartoon, was quite comprehensive, and the amount of reading required may have been difficult for some students. Also, the task itself, being new to these students, was quite a challenge as one interview student mentioned. However, one of the interview students felt she was well prepared.

> First we got like handouts and they were more than clear for us to understand.
> (Najla, first interview)

The question to draw the most negative responses was question four, about the extent to which the grading system had been clarified before they began the

assignment. In this class it was almost a 50/50 split (Appendix R). This was the only class where no grading rubric was use, but in the interviews, the students indicated that there had been a lot of discussion about what they were expected to do for the writing assignment and they, at least, were largely satisfied with how this was communicated.

> Najla: It was clear enough, but like more specifically about so and so points for grammar, we didn't know that. I don't think we need to know it. . . . I think I should work on all different areas in the essay to achieve as high as possible. (Najla, first interview)

Najla seemed to think that more information may have distracted her. However, the three interview students were quite successful students and received essay and final grades in the B+/A- range, so they may not accurately represent the views of other less successful students in the class.

Only four students felt that the first draft of the essay required few changes (Appendix R). It must be remembered that they knew they were writing drafts and would receive feedback. An interesting question in relation to the way students write the essays is, did they not make much effort initially, or did they realize that the writing was not very good as a result of the feedback? Unfortunately, this question was not part of the current research.

The majority of students felt that they had received feedback which helped them to improve their essay in most areas especially thesis statements, topic sentences and transitions (Appendix R). There were three or four students who felt they did not get the help they wanted in terms of support details, verb problems, word choice/form problems, and indeed these were the areas where less feedback was given although there was plenty of evidence that these types of errors were present in the students' essays (Figure 7.1). Sometimes the instructor responded to these types of errors on the final draft, and this seemed to draw some criticism from students who felt they should have known earlier.

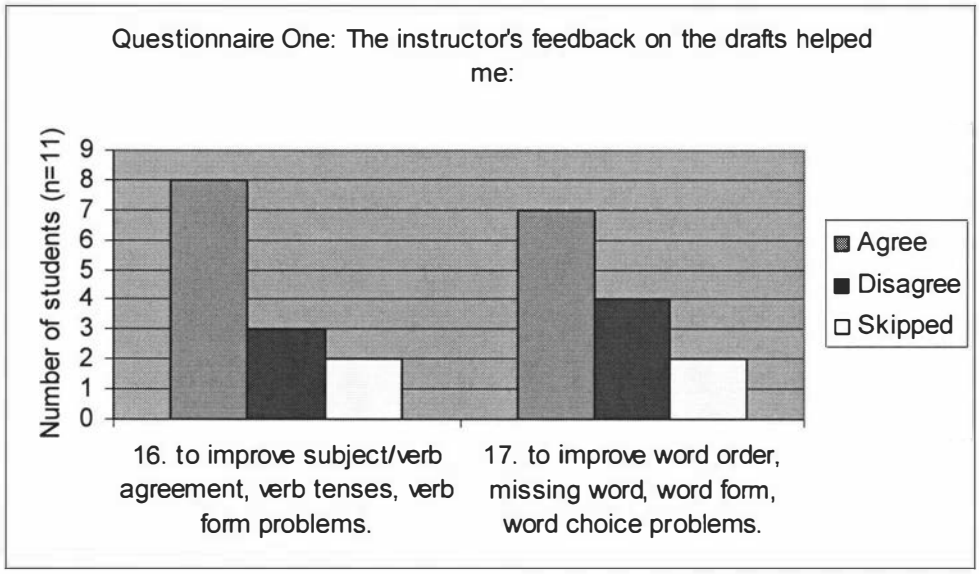

Figure 7.1. Jane's students' perspectives of the usefulness of the instructor's feedback when dealing with sentence skill errors.

Grades on essay one were gathered in response to question 23, and they were in the high range in contrast to Kitty's more even spread and Lydia's lower end grades (Figure 5.2). Question one asked if the students were satisfied with their grades on the first essay. Despite everyone scoring in the A/B range six students were not satisfied with their grades (Table 7. 3).

> no, because I am used to better grades
> (Unidentified student, Jane's class)

It seems that some students have come to expect high grades and found it hard to accept that the standard at GSU was higher than it was at high school.

> I followed the feedback I got, but still that was not enough.
> (Unidentified student, Jane's class)

This comment suggests that the student, assuming the instructor had given feedback on every error or weakness, had abrogated responsibility for revising, making it the instructor's problem. This type of response may be related to the extensive feedback offered making the student more dependent on the instructor, but this is speculation.

Table 7.3

Jane's Class Essay One Grade Range

	A/A-	B+/B/B-	C+/C/C-	D	F
Number Awarded[a]	5	6			

[a]n=11

Questions 20-22 were open-ended questions seeking information on what additional help the students wanted or effort they could have made. Two students asked for more specific help, such as examples, in response to question 20 about the help they would have liked from the instructor. In response to question 21, which asked what students could have done to prepare themselves better, there were seven responses but two of them claimed there was nothing they could have done. Encouragingly, one student realized that a more careful preliminary draft would have helped, and two students realized they needed to put more time into their writing. And in response to question 22, which asked for any additional information on writing and receiving feedback one student wrote that advice to use the writing center was useful and another appreciated the chance to:

> know my weeknesses and work on them
> (Unidentified student, Jane's class)

This last comment shows appreciation of the use of the process approach to writing.

7.8.3 Students' Responses to Questionnaire Two

A further questionnaire, *Questionnaire Two Instructor Feedback Wanted*, was administered to see what students would have wanted if they had had the chance to control the feedback given. The number of students responding to this questionnaire dropped to ten. Most of the students responded positively to the idea of receiving feedback on all areas of the essay (Appendix S). However, question seven asked if students found it helpful to be referred to relevant pages of the textbook and 60% disagreed with this. This response may be related to the fact that Jane was using a lot of supplementary materials with this class as it was intended to target the needs of SA&D students, which the textbook, being a general reading/writing text, would not have been well equipped to do. Question thirteen dealt with the instructor correcting problems with wording. Again 40% of students responded negatively (Appendix S). This was

interesting as the instructor used a lot of direct feedback and indicates some resistance to the approach; however, there appeared to be strong individual preferences.

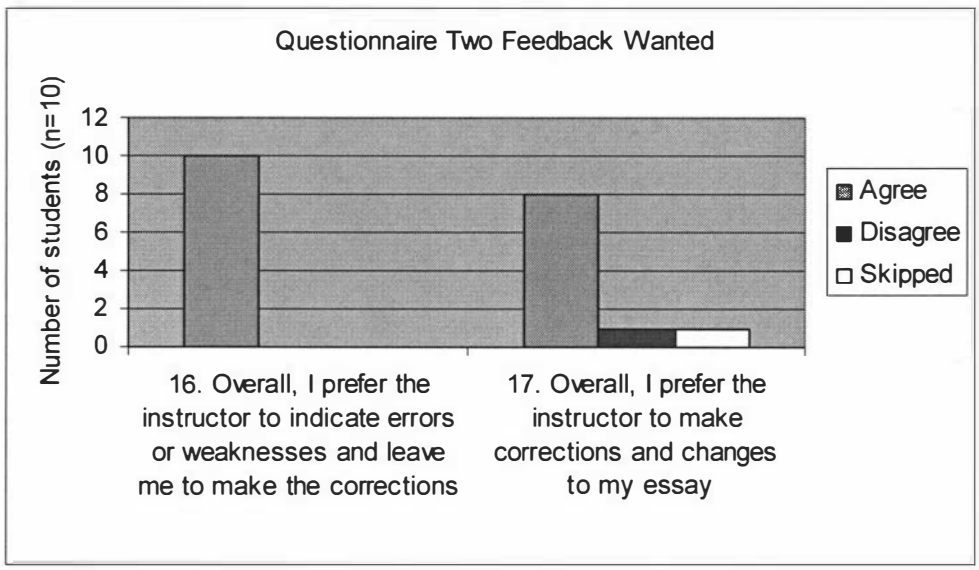

Figure 7.2. Jane's students' overall instructor feedback preferences.

As with the other classes, the questions asking for an overall preference in terms of the instructor's method of handling the feedback, showed the majority of students wanted the instructor to have two apparently opposite responses to the errors; both indicating and correcting (Figure 7.2). But, in the responses to open-ended question 18, two responses shed a little more light on what students want the instructor to do.

> Instead of just indicating my errors, my instructor can help me fix them. She could also help me improve my essay and show me how to connect my ideas if I needed help.
> (Unidentified student, Jane's class)

It seems that the first student wants the instructor to be aware that there are some errors that are beyond the student's ability to correct just because they have been pointed out.

> I would like the instructor to make connections and changes in my essay but leave it up to me wither I would like to do it the way he did it or in another form that is correct as well.
> (Unidentified student, Jane's class)

However, this student is asking to be shown a way forward but also asking to be given autonomy over the essay so retaining the right to make the final choices. The students certainly seem to want a high degree of sensitivity from the instructor.

7.9 General Information on Feedback from Interview Students

Three students took part in the interview process discussing their essays after they had received the final grade. They will be known as Leila, Najla and Suad. As had previously happened, there were difficulties encountered, and not all the essays anticipated were handed in with all expected materials. Also, one of the interview students, Najla, only came for one interview. The two students, who took part in two interviews, were willing participants and had a lot of insights to share on the feedback/revision cycle. Although a third essay was written, it was returned too late for us to meet and discuss it.

7.9.1 Students' Self-Assessments and Previous Writing Experiences

Leila considered herself a good writer and was interested in creative writing and liked to have control over the choice of topic (Table 7.4). She found academic writing more restrictive, initially. She had a lot of ideas and an interest in writing but appeared to see little benefit in planning. She also restricted her proofreading to reading on the computer screen rather than printing and reading. It may be that students who write like this are the ones who produce what Jane called 'stream of consciousness writing'.

Najla had been confident of her writing skills as a result of her school experiences but lost this confidence at university (Table 7.4). It is interesting to note that she specifically echoes Jane's concern that some students think writing is easy and just means getting words on paper.

> In school, I really had no problems . . . . I thought it would be something easy for me to do, because it doesn't need preparing, it doesn't need anything. You just need to put your ideas on a piece of paper. But . . . my professor said, I don't know how to, the syntax of my text is not good. I have the ideas but I don't put them in the way she wants. But I've never knew that was a problem until I came here.
> (Najla, first interview)

Despite not understanding the instructor's concern over her syntax, she did mention that she had previously had problems with order of ideas or the conclusion in school. She had attended an English medium school that is known for having a strict teach/test regime. Despite her claim that writing was easy, she was cautious in her proofreading approach, printing, rereading and making corrections several times before submission.

Table 7.4

Jane's Students' Self-Assessments of Writing Ability and Final Grades Awarded

	Self-Assessment in the Interview	Final Grades
Leila	Good	A-
Najla	Good at school, now uncertain	B+
Suad	Average	B+

Suad mentioned that she was an A student at school; she had attended a school that based its curriculum on the British system and had externally marked exams. But she too had had her confidence in her ability as a writer knocked as a result of the transition from school to university (Table 7.4). However, she saw this as being because she was asked to write "bigger topics", so she realized that the challenge was greater. Although she had been taught about structure and the thesis statement at school, the class had not been using the process approach, and she appreciated the chance to have multiple drafts responded to by the instructor.

> Back in school we used to write the essay, check it once ourselves before handing it in, like you know, just yourself, just read it and give it in so it will be graded. But here . . . like if she checks the preliminary draft, ok, she may just tell us ok, this is, you need to change this and that. It gives us a chance to improve, and we have like two chances to do better in each one. So I find it much better.
> (Suad, first interview)

7.9.2 Perspectives of the Relevance of WRI 101 to Other University Courses

As mentioned above, Jane's class was specifically for SA&D students, so it had a slightly different emphasis in terms of readings and assignments. This had an impact on the way the students saw the class, and concern about the degree to which WRI courses were valued was not discussed much by Jane apart from her objection to being asked to reschedule assessments because the students were working on other instructors' projects.

Najla realized that other friends of hers were using the same textbook in other sections of WRI 101 but doing different assignments and reading different supplementary materials. She appreciated the focus of the course she was taking with Jane.

> What I liked about this writing class is that they put, like the essays we take and the readings we should read as an assignment for the English

> class are related design. So that was one of the things that I found interesting. . . . And the passages we read include lots of facts about, like, design. They might not be really important but as a knowledge and a background for us it would be, I think, useful.
> (Najla, first interview)

In terms of writing for other courses, she only mentioned writing reports for history, but she still felt that a sound knowledge of English was needed, would be useful and contributed to the grades earned in other classes.

Leila seemed to think she would learn the type of English that would be useful later rather than in WRI class. Her comments suggested that she anticipated that the English classes would benefit her when she had to write letters although she did not explicitly connect what she was doing in class with her future expectations.

> I think that later on years when you communicate with people my English will become better. And of course we will have to write letters to people and explain and discuss so I think it's good.
> (Leila, first interview)

At the time of the interview, despite some probing, she did not seem to see a strong connection between the English course and her other studies.

> I guess they help me in reading, like they become, there is more of vocabulary words known.
> (Leila, first interview)

Also, at one point in the discussion over feedback that she had not understood, she mentioned that she did not ask the instructor for help because she did not have enough time due to the demands of her major. But later in the same interview she admitted that she did in fact have free time and she just failed to make the time to seek help.

Suad also had an instrumental motivation to do well in English as she recognized that it would benefit her when she applied for jobs. She felt that the cartoon assignment, the first essay assignment, was useful as it prompted her to look deeply the way she is expected to in her design courses. However, she reported that English was the only course that she had to write for.

7.10 Tally of Feedback Received and Students' Responses

The first essay assignment required the students to analyze a cartoon of their choice. Although the preliminary draft, basically an introduction and plan, was responded to by the instructor, it was not always possible to ascertain the extent to which the feedback was incorporated as the writing changed dramatically between the

preliminary draft and the first draft. However, feedback was offered on two subsequent drafts. As the majority of the grammar feedback on the drafts was direct feedback, the students incorporated it into their essays. For essay two, although the students wrote a preliminary draft or plan, only the two full drafts were responded to. To alleviate concerns that the extensive feedback offered would be demotivating, Jane took time to explain to the class the obligation she felt to point out errors.

Examination of multiple drafts of five essays revealed that Jane did indeed give a lot of feedback, although the quantity was in the length of the comments rather than the number (Appendix T). Comments of around 16-18 words were common (Appendix Q). Lengthy comments were also given on second drafts, although Jane had estimated that she gave more feedback on the earlier drafts. On checking with her through email exchanges, I found that she was not really aware of her practice of responding fulsomely on final drafts as she intended to give most feedback on the preliminary and first drafts. But she mentioned that if there were lengthy comments, they were to give students something to think about for the next essay.

Because most of the grammar feedback came in the form of corrections, error codes were seldom used. Checking with Jane, I found the use of direct feedback was a deliberate policy as she often felt that the students would not know how to make the correction if she gave a code. The most frequently used error code was for comma splices (cs). Jane also wrote summary comments on grammar; however these were usually short with the exception of a lengthy comment on syntax on Najla's essay (Appendix Q).

One essay, Suad's first draft of essay two, appeared to receive much more attention to grammar than other students received; however, this was because Suad had made many small errors, such as writing numerals where words were required, and Jane responded to these every time they appeared, which led to many individual feedback items (Appendix T). Also, the essay was longer than the other essays examined. But, this detailed response could also have been an example of varying the feedback according to the extent it was being used, which Jane did volunteer was one of her techniques. Seeing the amount of feedback she was giving, it was not surprising that she expressed frustration with the workload.

Despite the large number of responses, Jane did not comment much on sentence skill errors. I was also not always in agreement with her in terms of the type of error identified or even that it was, strictly speaking, an error. As mentioned in previous case

studies, this is commonly observed in research on feedback (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Leki, 1991).

7.10.1 Leila's Revision Process Essay One and Two

Leila appeared to have attended to the feedback carefully on the first essay. She had had an experience that was different from the other students in that in class her essay was projected on to the board, analyzed and had feedback offered on it but without identifying the writer. This experience had made a major difference to how she saw her writing.

> Leila: But sometimes [the feedback] was somehow confusing to me. . .I think when I write I want to write and I don't really concentrate about what I wrote and then when I read it I think it's right. But once she put my writing on the projector and we were reading it and it sounded like messed up. . . While I was reading it alone, I didn't think there was something wrong . . . . I guess she had choosed because of the introduction. . . . And then throughout it was messed up.
> Interviewer: And that really worked for you? You were able to see it as . . .
> Leila: It was like looking at another person's writing.
> (Leila, first interview)

Although Leila had learned a lot from this experience, she also had some difficulties accepting some feedback at least partly because she resisted some advice and because she found it confusing. One of the problems with responding to the feedback seemed to be that Leila had thought what she had written was good and then she had to accept criticism of it. But, she also had difficulty dealing with comments such as 'rephrase', a comment that her instructor called one of her 'stock phrases'. Also, she felt she had given her all and could not dredge up much more.

> You had the ideas and then you had to like change them in a way but you had your mind on that idea. You got my point? Like I didn't want to change. What will I do? I didn't have many ideas, more than what I already had. (Leila, first interview)

Leila's reluctance to make changes comes through clearly in this statement. For her, it was the first time to go through the writing process and work intensely with a piece of her writing, revising it. Clearly, it was not easy for her to accept this requirement.

There is a school of thought that suggests that direct feedback can cause problems (Truscott, 2004), and this was demonstrated in Leila's essay. One area of confusion arose over the use of the word 'health', which Jane supplied for Leila on the preliminary draft of an essay analyzing a cartoon. However, the subsequent revision

made this problematic as Leila changed the sentence in response to an additional prompt so that the use of the term 'health problem' was no longer appropriate (Table 7.5) This led to a lengthy marginal comment on the first draft to assist the student to correct the error that would have not been needed had the instructor restricted herself to indicating the fragment. The difficulties that arose from these two feedback items suggest that feedback, particularly in this case directly supplying a word, is not always useful and should be applied cautiously.

Table 7.5

Leila: Sentence Skill Feedback and Misunderstanding

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Preliminary Draft	Added the word *health* And the marginal comment that the second sentence was a *fragment*	*health* It is about the serious ▲ problems threatening the world. Ranging from bird flu to global warming, and finally obesity.
Draft One	Instructor's attempt to repair the damage - *Can you define this (global warming) as a health issue? Isn't it more of an ecological threat*?	It is about the serious health problems threatening the world, ranging from bird flu to global warming, and finally obesity
Draft Two		It is about the serious problems menacing the world, ranging from bird flu to global warming, and finally obesity.

Note. Italics in tables indicate the instructor's feedback and the symbol ▲ marks the spot where the instructor intended the insertion to go.

Leila was not always happy to make changes in response to feedback because she was not always convinced of the need. However, she was not able to point to any specific paragraph or sentence as an example.

> Leila: Some things I found I thought was right and I still like think they're right somehow.
> Interviewer: Were there any things that your instructor asked you to change that you didn't change?

> Leila: No
> Interviewer: You made all the changes, but you felt you didn't need to make some of them. Is that what you just said to me, but you're not sure which parts now?
> Leila: (giggles)
> Interviewer: So even though you thought it wasn't necessary . . .
> Leila: I did it.
> Interviewer: You went ahead and did it. So why did you go ahead and do it?
> Leila: For the mark. I think because she knows more.
> (Leila, first interview)

This desire to resist is interesting especially considering that the instructor had taken the time to offer so much feedback. It suggests that Leila felt there was some degree of appropriation of her writing. It is also worth noting that concern over the possibility of losing marks meant that she acted on the feedback.

Finding out what students wanted was not easy as there were contradictions in what they said. For example, even though she resisted some advice, Leila wanted more specific feedback to assist her and she mentioned this several times. When asked, at the end of the interview, if there was anything more in the way of feedback that she wanted, she had a very interesting response that showed she had thought about the feedback she was getting and really did know what she wanted.

> Leila: Just, like, more specific feedback.
> Interviewer: More specific feedback. That's a good comment. Can you tell me what?
> Leila: Like when there is something vague or something like rephrasing, like, why?
> Interviewer: Why you need to rephrase? So you want to be told, if we look back at this. Oh here it is here.
> Leila: I took that out.
> Interviewer: So rather than rephrasing you took it out.
> Leila: It was very like confusing after reading it again. It's easier to say rephrase 'cos or rephrase for this reason, or where's the part that makes the . .
> (Leila, first interview)

Leila found it difficult to know what to do in response to the prompt 'rephrase'. She wanted more specific help and ideas on how to proceed. In fact, she had not completely deleted the section under discussion, but she had moved it to create a separate conclusion, added to it and made it more specific. Unfortunately, despite considerable reworking, it received two comments from the instructor that indicated she still did not think it was successful. It seemed that Leila had struggled with the task of interpreting

the cartoon, had focused on the wrong points, and this was what was commented on in the end. Possibly the demands of interpreting the purpose of a cartoon and writing about it in a clear way were too great for her.

Jane had hoped that the comments on the final draft would encourage the students to think more about their writing and help them with the next essay and it does seem to have worked for Leila. She had clearly read the feedback, thought about it, and had quite a lot to say in response. In the comments below, Leila was continuing to fret over the revised conclusion and the additional negative feedback it had drawn.

> Leila: After reading what she wrote I got like [unclear] I thought that to stop obesity, the society should enlighten people. You know like tell them about obesity and why. So she took it as giving more attention to the thing that's having attention. But I wasn't, I don't know, I didn't think about that. And also she says that my conclusion doesn't sum-up the things we wrote.
> Interviewer: Do you agree with her about that?
> Leila: The thing about obesity and giving more attention, I'm confused about it actually because I wanted to give a solution for the problem, but then it sounded like giving more attention to the problem that's receiving attention.
> (Leila, first interview)

This rehashing of the way she had expressed herself showed that she had tried to apply the feedback to what she had written, but she was annoyed and confused over why it had not worked.

When she was asked how much the essay had improved, Leila indicated that it had not improved much, and this was because she had not made major changes.

> Leila: Because mainly same ideas are put. I just changed whatever she told me to change and that's it.
> Interviewer: You didn't read it again and think about how you could make major changes?
> Leila: Not if she did not tell me like change this, change that I did not really bother. I just read it as reading.
> (Leila, first interview)

These comments show that she had relied on the instructor to direct the revision process, and she had not taken responsibility for reworking the essay extensively despite the feedback. So the difficulty here is that Leila is resistant to feedback but also reliant on it. This ambivalent attitude to the feedback and difficulty finding errors herself came up when discussing the second essay, too. On two occasions, Leila mentioned that errors had been pointed out on the final draft that had not been mentioned before.

> Leila: What makes me somehow angry, not angry.
> Interviewer: You're allowed to be angry.
> Leila: It's like when things are not pointed out in that draft and then it's pointed out in this draft although it wasn't shown in the other one. I can't see them wrong unless she points them. You know like when you write something you think it's perfect and now there is something wrong. That's why.
> Interviewer: Do you give yourself time between writing and reading? . . . And reread it again a day or more later.
> Leila: I didn't reread this. Really I depended on her feedback and my peer's feedback and that all changed in my last one. . . . I tried to read it as if it wasn't mine.
> (Leila, second interview)

Not only was she annoyed that some errors had not been pointed out to her until the final draft, but she also admitted that she had done little to look deeply into her writing herself, depending on others instead. Unfortunately, I did not get a copy of the final essay which was in the process of being responded to at the time of the interview, but it was heartening to see that Leila did appear to have realized that ultimately she was responsible for her writing. Jane had certainly worked hard to provide feedback to this student, but it seems having the instructor work hard does not directly lead to the students working hard. And we may even need to consider that Leila's passive approach may have been encouraged by the extensive feedback offered although it is not possible to say for certain.

7.10.2 Najla's Revision Process Essay One

Najla only handed in one essay and completed one interview. Interestingly, the first comment she made about feedback echoed the comments Leila had made about finding out, on the final draft, that there had been more errors all along that had not been pointed out. This came out of a question on where she thought she got most of the comments.

> I think in each draft I got different comments. I don't know if like, I mean, in the first draft she put for me some comments and then I tried to improve them. And in the next paragraph I think she found other mistakes. To tell you the truth that's something I didn't really like 'cos the mistakes that she saw in the first, in this draft, the comments she wrote, I tried to fix them and I fixed them in the next draft. But then in the final draft, I came to know that I have more mistakes. I would like to get as much feedback as possible. . . . I mean because by that time I'd be able to fix it and get a higher grade for the final draft. But on the final draft, it's true that I am gonna learn from my mistakes but the final grade is there. I can't do anything about it.
> (Najla, first interview)

By not showing her some errors until the final draft, Najla felt duped in that she was deprived of a chance to make corrections. But she also appeared not to have recognized that it was her responsibility to look for these errors. Comments of this kind did not arise with the students from the other two instructors' classes, which led me to speculate that these may have been provoked by the sheer volume of feedback, and that both grammar and extensive content feedback were offered on the final draft.

Najla returned to the theme of errors not being pointed out until the last draft again towards the end of the interview.

> She didn't spot them out for me then how would I; ok I might know a couple of them, but I don't think I would be able to spot them at all because in the first place I thought there were no mistakes at all. (Najla, first interview)

Indeed, on the final draft several sections were circled that had not been responded to before, for example odd wording (Now ever) and phrases (our world in all its aspects). The first appears to be a typing error and should have been within Najla's ability to spot. The second was vague language, which was more difficult. It does appear that the student is, like Leila, wanting more and more support from the instructor.

The grade Najla received, a B+, was something of a shock to her. She had expected to do well in the same way as she had done well in school. However, she was eventually able to take this in a constructive way.

> I was a bit disappointed because I am not used to such marks in school, but then I was like, it's ok because that means I should improve. I should work on myself. . . . I thought I was good at writing. I take it in a very easy way. Like even in my assignments like, I wrote it and I have no problems. Some of my friends were like, "We have an assignment, an English assignment. It's ok, we just write it as if we are writing a composition at school." But now I guess it is more important than I think. I should work more maybe on them and I should try to revise it more than once, maybe take the opinions of others. That made me go to the writing center and ask for opinions. (Najla, first interview)

This is yet one more example of students having inflated ideas about their writing ability based on their high school grades, but this is hard to align with the dependence on the instructor to take responsibility for the revision of the student's writing. However, it is possible to see in this extensive comment that Najla works through her feelings and finds a way forward, a way that should benefit her as a writer. She had never considered going to the writing center before as she thought she did not need any

help. Her comments also offered an interesting insight into the way she believed most students initially approach academic writing, taking it lightly.

Najla had been informed by the instructor that she had a syntax problem on the final draft of her essay and this had confused her as she had never had this mentioned to her at school. She had gone to the writing center as advised, but this had only confused her.

> We went over, through the whole essay, and we tried to discuss the points where the professor shows, sees there is a mistake, and we tried to discuss why does she see a mistake, and how can we improve it. Although the person that was like helping me, he told me that I don't really see a major problem of syntax in your essay.
> (Najla, first interview)

The writing center tutor suggested that there were other problems in the essay that seemed to be more serious than the suggested syntax problem. Indeed, there were problems with the sentences, but it was surprising that syntax was chosen as something to comment on in a final draft (Table 7.6). It is possible that this issue caused quite a lot of tension between Jane and the student as it was mentioned several times.

Table 7.6

Najla: Syntax Problem in the Final Draft

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft Two	*Your sentence word order is difficult to follow. Visit the writing center for help with syntax.* Circled the parts underlined and wrote *AWK*	*AWK* A rescue call overwhelmed with pain and grief has echoed throughout the world. An *AWK* immediate request is being asked for by the world as the days are passing. The world, along with its rich, natural resources is predicted to reach an end very soon. The world is threatened with catastrophic consequences. The world's disasters are increasing rapidly. Etc.

Najla extensively revised her essay, adding paragraphs and deleting a lot of what she had written for the first draft although this did not appear to be avoidance behaviour even though it was sometimes in response to questions from the instructor. Rather, it seemed as though she had found more in the cartoon that was worth

discussing and changed whole paragraphs accordingly. A lot of this revision appeared not to have been prompted by the instructor. She also ignored some direct feedback on content, but it is not clear if this was because she did not understand or because she forgot to use it (Table 7.7). Despite not including this feedback in her essay, she had done a considerable amount of work on the essay; the final draft was a whole page longer than the first draft, and the paragraph order had been changed as per the instructor's advice. She certainly appeared to have taken at least some of the feedback seriously, which her repeated references to and concern over the syntax issue showed.

Table 7.7

Najla: Ignoring Content Feedback

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	At the point indicated, suggested addition - *contributing to the damage that is being done?*	The audience in this cartoon is every single person contributing to ▲ the natural world in any sense- to every environmentalist, naturalist, citizen, governmentalist…etc.
Draft Two	Tried again with a new comment positioned as per the symbol ▲ - *destruction of the*	The audience in this cartoon is every single person contributing to the ▲ natural world in any sense- to every environmentalist,naturalist,citizen, governmentalist…etc.

Note. ▲ marks the spot where the instructor intended the insertion to go.

Note. There is an unwise and inexplicable change to the punctuation and spacing directly above.

7.10.3 Suad's Revision Process Essay One and Two

Suad had initially been disappointed with her essay grade although she had received 9/10, 42/50 and 85/100 for the preliminary, first and final drafts respectively.

> I was like partially shocked when I saw my mark because I'm not used to such grades, only since I came to this university. And when I talked to her [the instructor] I felt much better and she told me it's not bad at all. It's like a B/B+.
> (Suad, first interview)

She examined her essay closely, discussed it with the instructor and on looking at the feedback and the weaknesses in the essay she had come to see that it was fair.

Discussing some errors with Suad in the interview, there was evidence that she had not yet reached the stage in her language development where she was able to integrate and use some of the information she had received on her essay. As the opening line of her final draft, she had written 'Life is perfect, and so we are', but it became clear that she had not understood what was wrong with this sentence.

> Suad: Actually we went in detail a bit, we did. Like here ummm, I did some silly mistakes I admit. Like I just realized them when she told me about them. Like in sentences, this sentence, I misplaced the word "we".
> Interviewer: "Life is not perfect and neither are we" perhaps?
> Suad: Or " so are we" not "we are". So I got confused with this one.
> Interviewer: But if you said "so are we" it wouldn't make sense. "Life is not perfect, and so are we."
> Suad: I meant we are not perfect.
> Interviewer: Neither are we.
> Suad: Well maybe. Maybe yes.
> Interviewer: And actually your instructor has said, "We are perfect because life is not" so she is trying to work it out. It is funny isn't it.
> Suad: It is. I was like, I'm so stupid I did this mistake.
> (Suad, first interview)

Despite the feedback and the discussion with her instructor, Suad had not managed to get the wording that she was looking for to accurately represent her idea and she had not noticed that the instructor had continued to misunderstand her point, so this feedback, possibly an example of responding to an untreatable error, served no purpose at all. Suad was still manipulating the wording she had originally started with and felt frustrated with herself. From her hesitation, it is obvious that even when I supplied her with the phrase she was looking for, she was reluctant to accept the construction.

Further on in the interview, as we looked at gaps in the logic of her statements or areas where, as a reader, it was hard to follow, Suad had a minor epiphany about her writing.

> It's [silicone] delivered very much, but this fact shows that too many people are undergoing plastic surgeries. I didn't mean to show this one as the fact that makes people go into plastic surgeries. So it's just, I'm finding a lot of very silly mistakes.
> (Suad, first interview)

She was seeing the flaws in the logic in a way she perhaps had never done before. That she was seeing this with little prompting from me, suggested that this type of in-depth examination of the student's writing when the student had some distance on it was beneficial.

Suad did not have any particular preference as far as direct or indirect feedback went. She rather philosophically saw that it was all beneficial and would help her with her grade. However, a lot of sentence skill errors went unnoticed if the instructor did not indicate them. On one occasion, the instructor had drawn attention to several small passages and suggested they be combined. No mention was made of the numerous grammar errors, one of which rendered the first sentence almost incomprehensible. (Table 7.8).

Table 7.8

Suad: Responding to Instructor's Feedback but Looking No Further

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	*combine* indicating three small paragraphs	Many are those who want to become an actor or an actress twin. They undergo plastic surgeries, costing them quite a bit, and in my opinion, ending up looking like clones with no dependent personalities.
Draft Two	*unnecessary* with the offending part struck out	Many are those who want to become an actor or an actress twin. They undergo plastic surgeries, costing them quite a bit, and ~~in my opinion~~, ending up looking like clones with no dependent personalities.

Suad had followed the feedback offered and combined these passages, but it is doubtful that she carefully reread what she ended up with, as errors remained unaddressed. Perhaps, she did not even think to look for errors as none had been indicated. But, surprisingly, on the final draft, the instructor chose to strike out a section, still not commenting on the sentence skill errors (Table 7.8).

Suad did feel some frustration over feedback that she could not quite understand. An example of this was a comment '*vague pro*' as she had thought the referent was clear at the time she wrote. At the time of the interview, being less closely connected to her writing due to the time that had passed, she was less sure that it worked. It is also clear examining this section of her writing that despite her doubts about the feedback, she had tried to improve the relevant section and in doing so had made more changes than the instructor's feedback suggested and more mistakes (Table 7.9). This revision may have been part of her overall strategy for reworking the essay,

or it may have been because she was uncertain how to respond efficiently to the prompt. She certainly did not correct the pronoun and instead managed to eliminate it, possibly an example of avoidance behaviour.

Table 7.9

Suad: Misunderstood Feedback

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	*vague pro* indicating the underlined word	The cartoon . . . shows the ridiculously huge amount of silicon needed by the plastic surgery institutes. Harris smartly symbolizes that by using a huge container truck that has the word "silicone" written in capital and bold on the truck. This obviously is exaggeration.
Draft Two	*punc*	In the cartoon, Harrison smartly symbolizes the large amount of silicone needed by using a huge container truck that has the word "silicone" written in capital and bold on the truck. As much as it seems exaggerated;

Note. Underlining as per instructor feedback

The instructor may also have sometimes been unsure how to respond to Suad (Table 7.10). There were a number of places in this sentence where she could have intervened and prompted a change, which would then have required a ripple of changes through the sentence. However, without that ripple effect, it was possible the sentence would not improve. These types of problems come into the realm of not easily treatable, if not actually *untreatable* (Ferris, 1999).

Table 7.10

Suad: Haphazard Revision in Essay Two

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	Indicated the underlined section and added - *VF*	But he struggled to leave his mark in a society where one had to fight for merely existing and *VF* surviving, let alone accomplish high goals.
Draft Two		He was one . . . struggling to leave his mark in a society where one had to fight for merely existing and surviving, let alone accomplish high goals.

Comparing the first draft and the final draft, it was clear that Suad had made substantial changes. Where her instructor had supplied direct feedback and that sentence was still in use, she had made the suggested changes. But, her revisions were substantial in places so that much of the direct feedback became irrelevant. When prompted, Suad seemed able to connect her ideas more closely and explain her point more clearly, but her sentence skill errors persisted and had not been responded to (Table 7.11). It did not appear that Suad had looked for sentence skill errors in her work

Table 7.11 *Suad: Material Added to Essay One but Errors Persisting*

	Instructor's Feedback	Student's Sentences
Draft One	Indicated underlined section – *unclear what you mean*	Harris is trying to convey a message through this cartoon. Starting with the truck, ending with the surrounding, his aim is to demonstrate absurdity of plastic surgeries, <u>and his hope to deliver the message to the audience and motivate them to take serious action towards this case to the better, to make a change and definitely make a difference</u>
Draft Two		Harris is trying to convey a message through this cartoon. Starting with the truck, ending with the surrounding, his aim is to demonstrate absurdity of plastic surgeries, and his hope to deliver the message to the audience that plastic surgery is a serious matter; it's not just a fad that will come and go, it's a situation in which many people's lives become at high risk of death, or actually die from it.

According to her instructor, Suad had been horrified to find that she was in an ESL class, and she assessed herself as a lot better than the other students. Nevertheless, she believed she had benefited from the multiple draft approach but had found it depressing to see that she had new mistakes in each subsequent draft. Suad did not expect the instructor to show her all her errors as she recognized that that could be "a bit depressing", but she felt frustrated with herself. She had not written an analysis essay before and mentioned that it had been a struggle for her, perhaps being an example of what she called "big topics".

7. 11 Peer Review Practices in Jane's Class

Generally speaking there is a good deal of ambivalence over the use of peer review among writing instructors and the instructors taking part in this study were no different. Students should benefit from reading and responding to the writing of others at or near their level. Vygotsky's concept of the 'zone of proximal development' comes to mind here. For one thing, they get to see what others are doing with the same instructional input; for another, it is generally accepted that by helping others, students confirm and extend their own knowledge. In contrast to the other two case studies, there was a marked appreciation of the peer review activity from Jane's students, but though the students enjoyed the activity, this made little difference in terms of the usability of the advice received.

7.11.1 Responses to Questionnaire Three

The data gathered from *Questionnaire Three the Peer Review Process* in Jane's class revealed much more positive responses than had been gathered from the students in the other two case studies (Appendix U). Jane's students overwhelmingly felt that they had managed the task well and had been helped by the reviewer. Only question 11 about help with grammar received an overwhelmingly negative response, but this was anticipated as the peer review sheet did not direct students to offer advice in this area (Figure 7.3).

Although many students responded to the two open-ended questions with requests for more ideas that they could have added to their essays, one student had a positive comment to make.

> I though it was very helpful. Something different to think about. It wasn't just a quick check made by classmates but involved more insightful focused comments from my peers. I'd use the method again. (Unidentified student, Jane's class)

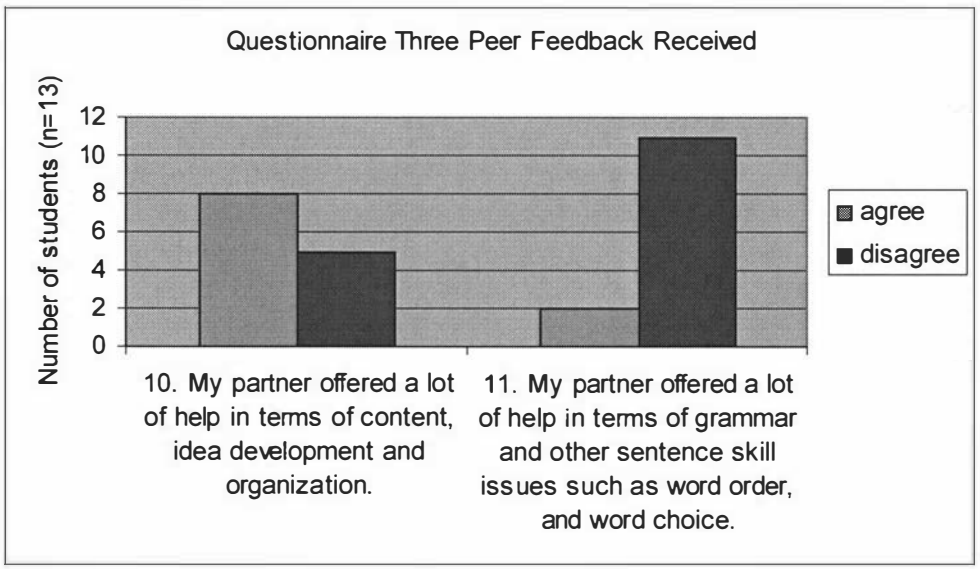

Figure 7.3. Jane's students' assessments of content/grammar help received through peer review.

7.11.2 The Peer Review Sheet

This peer review sheet was quite different from others accessed as part of the study. Questions on the introduction, body and conclusion were grouped together at the top of the page as if to engage students' attention and remind them what needed to be achieved at different stages, and then three broad prompts were offered (Appendix V). The reviewer was expected to read the essay three times. Unlike the other two classes, on this occasion the reviewer was able to take the essay home to complete the review, and time was available in the next class for discussion. The reviewer was encouraged to offer positive comments as well as suggestions for change. There were no places where yes/no answers would have sufficed. Nor was there any emphasis placed on grammar or mechanics. The two examples of completed review sheets showed that the students had read the essays closely and offered encouraging comments. There was also evidence of specific advice such as adding solutions to the problem from reviewer two (Appendix V).

7.11.3 The Interview Students' Comments

Despite the positive responses to questionnaire three about the peer review experience, the interviews with students revealed the usual lack of confidence in peers as reviewers.

> Najla: No, it is good but it is not as good as the teacher's feedback. . . . And then she was looking for mistakes.
> Interviewer: Did she tell you that or are you guessing that?

> Najla: No, she told me that.
> Interviewer: So she was trying to perform the task for the instructor.
> Najla: That's what doesn't make me really confident with the feedback I get from students. All what they are concerned about is writing the feedback so the teacher would see it.
> (Najla, first interview)

Also, in the comments about 'looking for mistakes' Najla seems to have identified a problem with students receiving grades on peer review. Leila had found one benefit in the peer review process though, as she found it useful to see what others had written and had taken advantage of this by reading and commenting on two essays although only one was required. Leila also mentioned that she had benefited from a comment by her reviewer that there was repetition in her essay and she had worked to eliminate that. It appeared that she had no trouble dealing with advice of that kind as it was easy to confirm and act on, and it was certainly within the capabilities of most peer reviewers to locate this type of weakness.

7.11.4 The Instructor's Attitude to Peer Review

Jane was concerned to have the student look closely at each others' essays as she felt that they got the most benefit from reading the writing of others and thinking about how the writer achieved or failed to achieve the objectives. So, although she gave grades for the response, she also gave students permission not to use the peer reviewer's advice if they did not agree with it.

7.12 Summary

Jane appeared to have adapted to the GSU teaching and learning environment although she clearly resented the workload. Although she commented that many students were not ready to cope with the demands of an American style tertiary education system, she had found ways of working with them. Jane repeatedly expressed the idea that she felt an obligation to her students, but that she was not particularly concerned with grammar problems in students' work as most of the time she could read beyond these and work with the students on logic, but there was a lot of direct feedback. Her responses to content seemed to be closer to that of a rhetoric instructor rather than a language instructor being lengthy on all drafts of the essays.

The students appeared to appreciate the multiple draft approach to writing. In the essays examined, the students had worked with the content adding and connecting ideas, but it appeared that they had done little sentence skill revision beyond the direct feedback Jane had provided, and that meant that their final drafts were still peppered

with errors. They all expressed resentment in varying degrees to being shown that they still had errors in their final drafts. The students appeared to be both dependent on the feedback and resistant to it.

In this class, peer review was well received by the students. But, these same students still doubted that they received tangible benefit from the advice of other students. Jane concurred with this view as she saw the benefit coming from having the chance to read other students' writing, not from the advice they gave.

This chapter elaborated on the experiences and perspectives of Jane and her students with written feedback. This was the third of three case studies set in three different freshman writing classes. The next chapter discusses key issues related to feedback and revision that have been presented in the reporting of the three case studies.

CHAPTER 8
DISCUSSION

The goals of this research were to conduct three in-depth case studies, examining the feedback/revision cycle in three classes over a semester, in an attempt to identify how students and instructors interacted. The hope was that it would be possible to identify ways to make feedback more usable. Rather than relying on oral reports alone, as there can be a disparity between what is said and what is actually done, information gathered from both interviews and an examination of essays was analyzed (Goldstein, 2005). Other interested parties were invited to offer their insights at different stages of the study: students from other WRI 101 classes, the writing center tutors and other instructors in the writing department.

It was hoped to include more material from classroom observations than has proved possible. Firstly, there was some reluctance on the part of two instructors to have the researcher in the classroom although access was provided at essential stages of the research. Also, some material from observations and gathered incidentally through insider knowledge was considered unusable. Ethnographic research can give rise to sensitive issues that it is impossible to anticipate at the beginning of the research process. The degree of sensitivity can be magnified when researchers are gathering data from within their own work environments. As the ethics of environmental research require that researchers proceed cautiously and avoid putting others at risk, the issue can become very complex. This was the situation in this study.

The first part of this chapter deals with key points revealed through subjecting the data to close examination and taking account of the different participants' views as well as what the texts revealed, a multifaceted process. The process reveals complex interactions fraught with potential for misinterpretations. In the second part of the chapter, key findings are related to the research questions. And like the moment when a weaver unwinds the completed cloth from the loom and examines it for the first time, although some threads have come together and produced findings that hold promise, the effect of the novice on the intricate pattern has led to gaps that have to be acknowledged, too.

8.1 Classroom Culture and Impact on Student/Instructor Interactions

Differences in perceptions of the teaching-learning process can impact classroom interactions and learning (Tudor, 2001). There were differences in approaches to classroom interactions between the three instructors; however, the impact of these different approaches on the students was not easy to gauge. Jane had had experience with students from a similar culture before coming to GSU. She was caught between somewhat competing obligations: a desire to provide students with access to an American style education, and the demands of working with the obvious ESL needs of some students. Jane talked often of the 'obligation' she felt towards the students, and it was this obligation that informed many of the decisions she made in dealing with the students. Ultimately, this resulted in Jane taking a lot of the burden on herself as she labored over the students' papers in the hope that her extensive feedback would work the necessary magic with her students. Despite the effort Jane expended for her students in terms of written feedback, the students were not always satisfied with what they received. They complained that the feedback was sometimes confusing and about inconsistencies they perceived. Therefore, it seemed that providing a lot of written feedback did not necessarily turn out to be what students wanted. The data from the student's evaluations of the instructor added little to the picture as a format change meant it was not comparable to what others had received.

Kitty had had considerable experience in the region and even took a philosophical view of the practice of seeing everything as 'negotiable'. She was aware of the ESL needs of the students, and she took a sympathetic approach as she tried to ease them into this new realm. Nonetheless, she was frustrated by how under-prepared most of the students were for the demands of academia, and it is possible that this frustration was evident to the students at times. Perhaps having been a successful student in this part of the world herself, and at least bilingual, she felt deeply perturbed by the lack of effort she perceived in some students' methods of dealing with writing and revision.

Kitty's insider knowledge should have meant that she was responsive to the local learning environment, an important factor in the 'ecological' perspective of language teaching (Tudor, 2001). Yet, the student evaluations for Kitty for the semester the data was gathered were lower than the departmental average. So it appeared that understanding their problems and cosseting them as they adapted to the university environment was not enough to ensure comfort with the classroom culture.

Of the three instructors, Lydia had had the least experience in the particular cultural and educational context encountered working with L2 students in the UAE. Initially, Lydia's statements indicated that rather than being responsive to the culture she found herself in, she saw herself as a conduit for introducing American university culture and practices to the students. Unlike the other two instructors, Lydia presented herself as uncompromising in having students accept her classroom culture, an unyielding stance that is strikingly at odds with calls for taking account of 'localness', a common theme in L2 literature (Leki, 1991; Tudor, 2001, 2003).

Until the 1970's, there was no formal school system in the UAE other than the teaching of the Quran to segregated groups. Even today, the education available in UAE schools varies considerably, and at university, students sometimes exhibit behaviors that would be almost incomprehensible outside this culture. Although an extreme example, a male student arriving late to class might interrupt whatever was going on to offer a general greeting to the class and even to kiss several male friends. Obviously this is disruptive, and milder versions of this behavior are commonplace. Although Lydia's technique for getting her version of appropriate classroom behavior across to the students was eccentric and individual, she stressed that she handled students with a smile; therefore, carried out with a combination of humor and firmness, her approach appeared to have been tolerated.

Despite the instructor's evident frustration with and criticisms of the students, their comments when evaluating Lydia suggested a certain 'wow' factor at work in the class, so perhaps her enthusiasm for writing was contagious; it may be a variable in creating a positive classroom climate (Tudor, 2001). The dynamics at work in any classroom are complex, so it is just possible that an instructor with confidence in what she is doing and the right personality can carry off an unconventional approach.

Also, it may be a mistake to accept many of Lydia's comments at face value and determine that this instructor did not reflect on her practice as an instructor in a culture other than her own. Within the duration of the study, but after the data had been collected from her classes, Lydia had experienced an epiphany in terms of her culture and come to realize that it had a stronger influence on her than she had realized. Perhaps the tough talk was a reflection of the frustration felt by an instructor trying to wrestle students into the realm of university discourse. Perhaps it was more representative of a venting of that frustration in the company of fellow instructors, who evidently shared some of these frustrations, rather than a true description of the way

this instructor interacted with the students. The curious dichotomy between Lydia's critical comments of the students on the one hand, and on the other, positive evaluations from the students, suggests that getting a clear picture of how classroom culture is established, and students are made to feel safe, is far from straightforward.

Further complicating the picture of what is going on in classroom interactions, according to DWS instructors, students often want to take the next level course with the same instructor, or curiously, choose to repeat the course with the same instructor if they fail. This may be a feature of the relationship that instructors typically build with their students. Goldstein (2004) suggests that instructors need to educate students on how to deal with their feedback and, presumably, their whole concept of classroom culture. It is my feeling that many instructors do this without actually explicitly realizing it, and having learnt the teachers' techniques, students feel comfortable, therefore choose to continue with that instructor.

8.1.1 Grades and Affective Responses in the Classroom

Within one of the classes, there appeared to be a discrepancy between the grades on essays, a major component of the semestral grades, and the final grade, and there were differences in the final grade range over the three case studies. Kitty felt that inconsistencies in grading throughout the department had a negative impact on the way students' perceived instructors and would have liked checks and balances to be applied. Certainly, considering the negative comments made about the low level of application shown by students, some grades seemed unjustifiably high.

Several questions arose. Were these grades a representation of the type of pass rate the university expected rather than a reflection of the instructor's real assessment of the students? This was an unlikely explanation as in the past instructors had been reprimanded by the dean of the college for giving high grades. Were high grades necessary if an instructor was to keep a job? It is worth noting here that at the time this research data was gathered, students' evaluations of faculty were a major part of how merit increases were decided and contracts renewed. In Lydia's case, did the students merit the grades, the irritation expressed being more a product of one person's frustration working within a culture other than her own, rather than a criticism of the students?

It was only possible to speculate. However one thing was clear, Kitty, who gave the lowest grades, received the harshest evaluations, and Lydia, with the highest grades, was rated positively. In addition, it was clear from a comment by one of Kitty's

students that the students' unofficial and clandestine message service was at work transmitting messages among freshman about grades and what could be expected from individual instructors, and Kitty was well-known as an instructor who gave low grades. It appears that grades influence evaluations of instructors and make these evaluations questionable as a means of getting a clear picture of classroom interactions and individual instructors' attempts to create a comfortable classroom culture.

8.1.2 Adjusting to the Demands of Academia

All three instructors agreed that most students had had a shock on finding how stringent grading was in the university, and they had had to deal with students contesting grades or attempting to negotiate grades. Dissatisfaction with grades was related to the significantly different learning environment the students were now in and the level of work required to achieve high grades. Many of the students had graduated from schools in the UAE where higher grades than seemed justifiable were common and possibly gained through the process of 'negotiation', a practice no longer available in the university system. Accepting unpalatable grades on writing previously judged acceptable, could well be a challenging moment for these students. As Kitty's and Jane's students wrote multiple drafts of three essays spaced throughout the semester, they were likely to have been exposed to more grades evaluating their writing, unpalatable or otherwise, than Lydia's students, who wrote less. This more extensive exposure to grades and feedback, little of which was positive, may have had an impact on the classroom culture. In fact, the expectation that the students will do a substantial body of writing may have been a factor taken into account at the time students completed evaluations of the instructors. Most of the negative comments were about the workload.

It seems that the clues available were not enough to get an accurate gauge of the classroom culture of each of these classes; however, from their comments it was clear that all three instructors felt a commitment to introduce the students to an unfamiliar learning environment, just in different ways.

8.2 Grade Expectations and Generation 1.5 Issues

Students' inflated sense of their writing abilities was a concern of the participating instructors and an issue they found frustrating to deal with. In addition, an instructor in the department commented in a casual conversation that the students were coming into the university with no clear idea of their competence in English due to the inflated grades they had received in high school. When all the instructors in the

department were invited to give their view on this issue, most had had experiences of this kind with the students who had attended the private, English medium schools (Appendix W).

One of the contentious issues that arose in the interviews with the students was that having been graded highly for their efforts at school, they were not used to grades of the kind they were receiving, although they appeared to be quite generous grades. While the term 'generation 1.5' is usually reserved for immigrants to English speaking countries, it appeared to apply to the experiences of some GSU students. For example, overestimation of writing ability and subsequent challenges to grades could be related to students having no literacy background in either their L1 or their L2; this would leave the students with a limited foundation from which to assess their own writing. A recent newspaper report suggested that the emphasis on English means that Arabic teachers are noticing that Arabic speakers' ability to communicate fluently in their native language is declining (Al Najami, 2007b). Arabic teachers who work in English medium schools where the hours of Arabic instruction are often minimal and may even be below the required number, are particularly concerned about this (Al Najami, 2007b). Although Arabic teachers teach classical Arabic, which students do confess to struggling to read and write it not being the Arabic in daily use, there is increasing concern that some Arab students are losing their fluency in daily Arabic as well due to the amount of time they spend studying in English.

Weaknesses in L1 may, also, be due to outmoded teaching methodology, a problem identified in schools in the region; this means that Arab ESL students who struggle when writing in English may well also struggle writing in Arabic (Khuwaileh & Al Shoumali, 2000). As well as this difficulty with written expression a fondness for oral traditions rather than literacy is evident in the UAE. As recently as 2007, Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, is on record as expressing frustration with many aspects of education in the UAE including teaching methodology, and on his initiative, the country has introduced initiatives to bring about major changes in teaching methodology in government schools.

Deficits in previous learning experiences raise the possibility that some of the errors that appear in GSU students' L2 essays may also exist in their L1 writing, a complication which instructors are unlikely to be aware of as they tend to operate on the premise that L2 students have mastered literacy skills in their first languages.

Students who have had little exposure to literacy in either language cannot be expected to know how far they are from what is anticipated in terms of academic writing. They may have scraped by without becoming competent users of written English as a result of having had little explanation of language structure or little corrective feedback (Frodeson & Holten, 2003). When schools pay lip service to the required commitment to Arabic and do not offer comprehensive exposure to English literacy skills and literature, the students emerge with literacy problems in two languages.

Also, universal literacy is still not a reality in many Arab and African countries, especially for women. In fact, the antics of four illiterate women are the subject of a popular UAE made cartoon called *Freej* (Neighborhood). When questioned, students seldom expressed any pleasure in reading and struggled to complete the reading assignments. One student in the study mentioned comparing "King Caesar and Socrates" in a paragraph, which calls into question just what her experience of literature had been. DWS instructors frequently commented that lack of interest or ability reading in English was a problem. The UAE is forging ahead in terms of the promotion of literacy in schools and no longer placing particular emphasis on the provision of tertiary educational institutions, the situation until recently, and this change has been in the newspapers repeatedly in 2006-2007. However, major changes take time, and there may be little demonstration of the benefits of literacy in many homes as yet.

There were vast differences in experience writing in English between the students depending on prior educational experience. Some students taking part in the research were aware of their weaknesses in English and felt let down by the education they had received in high school, but these were usually the students who had attended government schools. Others believed themselves to be competent writers. Even though many of these students struggled to accept their instructor's feedback initially, those who took the time to understand and attempt to use the feedback saw the sense in it, eventually. This came out in the interviews with them. But there was a definite sense that acknowledging their weaknesses had been a hard blow for some and attempting to negotiate a higher grade was considered acceptable.

8.3 Discrepancies in Perspectives of the Actual Use of Feedback

While there is uncertainty in L1 research on student use of feedback in the feedback/revision cycle, L2 research suggests that students do read the feedback offered to them. There was a range of views on this subject among the participants in

the study. Therefore, the views of as many stakeholders as possible were sought in an attempt to unravel this issue and see if there was anything useful to be found in these diverse views.

8.3.1 Instructors' Perspectives

All three instructors in the study assessed the students as underutilizing the feedback offered to them through the process approach to writing and this was confirmed by the responses from the writing department faculty in general (Appendix W). Some instructors even doubted that the feedback was read. Kitty felt that some students were just unwilling to learn. However, this may well be the voice of frustration as it is unlikely that any student tries not to learn (Reid, 2002), nor that any instructor really believes this to be the case. Responses from the DWS faculty indicated that there was also disappointment over the extent to which many students revised, with some instructors noting that changing a few wording problems was the best that could be expected from some students (Appendix W). It must be acknowledged that these were generalizations and the participating instructors acknowledged that each semester a few students realized what the feedback/revision cycle entailed and made the most of it.

8.3.2 The Writing Center Tutors' Perspectives

The tutors in the writing center, senior students trained by the coordinator of the center, were asked for their views on the question of whether students read the feedback and attempted to use it or not. They were assumed to be in a position to have views on this question as they typically see students from most of the instructors' classes in the department.

There was a mixed response to the question of whether or not the students had read the instructors' feedback before coming to the writing center; some thought they had not read it.

> They want us to go through the comments with them as if they haven't seen them before.

This was partly because the students could not read the writing. At least those students, and presumably all who went to the writing center, wanted to know what the feedback said. One tutor thought that the students only used rubrics to work out where they had lost grades and did not read the comments.

One thing the writing center tutors agreed on was that there were differences between students in the approach to using feedback, some genuinely wanting help and others just a quick fix, and there were weak and strong students in each category. The

quick fix option was often dramatically so, with students arriving with essays on their laptops anticipating help with major elements of the essay, such as thesis statements or support, so that they could print for the next class starting in an hour.

8.3.3 Students' Perspectives

Interestingly, the responses from the students gathered through questionnaire one indicated that most students read the feedback, with only two students out of 42 surveyed claiming that they did not (Appendix R). The vast majority of students in Kitty's and Jane's classes indicated that the feedback helped them work on all areas of their essays, but this was not the case in the responses from Lydia's class, which was understandable as Lydia gave far less feedback (Appendix R). Discussing the feedback on individual essays with the interview students, it was clear that all the students appreciated the writing process approach and the chance to improve their original drafts. Therefore, they had read the feedback although, disappointingly, they had not always understood it and did not always make the effort to seek clarification when there was a problem. Even though there were still glaring errors and weaknesses in content and organization, the students reported making use of most of the feedback. It is also worth noting that the interview students had an extra reason for reading and responding to the feedback, as they knew they were going to be involved in a discussion on what they had done. Simply being involved in interviews is likely to have influenced their responses to the feedback and, to some extent, their revision processes.

8.3.4 Favoring Personal Assistance

The information on instructor feedback gathered through questionnaires one and two showed that the students valued this assistance. Clearly, personal help had considerable value for the students. Being asked to work something out through a website or a reference book did not appeal quite so much, possibly reflecting reluctance in some students to work independently (Appendix S). However, it is just as likely that these students knew that searching though printed material would be very time-consuming due to their limited reading skills and were simply voting for the most efficient option, getting help directly from the instructor. A further possibility is that they were comfortable with a knowledge transmission approach to instruction, which still dominates in many parts of the Arab world. They may have been keen to maintain this approach if at all possible. The cosseting students' experience in school does not prepare them well for the independence required at university.

8.3.5 Underestimating the Use of Feedback

In fact, looking closely at what students did in response to feedback offered suggested that instructors may not realize the extent to which students do respond to the feedback. There was evidence of students responding to form and content feedback even when there was very little of it. Examples were added, thesis statements were improved, direct feedback was incorporated and grammar was revised successfully in response to indirect feedback, but revision seldom occurred without feedback. Because the essays examined contained a lot of sentence skill errors as well as weaknesses in idea development and organization, not all of which were addressed in the revisions, instructors may not actually notice what has been done. When the number of essays each instructor has to respond to is taken into account, not noticing all the changes seems very possible. Finally, perhaps when instructors are used to assessing first language speakers' writing, they are anticipating more extensive, independent revision leading to a higher quality product than was generally seen, especially in respect of content revision.

Clearly, there are many differing perspectives on the way students respond to feedback depending on who is talking. That there are such diverse views is a concern, and it appears that instructors and students need to discuss the use of feedback and develop realistic expectations of each other.

8.4 The Impact of Sentence Skill Feedback on Revision

Some research on instructor feedback has indicated that there is a scarcity of comments on ideas, and most comments operate at the micro-level (Stern & Solomon, 2006). Although this was not an accurate assessment of the feedback found on the essays analyzed, assessing comparability between studies on feedback patterns is difficult and requires a lot of transparency in terms of the analysis applied as there are many ways to quantify and judge feedback items. In this study, some instructors showed considerable engagement with sentence skill errors, which was of interest as none of the three instructors believed they placed particular importance on the grammar of the students' essays as they were more concerned with content. However the demands on the instructor when providing form or content feedback are different. In terms of the time they take to provide, it is clear that underlining and coding errors or even making changes is faster than explaining in writing why a paragraph lacks logic. Therefore, there are likely to be more feedback points related to grammar than content,

but the extent of the revisions they provoke could be significantly different with even brief content feedback provoking extensive revision.

8.4.1 Line Editing a Single Paragraph

Lydia's intention to line edit a paragraph in the expectation that the students would work on the rest of the essay, demonstrated an instinctive understanding of promoting student learning in a manner that maintains student ownership of the writing through prioritizing errors and offering selective response (Ferris, 1999, 2003, 2004b; Ferris et al., 1997; Stern & Solomon, 2006). But in reality, the grammar feedback Lydia offered was brief, scattered across the essay, and often took the form of making the changes. So in the essays examined, the feedback actually offered bore no resemblance to the ideal she aimed for. There is evidence that uncertainty about the role of instructor feedback does cause instructors with a large number of students to question what they are doing (Guenette, 2007). Therefore, it is possible that the mismatch between the ideal and actual practice seen with Lydia's students' essays is further evidence of this. This is particularly likely considering that Lydia expressed dissatisfaction with students' responses to feedback, and towards the end of the study her comments, and the marked extent to which she had reduced the feedback offered, suggest she had reached the point of having few expectations of feedback leading to substantial changes.

8.4.2 The Use of Codes

Research suggests that writing instructors who see themselves as language teachers respond to errors in language rather than idea development (Gascoigne 2004; Goldstein, 2004). Johns (2002), too, warns of the dangers of turning L2 writing classes into grammar practice classes. The three instructors showed various levels of engagement with grammar, even though they intended to focus on content. Kitty, with considerable experience in the region with ESL students, offered a lot of indirect form feedback compared to both Lydia and Jane, both of whom had had experience as writing instructors in L1 situations. Kitty favored the use of codes, but knew students seldom used the code sheet. In contrast, Jane had virtually abandoned the elaborate code sheet she began with. The instructors' ambivalence, as well as research on error feedback, suggests they may have been better off simply indicating the error thus saving time and giving the student the chance to work it out (Ferris, 2006; Ferris & Roberts, 2001). It is certainly a method worth exploring as instructors' and students'

time may be wasted on giving and deciphering codes. Or even more worryingly, not understanding the code might put some students off trying at all.

8.4.3 Direct Feedback

Jane obviously had ambivalent feelings about grammar feedback as she dabbled at giving codes, had a policy of using direct feedback, which she believed the students needed as they could not self-correct, but at the same time mentioned that she was able to read beyond the errors a lot of the time. Ferris, too, noted that instructors feel a need to give a lot of direct feedback and persist with this practice even when asked not to (2006). However, direct feedback needs to be used judiciously as students could self-correct some errors given the chance. Too much direct feedback takes puzzling out the error away from students and limits their efforts to applying the change, a task that requires little thought or processing. Direct feedback appears to have made Jane feel comfortable about meeting her obligations to the students, but it is doubtful that it leads to greater competence in the use of grammar. Evidence of this was that one interview student, not from Jane's class, mentioned making changes in response to direct feedback without knowing why the changes were needed.

In addition, perhaps as a result of too much direct feedback, it was apparent that some of Jane's students were not examining their writing having handed responsibility for the detection of errors over to the instructor. For example, one student wrote, "I just changed whatever she told me to change and that's it." Also, Jane's error response technique meant all three interview students complained about being shown errors in the final draft that had existed all along, but had never been indicated before. The students seemed to have felt misled by the instructor's feedback pattern, a response the instructor had not intended. This issue did not arise with the other instructors, who either gave little feedback or a lot of indirect feedback. Perhaps, the use of a lot of direct feedback encourages students to believe that their essay has been fully edited for them.

8.4.4 Avoidance Behavior

A further concern related to error feedback on form, usually indirect feedback, is that it can encourage avoidance behavior leading to shorter and simpler essays (Hyland, K., 2002; Truscott, 2004). This was seen in the essays examined and there was a notable example of this in one of Lydia's student's essays when the student had attempted a daring introduction to the narrative. This had drawn a questioning response from the instructor and had been deleted in the second draft (Table 5.6). The unclear,

indirect feedback showed that the instructor was dissatisfied with something but did not offer much of a clue as to what was expected from the student.

Avoidance behavior was evident in the essays of Jane and Kitty's students, too, in response to indirect feedback about pronouns. When students did not know what to do to correct an error, one option that came readily to mind was to delete the offending part, avoidance rather than a learning response. Reactions of this kind show that even a less invasive form of feedback has its dark side. Comments from Kitty showed that she was aware of this, but she was uncertain how to help without encouraging copying, possibly a reference to the copy/paste type actions of incorporating direct feedback.

8.4.5 Misunderstanding and Misdirecting

Considering the potential for misdirecting students, in some circumstances, no feedback at all could be better than unclear feedback. There was evidence in several students' essays that they were led into making more errors by unclear feedback. This happened in all three classes, either because the feedback was too vague to be understood, or too non-specific. Two examples were the underlining of the words "the Quran" with no indication of why in Huda's essay, and the request to create a new sentence that led Mustafa to create a fragment (Table 6.13). A similar problem occurred with one of Jane's students that had considerable repercussions in the second draft and led to extensive explanatory feedback being required (Table 7.5). In all three cases, the feedback caused the students to make further errors. It is likely that some unclear feedback comes about because instructors are under pressure due to the class numbers. Typical errors that instructors make in giving feedback, such as incorrectly labeling errors, were found in the feedback of all three instructors and are commonly observed in research on feedback (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Leki, 1991).

In addition, some errors are 'untreatable' due to the idiosyncratic way in which the ideas have been put together (Ferris, 1999). When the meaning is unclear to the instructor, there is a risk of misdirecting the student. Therefore, these errors are best indicated but left for the student to attempt to correct. Jane made an attempt to rewrite an 'untreatable' sentence for a student and, in the process, changed the student's intended meaning. Through discussion in an interview it was possible to supply the student with the desired expression, but working only with the written text in isolation from the student, this would have been much more difficult and best not attempted. Also, attempting to explain in writing why these idiosyncratic sentences do not work

would require a detailed explanation that could well be far to complicated for the student to understand.

8.4.6 The Should We or Shouldn't We of Error Response

Instructors used a variety of techniques to indicate errors; as part of the study these were counted and coded according to whether they were direct, making the changes, or indirect, indicating an error or awkwardness without providing a repair strategy although codes sometimes hinted at the type of problem present. Some were coded as unclear. No matter what technique the instructors used to draw students' attention to them, most errors highlighted in some way by the instructor were attended to, although not always successfully. However, there was little evidence of students finding and correcting errors that had not been indicated. Students commented that they had done their best and needed some help to find errors. For the weaker students, this is likely to be true, so individual differences in competence must be taken into account when deciding how to provide feedback.

The study revealed that all three instructors gave content and form feedback together, and even when they claimed that they concentrated on content, there was a considerable proportion of sentence skill feedback, which corroborates earlier research (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Although there is still some debate in the literature over whether or not to save form feedback until later in the process, an influence from the process approach to L1 writing instruction, there is evidence that offering content and form together works for L2 students who have different wants and needs from L1 students (Fathman & Whalley, 1990). Nevertheless, several responses from the DWS faculty in general indicated that when content and form feedback are offered together some students focused on form, it being easier and quicker than making radical revisions to the development and organization of ideas. This was also evident through an examination of the essays and particularly so for the weaker students. Rather than splashing an essay with red, this may well be an excellent reason to approach form feedback cautiously and with definite goals in mind.

Deciding on what technique to use is far from easy. Some instructors, in this climate of uncertainty over feedback, feel an obligation to offer extensive feedback, a lot of it direct feedback. However, doubts that this encourages learning suggest simply underlining sentence skill errors, selectively or comprehensively depending on the individual student's wants. This approach brings the error to the student's attention and provides a chance to attempt the correction. There is no likelihood of misleading the

student through over-enthusiastic but erroneous advice. Also, Jane's students' responses to the extensive direct feedback she provided indicated that it reduced their confidence in editing independently even though the purpose was explained carefully.

The concerns ESL students express over grammar errors make me dubious about simply ignoring errors as an option, although this would be a way to eliminate avoidance behavior. In my opinion, the benefits of selectively indicating errors, and giving students a chance to work on them, far outweigh the risk of provoking an avoidance response. However, the uncertainty over the efficacy of error feedback and the 'should I or shouldn't I' dilemma facing writing instructors means instructors need to be creative in finding ways to assist students with their weaknesses as they work towards building up a working grammar (Guenette, 2007).

8.5 The Impact of Content Feedback on Revision

Instructors' responses to content were coded according to whether they were long or short comments as well as the clarity of the comment. As one of the issues that emerged was the difficulty that students have responding to feedback on content, examining the length and clarity of comments seemed relevant. Also, as instructors expressed frustration at the amount of time it took to respond fully to content issues in writing, a consideration of the efficacy of long and short comments was of interest. As she felt strongly that having instructors do the writing did not help the students become better communicators, Lydia expressed little confidence in feedback and reduced the feedback she gave during the study. It appeared that Lydia's approach to writing instruction and feedback was informed by her previous experience as an L1 writing instructor since she focused on encouraging students to express their ideas and gave few directive comments. Interestingly, most of her students continued to revise the content of their essays.

Although they both expressed frustration at times, Jane and Kitty felt obliged to persist with giving lengthy feedback. Jane had mentioned that she felt that for some students just getting words on paper was a significant achievement and hoping for major revisions was unrealistic. However, both Kitty and Jane steadfastly continued with providing extensive content feedback, questioning the students' ideas and requesting them to reconsider their points and include more details, explanations or clear examples. Often instructors anticipate that writing questions on essays will activate revision and lead to the inclusion of more specific content, but there is evidence that they also have the potential to confuse students or even activate a simple

yes/no response from the student who misinterprets the intent (Bates' et al., 1993; Ferris, 1995; Ferris et al., 1997; Goldstein, 2004, Hyland, K., 2000). Also, written content feedback takes its toll. This was particularly evident with Mustafa, one of Kitty's more challenging students who put a lot of effort into face-saving excuses of the kind that meant he never examined his own faulty practices, when the comments became more directive than conversational. Other students expressed irritation at always being asked to give more details and examples. They felt the reader, in this case the instructor, should have been able to get the point. So it seemed that the amount of effort made by the instructors to address weaknesses in the essays and draw information out of the students was not always welcome.

8.5.1 The Complexity of Activating Content Revision

It is possible that despite giving feedback, instructors were not providing the impetus to activate comprehensive revision of the kind hoped for. At times all three instructors fell back on generic comments. It was rare to see the instructors offer examples, although Jane did do this several times, for example on the preliminary draft of Leila's first essay (Appendix Q). Students' responses to questionnaire one indicated that they knew the first draft of their essays was not well written, yet few students showed evidence of searching out places to revise unless prompted. For many students, once that draft existed, it was not especially malleable and rapidly set firm in terms of content. Information gathered from DWS faculty indicated that this was the experience of most (Appendix W). Finding the mechanism to activate revision, particularly independent revision, is challenging.

Rather than blaming the students for doing little, instructors could consider looking at the usability of their feedback. Research suggests that instructors' complaints about the low level of content revision are related to the complexity of a task that requires developing a strategy to gather more ideas and work them into existing writing, a task that is beyond some learners (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999). This view of the difficulty of revising content was confirmed by Jane's student Leila who said, "I didn't have many ideas, more than what I already had." And it was demonstrated by two of Kitty's students: Mustafa whose revision strategy, which required considerable effort, was generally restricted to shuffling existing material around rather than adding to what he had, and Maitha who deleted sections to avoid having to add details. Alternative ways to activate work on content are needed as generic comments are not necessarily productive. Hyland and Hyland (2006b, p. 223)

suggest that "we need to tailor our comments to specific students and their needs and personalities as well as the teaching context."

8.5.2 Grades, Criticism and Praise and Content Revision

Low grades on first drafts, a form of criticism, may have been one of the factors that prompted students' revisions. Lydia's students received low grades for essay one relative to the other two classes in the study, and there was evidence of revision in the students' essays despite the rather general comments. Kitty had found that some students reacted to grades on drafts by judging whether or not it was a pass, ultimately opting to do no revision if assured of a pass. So, if used at all, it is a technique that needs to be handled judiciously. Comments from the DWS faculty in general revealed that applying grades to first drafts was one option being considered in the hope of encouraging better first drafts and activating revision processes.

Another grade option exercised by Lydia was the withholding of grades. Certainly, Lydia's focus group students were relieved to get a graded draft from the instructor and one student commented, "I know where I stand and I can project where I want to go." Having a standard to measure himself by, he seemed ready to assume responsibility for moving on from there. However, the weaker students seemed distressed about the lack of grades as the semester progressed and appeared to have no ploy for making use of this silence even when it was broken at last. They exhibited considerable distress over the lack of feedback, which indicates that writer competence is a factor of importance when trying different approaches.

Another factor potentially influencing revision was the use of praise, although contentious, it is recommended by some researchers (Straub, 2000). Praise has been shown to be linked to lengthier writing and students appearing to enjoy the activity (Taylor & Hoedt, 1996). Although they were also stock phrases, such as 'well-organized', six of the seven drafts examined from Lydia's class had a marginal comment offering praise at some point, which may have encouraged her students to revise. In contrast, Kitty offered five positive comments on thirteen drafts, some of which were paired with criticism. Kitty also used ticks, an efficient way to honor the successful sections of an essay, and Jane offered praise four times on thirteen drafts (Appendix Q).

Pairing praise and criticism to alleviate the sting of a critical comment is common practice in feedback, but it can blur the instructor's intention, too, or even do harm if not attached to something tangible (Ferris et al., 1997; Hyland, K. 2000;

Hyland & Hyland, 2001). However, listening to the students in the interviews, it was clear that most of them felt they had produced a good piece of writing by the final draft, so it should be possible to find a place deserving of praise. Jane's comment '*nice image*' picked out a small but successful part in an otherwise rather flawed essay. All three instructors had stated that they were interested in the students' ideas, so finding ways to show that the ideas were valued should be possible and is likely to be appreciated (Cumming, 2002).

8.5.3 Oral Feedback and Content Revision

All three instructors reported repeatedly urging students to come to their offices to discuss the feedback and get help with revisions, yet few students did this. Some students claimed that they did not have the time; others just did not do this even though they knew it would help. Lydia valued oral feedback but had been astounded by students who came to her office then made no effort to take notes of the discussion. However, this is a complex issue as many Gulf Arab students are entirely comfortable with an oral exchange of ideas and may even consider it culturally inappropriate to divert attention away from the instructor in the process of taking down notes.

Kitty was aware of the importance of the oral transmission of ideas in the region and realized that for some students oral feedback was more likely to work. For that reason, rather than giving written feedback, on occasions she simply requested a student to come to her office to discuss the problems with an essay or even just have the feedback read to them. This did not appear to be simply because students could not read the handwriting, but was related to a desire for oral interaction. Insights like this signify the need to know the students well.

Dima, Kitty's student, was one of the students who, initially, experienced shock at the way her work was responded to and graded. However she responded to oral feedback from the instructor and showed through her comments in interviews that she had come to see how her essay was confusing for the reader, even if it was clear to her. She revised extensively and mostly successfully. But, it is possible that without that discussion, she may have maintained her belief that the instructor was wrong or too harsh.

Rather unexpectedly, on at least three occasions, I found myself giving interview students quite detailed instruction on matters such as topic sentences or pointing out what the feedback, such as 'gaps in logic', actually meant. Maitha, an interview student, commented on this:

> Well, if she would sit with me like you and maybe show me one example like how you did, maybe I would see it better because I really didn't notice this until now when we spoke about it.

When reminded that the instructor had office hours for just this purpose she admitted that she just never thought of taking up this offer.

Considering the value placed on oral communication in this group-oriented culture, it is difficult to explain why so few students took advantage of office hours. As time may be a factor, occasionally replacing classroom instruction with opportunities for individual or small group conferencing on essays may work. Considering Maitha's comment, it may be advisable to have mandatory conferences early in the semester to ensure all students partake at least once and can assess how beneficial these are for them.

8.5.4 Task Demand and Content Revision

Quite different writing tasks were set by the instructors and students seemed to find some easier that others. Some instructors specified certain rhetorical modes, such as comparison and contrast, others favored narrative, which seemed to be easier for the students to write on if they were drawing on personal experiences. The class designed to appeal to the SA&D students began with a writing assignment that required the students to analyze a cartoon. In the interviews with the students, it was apparent that they had struggled to understand the complex and sometimes subtle messages of the cartoons, and the instructor had had to prompt them in her feedback (Appendix Q). The students seemed to struggle with the complexity of the task: understanding the cartoon, describing it and its message, and doing all this in clear English. Task demand overextending the students may be a factor when students do not appear to make use of feedback.

8.6 The Impact of Rubrics on Content and Form Revision

The classes in the study were freshman writing classes and some students had not written essays before this, or they had written essays but not had experience with the writing process approach prior to this class. Considering this lack of experience, briefing them on the way the essays would be evaluated may have been beneficial. Both Kitty and Lydia used rubrics that had space for summaries of strengths and weaknesses. However, Lydia gave her rubric out with the first graded draft and it was not explained prior to this. Consequently, although they felt the essay instructions had been clearly explained, 75% of Lydia's students did not feel that the grading system

had been explained to them before they wrote; surprisingly, this represented a higher percentage than in Jane's class where there was no rubric at all, which suggests that students may have difficulty understanding rubrics (Appendix R).

Lydia's students may have benefited from seeing the rubric ahead of time, but it just as easily could have been too detailed to have helped them much, initially. Although the general comments on thesis statements in the points for revision section of the rubric appeared to have activated revision strategies in some students, at least one of Lydia's inexperienced students, Rana, had not managed to see how the rubric reinforced the marginal comments on the essay. This became clear when she failed to see the link between the rubric information on sentence skills, a tick in the 'needs work' column, and the marginal comment at the beginning of the essay '*work on sentence structure*'. The strategy Rana opted for, deleting sentences near the comment and looking no further for errors, was unlikely to be the response anticipated by the instructor. Discussion in the interview revealed that Rana thought she had done what was expected of her, and that she had not made the connection between the marginal comment and the rubric, nor picked up on the message that she needed to trawl the essay for grammar errors. In this instance the feedback led to avoidance behavior as a result of an inaccurate assumption on the part of the student in relation to her revision responsibilities.

According to the interview students, and information from the questionnaires, Kitty explained her rubric fully in class as part of preparation for the essay and the feedback, and 69% of the students felt that they had understood how they would be graded (Appendix R). The time taken to explain the rubric and connect it to instruction is a chance to 'feed forward' showing students what is expected of them before they write (Higgins et al., 2001). Despite this, Maitha had still not fully understood how she would be graded, which suggests that full information may confuse rather than benefit weaker students and could have them focusing on grading rather than writing. Maitha had a definite preference for marginal comments, which helped her to focus directly on the weaknesses. Ironically, she felt the summary comments on the rubric "spoke only about everything" and were no help.

8.7 Appropriation and Resistance to Feedback

It seems unlikely that there will be a simple solution to students' needs until someone shifts the Babel Fish from fantasy to reality, but feedback may lead to appropriating a student's paper and even cause a student to change the meaning of a

sentence. Nevertheless, L2 students are not necessarily concerned about appropriation, and want to receive a lot of feedback from the instructor. There were individual differences in students' responses to the positioning of feedback, but in both the focus groups and the discussions with the interview students the majority, like Maitha, showed a preference for marginal comments but given the option, they wanted it all. These students may well be simply trying to cover all the bases as they did not know what would help. This is not surprising considering that researchers in the field are also unable to agree on the best method to offer assistance. As mentioned earlier, they may also be trying to move classroom interactions more towards the knowledge transmission model of teaching and learning familiar to them.

Despite this hunger for instructor feedback, there was evidence of students resisting the feedback and continuing to write what they wanted despite advice to the contrary. In the case of Maitha, this was because there were things she wanted to say, and knowing no other way to say them, she simply made no changes despite the feedback. Hyland discusses the potential for students to challenge the "pressure to conform" even when that means ignoring advice on an academic paper (Hyland, 2002, p. 68). Unfortunately, when there is limited opportunity to discuss papers, acts of resistance of this kind may lead instructors to assume the feedback has not been read. It can also be very frustrating for those instructors who assume a lot of responsibility for the students' progress and give a lot of feedback. Kitty had been aware of the tendency to resist her feedback and made comments that showed that this was a frustrating response for her to deal with.

Discussion with Dima, a student in Kitty's class, showed that helping students to see that the awkward constructions they persevere with are not working can be a difficult task. In fact, the revision required may have been beyond Dima at the point she was at in constructing a grammar that worked for her. Even with considerable support, it took time and repetition to help her to understand. Under these circumstances the students' decision not to revise may have been wise, especially if she put the effort into working on parts of the essay where she could make productive changes.

A similar example of resistance was seen with Suad, Jane's student, who was reluctant to accept an alternative construction Jane had provided. Two interesting points come out of this; firstly, if instructors are wrong in the guesses they make about what the student intends to say, they may exacerbate the situation. Secondly, it seems that if the student is not ready, there is little to be gained from repeated explanations, at

least in the short term. What happens later as a result of further processing and repeated encounters is another matter.

8.8 Varying the Feedback According to Perceived Need

The examples above suggest that judging when to leave some errors unacknowledged is important, but the experience of Jane's students made it clear that having decided to ignore an item, it only irritated them to identify it in the final draft. Nevertheless, responses from students made it clear that they wanted different feedback in different circumstances. Sometimes they wanted the change made for them, and sometimes they wanted a hint and a chance to work it out; they wanted the instructor to vary the feedback depending on the type of error and whether or not they had had experience with it before. This intuitive request sounds sensible but would require considerable skill and knowledge of individuals to carry out well.

All three participating instructors mentioned that they varied the feedback they gave although it was clear there was some anxiety felt about this. Lydia justified her actions on the basis that too much written feedback was off-putting to some students and she preferred to request that certain students come to her office for help. Kitty had a similar approach. Interestingly, she also gave extensive feedback to the students who repeatedly lobbied for higher grades in an effort to try to get them to accept that they had a way to go yet as writers. It sounded like using feedback to justify the grade, but as she said, she is only human. Jane seemed to be anxious about giving different amounts of feedback to different students and mentioned that it would sound 'bad'. It was clear she was driven by the obligation she felt to the students, and she felt concerned that she would not fulfill this if she reduced the feedback. Ultimately, expediency won over ethics as the student numbers meant that she could not continue to respond as fully as she wanted to unless she allowed the job to take over her life.

One potential problem with varying feedback was mentioned in the information from a faculty member who found that if she had made few comments on the paper, students assumed it to be an A paper (Appendix W). This potential misconception was also brought up by Lydia's focus group students, and a similar reaction was demonstrated by one of Kitty's students, Mustafa. He had usually received a lot of indirect grammar feedback, but with one particularly off-track essay, Kitty stopped responding on the first page and requested the student come to her office to discuss the problems. While Mustafa accepted that he had to change his topic because the instructor told him to, he had a clear understanding of the power dynamic operating in

the university, he steadfastly maintained the impression that "there is no, like, structural mistakes" due to the lack of feedback. As giving little feedback may initially mislead and disappoint students if they have not been prepared for the individual instructor's approach, instructors need to explain their feedback strategies.

Previous studies, like the current study, have found that instructors respond differently to different students and even reduce the feedback offered as the semester progresses (Ferris et al., 1997; Hyland, 1998). Clearly, this variation takes different forms and serves different purposes, not all of them learning related. While it may be comforting to think that feedback is reduced as confidence is gained, it could equally be because seeing little benefit for the effort expended, instructors lose confidence in what they are doing. Burnout, too, is a factor to take into consideration when instructors have large classes.

8.9 Reactions to Requests for More Feedback

All three participating instructors were giving feedback in different ways and amounts. One instructor was giving extensive direct feedback as well as content feedback and finding the workload egregious. Another was offering prompts on where to expand ideas and giving a lot of indirect feedback but getting frustrated with how little was being used, and the third was giving some content feedback but more sentence skill feedback than she thought she gave. However, they were united on one thing; they were unwilling to give more feedback. Surprisingly, despite complaints about the workload, that was not the primary reason given. More significant to the teachers was the belief that the students had to take responsibility for improving their writing. The other prevalent view was that the feedback that was given was not used; therefore, they had no intention of giving more.

8.10 Workload and the Quality of Feedback

Workload is an issue although teachers are often subtly discouraged from referring to it as their role at GSU is a service role. Although teaching writing is a complex task and one that should be highly valued, this does not seem to be the case. Faculty in DWS are required to teach more sections per semester than other departments at least partly due to lack of instructors. A letter to the administration objecting to the inequity of the situation received a response that was not encouraging, and it transpired that the university had put a freeze on hiring but not on enrolment.

Research suggests that 50 students per instructor is the upper limit if the instructor is to provide quality instruction (Silva, 2002). At least one of the

participating instructors had had experience in a university where she was assigned a maximum of 45 students and found this considerably more manageable than the current load of 80 or more. The impact of the student numbers on instructor feedback was plain. Kitty had reduced the number of drafts she was reading per essay from three to two. Jane started off responding to three drafts and appeared to reduce this to two as the semester progressed, although she still gathered in three drafts. Lydia had reduced the number of essays per semester and withheld feedback until near the end of one semester. She had indicated in the initial interview that she intended to conduct a conversation in the margins. Considering that the GSU instructors had almost double the number of students Straub considered ideal for this type of feedback, it is understandable that lofty ideals crumbled under the workload (2000). Although it is by no means certain that the evidence that Lydia came in short of her aims was an indication of burnout, it is a viable explanation. This seems even more likely considering that during the semester in which the focus group took place Lydia had taken on significant, extra responsibilities of an administrative nature.

Finally, comments from DWS instructors in general indicated that providing feedback was labor intensive and time-consuming and sometimes appeared to have no benefit at all (Appendix W). Some instructors in the department had found it expedient not to read drafts of the last essay for the semester forcing the students to rely on the writing center and peer review. Pragmatically, alternative approaches to intensively inscribing feedback on essays, often thought necessary by conscientious teachers, were being tried by some instructors. These were often survival tactics rather than teaching strategies.

8.11 Demonstrating Revision Strategies in Class

Although a lot of students wanted more feedback, some of the focus group students acknowledged that it was not a realistic request. What the students wanted was help, and the weaker the student, the more help they wanted. Students pointed out that unassisted they could not find the errors or weaknesses as they had done their best and could do no better unassisted. Kitty reported observing this problem, too, and suspected that the students wanted a different type of support, but she could not see a way past written feedback. Perhaps the most useful comment from the students was from Lydia's focus group students who wanted examples of typical errors and strategies for revision demonstrated for them so that they had an idea of how to go about independent revision. This astute request fits with research that indicates that feedback be selective

and varied according to the instructor's knowledge of the student's needs (Hyland & Hyland, 2006b) and that strategies for revision be offered (Goldstein, 2005; Guenette, 2007, Stern & Solomon, 2006).

Despite students' requests for more specific feedback, they did not appear to want a magic bullet, in contrast to what instructors' believed. However, as they were not ready to assume the responsibility to communicate that instructors expected of them, they wanted to know that the instructor cared about them enough to offer help. Comments from the writing center tutors confirmed this, for they claimed to have seen plenty of evidence that once shown a revision strategy, admittedly in a one-to-one tuition situation, the students were willing to work on applying it further.

In contrast to strategy training, giving specific written feedback means providing long and complex written comments that may be difficult to process and act on therefore of no more use than a brief request for 'examples'. Also, evidence of students misunderstanding feedback suggested that preparation for typical feedback patterns and strategy training of some kind could be a worthwhile approach (Goldstein, 2005). Modeling revision strategies in class with real essays is an alternative method of providing detailed feedback to the whole class that demonstrates how to go about difficult tasks such as gathering additional ideas related to the essay and inserting them to create a logical flow of ideas. This concept brings the feedback, and support dealing with it, back into the classroom where it benefits more than just one student. Leila, one of Jane's students, had a section of her essay dealt with in class in an approach similar to this and she reported favorably on the experience. If the strategy being demonstrated has relevance to the majority of the students in the class, and they are aware of this, it could have far-reaching benefits.

In addition, a similar approach could be applied to form feedback. Many L2 students know a lot about grammar, can handle grammar quizzes easily, but still make the errors when writing. As error correction appears to be most effective when it concentrates on patterns of errors, making students aware of their most common or most damaging error patterns and demonstrating strategies for overcoming these through teaching specialized mini-lessons on grammar and editing is a tactic for making grammar feedback usable (Ferris, 2002, 2004). This may be especially productive if the mini-lessons are linked to repair strategies on a student's actual essay.

8.11.1 Linking Classroom Instruction and Feedback

There was evidence from the study that some students' responses to the feedback seemed out of all proportion to the limited prompts offered and may have been connected to classroom instruction. This process may have been at work in terms of examples and explanations in Jane's and Kitty's feedback as the brief comments, sometimes only one word and a question mark, did lead to the addition of sentences. Also, something inspired Mahar to revise the first draft extensively. Looking at the actual written feedback Lydia's students received and the revisions made, it appeared that some dynamic at work in the classroom may have been at least as influential as what was supplied in writing. Lydia was a very voluble instructor and drew heavily on readings promoting the idea of reading like a writer to encourage students to see how other writers did what they did and try similar techniques themselves. Lydia mentioned that she attempted to explicitly link classroom instruction on writing and feedback. Reportedly, her teaching concentrated on content and organization, as well as audience and purpose, so perhaps the sparse, written feedback acted as a trigger to activate students' revision processes along lines prepared for in class. This technique could reduce the amount of written feedback necessary (Higgins et al., 2001; Goldstein, 2005). However, without classroom observations looking for this, it cannot be confirmed.

Confusingly, Lydia's grammar and mechanics feedback does not fit the theory that she linked feedback to teaching as little was said about grammar in class. As Lydia mentioned, it may have just been a habit, an inability to resist when certain errors came to her attention. Ferris, (2006) found that some instructors were unable to resist giving direct feedback even when asked not to.

8.12 The Impact of Peer Review on Students' Revisions

The majority of students in all three case studies felt that they had performed the peer review task correctly. However, when they finally had to decide whether or it was applicable to their revision process, their confidence diminished considerably. The exception was Jane's class where the majority remained confident that they had received help with their content (Appendix U). In Lydia's class timing the feedback so that it coincided with the instructor receiving a copy of the essay may have reduced students' enthusiasm as it was likely the they assumed that the instructor's feedback would supersede any other feedback (Kischner, 1995). This idea was supported by

comments from the interview students expressly stating that they either ignored the peer feedback or made little use of it as the instructor's feedback was preferable.

Also, perhaps this lack of confidence in peer review could be linked to the peer review sheet. According to F. Hyland (2000), the use of peer review sheets is an area where caution is called for as there is some evidence they reduce student autonomy and make the process dull, especially for more competent students. Some students simply write 'yes' in the appropriate place and offer no clearly useable feedback, and this was particularly evident from Lydia's students (Appendix V). The nature of the questions on the peer review sheet Lydia used had more potential to provoke yes/no answers than the other two sheets. In contrast, Jane's peer review sheet seemed to work by placing emphasis on having the students read the essay closely and then respond. Inevitably, most of the comments offered from all students were rather general, perhaps echoing what they had seen instructors using. The students appeared to be concerned about the things they thought the instructor valued, for example thesis statements in Lydia's class, ideas in Jane's class and grammar in Kitty's.

The lack of enthusiasm for peer review and the lack of confidence in their peers suggest that students need training to maximize the use of peer review and boost students' confidence in the activity (Ferris & Hedgecock, 2005; Leki, 1990b; McGroarty & Zhu, 1997; Min, 2006). Just as strategies for revising appear to be a way forward in terms of dealing with instructor feedback, preparation through modeling peer feedback techniques may make the task more meaningful all around.

8.13 The Impact of the Reading/Writing Requirements across the Curriculum

The instructors taking part in the study, and some other DWS instructors, believed that the limited amount of effort students expended on their essays and the extent to which they were willing to revise was due to the fact that they saw little demand for writing skills outside the writing department, a situation Silva had noted (2002). The students confirmed this perception indicating that they had been asked to do little writing, but Leki warns that students' reports on this matter are not necessarily accurate, so instructor confirmation of the situation is relevant (2006). Although some students could see that being able to express themselves well in written English could be beneficial in the future, particularly in the workplace, this distant need could not compete with the immediacy of the demands to perform for courses being taken as part of their majors. Often, when faced with a choice between working on a writing assignment, or studying for another course, writing lost out. For some, time

management was an issue, but for others, it seemed that they underestimated the writing task and the extent to which revision was needed to produce a higher quality product.

During the course of the study, there appeared to be a coming of awareness that the university as a whole had to take a different approach to writing. Other faculty, beyond DWS, began to discuss the issue of the lack of writing required outside of the writing department and several presentations were made on this matter in the Faculty Development Center (FDC) over the duration of the study. At the first college wide meeting at the beginning of the academic year 2007-2008, the dean of the college announced the intention to review the types of examinations offered. Multi-choice questions were prevalent in exams, at least partly because some faculty complained that the students could not write and used this as the justification for not having them write papers or exams.

There was little recognition evident of the enormity of the task faced by L2 students developing competence as writers, which was surprising considering many of the instructors had first languages other than English and had completed their studies in English medium universities. Nor was there any evidence of recognition of the obligation to address language needs no matter what the subject area taught (Stern & Solomon, 2006). Faculty who did include the writing of papers or essay exams in their courses reported that there was a decline in students willing to take their courses, most opting to wait a semester and take the course when another member of the department was offering the course, one who did not include the writing requirement. Without a university wide policy promoting written expression, those instructors in different fields trying to support the efforts of DWS faculty stood a high chance of being undermined by wily students finding loopholes.

8.14 Addressing the Research Questions

The study produced a wealth of information from different perspectives on many aspects of the feedback/revision cycle, not all of which directly applied to the research questions. However, interesting points related to the research questions did emerge through gathering various points of view and examining how these meshed with participants' actions.

8.14.1 Research Question One

What difficulties do students have interpreting written feedback received from their instructor and peers?

On the whole, students wanted the written feedback and read it, but that did not mean it was readily usable. The problems that students encountered interpreting the feedback were various: at the most basic level actually reading handwriting, working out what codes meant, and understanding what rubrics indicated. Rubrics appeared to be used to estimate grades, or where grades had been lost, but did not necessarily provide the impetus to revise. Working out what summary comments were telling them about their writing was difficult for some students, particularly when these were vague or formulaic. Some students understood the feedback but had no schema for improving their writing. Initially, accepting criticism and lower grades than previously gained made it hard for students to see the feedback as useful, especially if they considered they had worked hard.

Although instructors' feedback was generally subjected to scrutiny in an effort to understand it, peer review was more problematic as students had less confidence in the views of their peers and often made no effort to understand or use it. Many students did not value feedback from their classmates that criticized their writing. Also, as peer review sheets tended to have flaws that encouraged vague responses, students were once again limited in what they could get from the advice.

8.14.2 Research Question Two

What do the students understand to be their responsibilities in terms of acting on the written feedback?

Realizing that it was up to them to act on the advice offered in the feedback or seek help was an issue for students unused to the process approach. All the students interviewed knew that it was up to them to get the assistance they needed to help them understand the feedback, and they all knew there were several sources of assistance available. Not all of them acted on this knowledge. Few students sought out the instructor to ask what the feedback meant. Some chose to access help from the writing center tutors, students like themselves. However, there were differences in the help anticipated ranging from what the writing center tutors called wanting a quick fix to genuinely wanting to be helped to understand and overcome weaknesses. Some attempted to get the assistance they needed from friends or dorm mates. Some made attempts to deal with the feedback themselves with results ranging from successful revision to exercising avoidance strategies.

They knew they were expected to revise, and that this revision meant adding material as well as making changes to existing paragraphs. However, how to go about

this revision was the problem. The students encountered difficulties knowing how to make revisions that went beyond incorporating direct feedback or correcting grammar where errors were indicated. Some students did not appear to realize that the instructor had not found every sentence skill error, and that they were either to apply feedback found on one paragraph to the whole essay to or revise independently. Adding details where directed to was beyond some students who struggled to generate more ideas and drafts were seldom subjected to extensive content revision of the kind that led to a higher quality essay. However, some students did manage this and in response to the slimmest of prompts.

8.14.3 Research Question Three

What are the instructors' views of the use students make of the feedback offered?

Although instructors expected students to come to their offices for individual tuition when they did not understand the feedback offered, this seldom happened, but the writing center was used. In general, the three participating instructors were disappointed at the limited extent to which the students made use of the feedback and revised essays, yet they seldom applied critical analysis to their typical feedback patterns or experimented with alternative approaches. The more common response was to see the students as being in the wrong, and not the feedback. Generally, instructors felt that students did not take the feedback or writing classes seriously and allocated too little time to revising. They also felt that many students wanted an easy route to revision and expected an excessive amount of help. At times, the level of despondency over student use of feedback led instructors to express the belief that some students did not even read the feedback, and one instructor took to giving less and less feedback. Some instructors felt that the majority of students revised grammar and little else. These views were also typical of the instructors in the department who offered their views, particularly those whose training and experience had been largely focused on L1 writers.

8.14.4 Research Question Four

Are there identifiable aspects of the process of giving and receiving written feedback that help to make it an understandable and productive experience for students?

There were individual differences in what students wanted that make it difficult to generalize. In fact, individual differences emerged as of prime importance when responding to students, but some general trends were apparent. To assist with content, clear hand writing was a good start. Feedback that made their weaknesses

comprehensible and offered advice that assisted them to make improvements was wanted. Although students did not ask for praise, it was apparent that they wanted to know that their efforts and ideas were valued. Marginal comments were appreciated for their immediacy and being easily associated with the weakness. Clear summary comments that explained exactly where and what the weakness was, were also welcomed by some students. It was clear that some students benefited greatly from discussions with the instructor and oral feedback that helped them see the gaps in logic in their writing, particularly when dealing with complex ideas. Some students welcomed a tentative grade as it provided the impetus to work that they needed. Brief comments that related to instruction, such as *add a thesis statement*, worked for most students. In addition, some students appeared to have intuitively, or through experience, identified the potential benefits of having typical errors or weaknesses identified and revision strategies modeled. The value of reading other students' writing as part of peer review was recognized by some students.

In terms of sentence skill feedback there were contradictions. They wanted to be given direct feedback that made the correction for them and they wanted to be shown where the error was and left to make the correction themselves. The real point here was that they wanted the instructor to react differently depending on the type of error, whether or not it was new to them and whether or not it was possible they could manage it once it had been indicated. They wanted the instructor to be skillful enough and to know them well enough to be able to judge these fine distinctions and offer feedback tailored to meet their specific and changing needs. Overall, most students wanted errors to be indicated as they doubted they could locate them unaided. There was evidence that with 'untreatable' errors, direct feedback can make the situation worse if the point has been misunderstood.

8.14.5 Research Question Five

What factors can be identified that limit the amount of time and effort students put into reading, understanding and acting on the written feedback from teachers and peers?

In terms of the time and effort students were willing to expend, several influences emerged in this particular context. Firstly, time management skills were not well-honed. University wide attitudes to and demands for writing appeared to be relevant to the time students allocated to revising writing. If put in a difficult position, most students made the decision to work on a project or prepare for a test for another course rather than work for English. Not all, but many students were reluctant to go to the

instructor's office for help due to time conflicts but also for other indefinable reasons – apathy/inertia/timidity. The second problematic issue, closely related to the first, was the perception that there was little immediate need for writing in English as students were seldom asked to do this for other classes or for exams outside the writing course, particularly as freshmen. Finally, none of the students in the study had used the writing process approach before, therefore, had little concept of what extensive revision required.

Looking at the feedback itself, students were frustrated by vague comments that offered them no tangible ideas on how to proceed. Being urged to *revise* was not always enough. Being asked to add information was frustrating if they had exhausted their store of ideas and led students to question the instructor's obsession with having everything spelled out. Due to the difficulty of generating more ideas to add support to their essays, students wanted assistance in the form of examples and hints. Some feedback provoked avoidance responses in the form of deleting material rather than adding details. Resistance was also an issue for a few students who wanted to say what they had in mind even if advised that it added nothing to the writing.

Resistance was also an issue with sentence skill feedback if the student did not understand or accept it. This was sometimes related to earlier learning experiences that had led them to believe they were right. Also, students found it difficult to make sentence skill revisions that did not mesh with their current interlanguage competence and were reluctant to give up on some material even when feedback indicated that there were problems. Some sentence skill feedback went unattended to because of indecipherable codes and prompts such as *awkward.* How or why something was awkward was unclear to many students and comments of this kind irritated rather than motivated. As with content feedback, some grammar feedback provoked avoidance responses, yet most students wanted the errors indicated.

Inconsistencies in the instructors' feedback patterns and lack of understanding of instructors' strategies in terms of feedback confused some students. For example, deciding whether to concentrate their efforts on form, or content and organization was a difficult choice when instructors' emphasized content and organization in classroom instruction, but gave the most feedback on form. Also, there were problems with the way students approached grammar revision as many either assumed that the instructor had indicated all the errors, therefore did not search their writing for more, or they did not look because they believed they would not be able to find errors unaided. Students

also seemed to lack knowledge of basic revision techniques such as leaving a gap of a few days then reread with fresh eyes. Last minute revision and/or print and present were common options.

Peer feedback was repeatedly ignored because the students did not have confidence in their peers and preferred to wait for the instructor's feedback. Also, some students were not confident that they could help others.

8.16 Summary

The idea that more studies on various aspects of the feedback/revision are needed to build-up a picture of how students use feedback is well recognized (Hyland, F., 2003). Finding out what was going on in the feedback/revision cycle seemed like a modest aim at the beginning of the study, but it blossomed into an extraordinarily complex task. The participants on both sides of the feedback/revision cycle did not always do what they said they did, what they thought they did and what they suspected they ought to have done. Explaining what the data revealed and the contradictions that emerged required looking for patterns and interpreting behaviors and comments as well as some speculation.

Some students will grasp every opportunity to get that slice more assistance from the instructor and some never seek clarification. Students behave according to their own characteristics and limits; however, I agree with Reid (2002) that students do not come to class not to learn. Despite a widely held perception that students do not read or use feedback, the findings of this study suggest that L2 students understand the value of feedback and want clear, specific feedback that assists them to improve their writing. This does not mean that they want it all done for them. But they want help locating errors, and weaknesses in content and organization, as well as hints or suggestions on how to overcome these. If they appear to make little use of the feedback, this could be because it is not particularly usable. However, it is also possible that the instructor underestimates how much revision has been done. Work load may be a factor here in reducing the amount of time and attention instructors' can pay to each paper. Certainly, instructors need to explain the purpose of the feedback and make sure the students' responsibilities in terms of revision are understood. Other approaches, such as demonstrating revision strategies in class using students' essays, may prove beneficial. Instructor feedback is valued above peer feedback. For peer feedback to be effective, well-designed peer review sheets that ask the reviewers to perform tasks that are within their capabilities are needed as well as modeling review techniques. There are few

certainties as far as the feedback/revision cycle is concerned, but if instructors have class numbers that make it possible to take note of individual student's needs, there is some hope of making the procedure meaningful for the students.

This chapter discussed the results of the study and related them to the research questions. The next chapter sets out the conclusions that can be drawn from these results, the limitations of the study and future areas of investigation.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The ethnographic approach taken in this study meant that as well as the data gathered through the three case studies, data was able to be harvested from other members of the department and other faculty in the university to reveal a more complete picture of student writing and responding to writing. This allowed for a rich description in this particular context revealing dimensions in terms of participants' and other stakeholders' perceptions and ideas that would not have been accessed through an experimental approach. As the research drew primarily on the views of instructors and students, competing interests resulted in contradictions, but understanding how these contradictions came about led to a clearer picture of the feedback/revision process as it was experienced.

9.1 Revelations and Contradictions

Although students were overwhelmingly in favor of receiving instructor feedback and felt they benefited from it, they did not expect to get much usable help from their peers. The lack of confidence in peer feedback was not surprising as instructors largely shared this view. Under these circumstances, it is unlikely that they can instill confidence in the students.

One of the unexpected outcomes of the study was the issue of the timing of giving a grade on the students' writing. It emerged that some instructors gave grades at different stages of the writing process in the hope of having these grades encourage the students or spur them to make more effort; some gave grades on drafts yet thought they did not; others were considering using grades in this way in the future (Appendix W). Of interest was Kitty's experience with offering grades on drafts, which revealed that this can impact the use of the writing process negatively as it had led some students to discontinue revision once they calculated they had a pass grade. Evidently, changes to the writing process approach need to be made judiciously as the outcomes may not be what were intended.

All three instructors admitted that the workload in writing classes was excessive, yet this was not the reason they were unwilling to give more feedback. On the contrary, the resistance to requests for more feedback was based on the belief that little of it was attended to, or the concept that students had to work things out for themselves. Recent research that supports the concept that, at least for moderately competent students, less directive feedback assists students to revise successfully

appears to collude with the instructors' idea of having students work errors out, but there is still a need to show them where the error exists (Ferris, 2006). More confusingly, the claim that the students needed to work things out for themselves was contradicted by the actual practice of one instructor, which she confirmed in interviews, of giving a lot of direct feedback because the students would not be able to manage without it. In fact, all three instructors resorted to direct feedback at times even if it was not a stated intention, a practice confirmed in research (Ferris, 2006).

Instructors' despondent comments in relation to the extent that students used their feedback tended to blame students for their failures, but examining the feedback given suggested that sometimes instructors needed to reconsider their feedback patterns and assess the usability of some comments. Although a small minority of students admitted to not reading the feedback (Appendix R), when students did little in response to the feedback there were often reasons other than failure to read the feedback. Revising writing is a complex task that requires understanding what the weakness is as well as how to overcome that weakness, but vague, generic feedback falls down on helping students in both areas. Often students were responding to what was usable and by-passing what was either too vague or beyond them in some way.

The other side of the issue of the extent to which feedback is used is that it appears that instructors underestimate what the students do. The surprisingly deeply held belief of many instructors that students either did not read the feedback or read it but used little of it, failed to recognize the revisions made. There are many possible reasons for this. For example, it could be partly due to the number of errors in the essays blinding the instructors to what was attended to. However, it could also be because, having many essays to read, instructors skim revised drafts hastily and miss a lot of what the students have done. Or, it could be that the quality of the revisions frustrates instructors and it is this frustration that was being given vent to in the interviews and focus group. Certainly, Kitty's student Mustafa was an example of a student who did a lot of revising for little improvement in the essay.

Despite instructors' perceptions about the extent to which students revise, in fact, even when there was little feedback, students made revisions. In the essays examined, revisions resulted in changes to content through the addition of sentences or parts of sentences and, occasionally, the shifting of paragraphs to improve the logical flow of ideas. Thesis statements appeared in response to prompts, and sentence skill

revisions included incorporating direct feedback and working on grammar items, specifically those that attention had been drawn to.

Another contradiction that emerged was that at times instructors had a tendency to misperceive what they did as there was a difference between what they had intended to do and what actually happened. For example, codes were used inconsistently, and, as mentioned above, a lot of the form feedback was direct. Difficulty resisting the urge to take this approach meant intentions to restrict grammar feedback to line editing a single paragraph were forgotten. In addition, a lot of feedback was on sentence skill errors although all the instructors believed they were concentrating on content and even thought they could read beyond these errors to access the students' ideas. Noting similar contradictions in what instructors intend to do and actually do, Ferris recommends "double-checking" to researchers looking at feedback (2006, p. 93).

From the students' perspective, feedback patterns led to confusion over where the instructor intended students to concentrate their efforts during revision. It was far from clear through the feedback seen that the instructors' considered content revision more important than form. Misunderstanding the instructor's focus may have misdirected the students, as there was evidence both from instructors' comments and the actual essays examined that, particularly the weaker students, made more form-focused revisions than content revisions. Orally directing the students to concentrate on improving their ideas and organization, but offering more written feedback on form than content is potentially perplexing; some students may well opt to restrict their revision to areas clearly demarcated in red and fail to respond to comments on content.

Although it was abundantly clear that students wanted feedback, some students ignored or resisted feedback. Ignoring the feedback was often due to not understanding the feedback, not knowing how to act on it or poor time management. Resistance was more problematic and related to not accepting the instructor's advice. My experiences in interviews, where I was occasionally asked to explain why certain form and content feedback had been given, revealed that overcoming resistance was a lengthy process as students needed a lot of help to understand why their sentences did not work; it would not have been possible to clarify these complex points and convince resistant students with written feedback. In an ideal teaching/learning situation, time would be available to get to know the students and their writing styles and to engage in appropriately lengthy discussions when needed. This ideal interaction requires having realistic student numbers.

The contradictions identified in the views and use of the feedback/revision cycle suggest that an instructor's role is a particularly delicate one. There are many opportunities for debilitating confusion to blossom in this complex task.

9.2 Reflecting on the Research Questions

The study sought to find out what difficulties occur when students attempt to understand written feedback from both peers and instructors, and how they respond to it as well as the instructors' views of the way students deal with written feedback. It also attempted to find what works and what may limit what students do when engaged with the feedback/revision cycle. More came out of the data than had been anticipated, revealing much about the complex nature of instructor/student interactions in writing classes, but also, several key points directly related to the research questions emerged.

Firstly, difficulties arose understanding and using some instructor feedback and students often made poor choices dealing with feedback. Students often did not understand how they were supposed to revise the content or organization of their essays as the feedback was too general to be of much help. Many also lacked the confidence, or did not understand the need to revise the grammar beyond the items identified by the instructor. Peer feedback was seldom used in any constructive way.

Being inexperienced at writing and revising multiple drafts students underestimated the extent to which they were expected to revise. Inevitably, instructors expressed a great deal of frustration over the issue of the extent to which students used the feedback and revised their essays. Instructors generally considered that the students were too dependent on their help, wanted everything done for them and actually needed to take responsibility for their own revision practices.

From the students' perspective, feedback from instructors was highly desirable, and there were some approaches to feedback that appeared to be particularly well received. On the whole students were able to simply copy/paste direct feedback into their essays. Depending on the students' level of language competence, some students were able to correct sentence skill errors if the error was identified for them and they did not rely on codes. The students did not necessarily want the revisions done for them, but they wanted the instructor to be capable of making decisions about when to indicate an error and when to make the change for them. They wanted the instructor to 'know' them.

Feedback on content and organization was more difficult to handle, but marginal comments were appreciated as they more effectively assisted students to see

where examples were needed than summary comments calling for more support. Students wanted specific feedback that related directly to their essay and to have revision strategies modeled. Peer feedback was seen to have some limited value such as the chance to read other students' writing.

Students were often hampered in their revision processes by time management problems, and making poor choices under pressure that left them doing last minute repairs. Moreover, students resisted feedback that did not mesh with their current interlanguage competence. They also struggled with vague, generic feedback that could have been applied to any essay, and lacked strategies for dealing with content and organization problems unaided. Inconsistencies in the instructors' feedback patterns and misunderstanding of instructors' strategies in terms of feedback confused some students.

This study has raised many questions about misunderstandings that exist between instructors and students over the feedback/revision cycle. Responding to L2 students writing is a complex task and one that requires sensitivity to the individuals' needs and expectations. Students appear to be more likely to make use of the feedback if the instructor's expectations are clear and the feedback is consistent, within the student's capabilities and relates specifically to the writing it is applied to.

9. 3 Pedagogical Implications

Having established that students want feedback that assists them to make revisions to their work, finding a practical way to do this is what is needed. The major questions writing instructors face are how to give feedback, how much feedback to give and what to concentrate on in order to maximize the benefit to students, although how to be consistent in giving feedback also emerged as an issue.

The question of whether or not to give feedback on grammar continues to be broached with little firm advice for instructors to act on. Truscott (2004) maintains a wary stance as far as the efficacy of grammar feedback is concerned, and Ferris (2006) finds that even indirect feedback leads to accurate changes but there is still no evidence that this knowledge is transferred consistently to later writing. However, Frodeson and Holten (2003) claim that errors need to be indicated to students so they can work on them and increase their understanding of the grammar of the language. The current study appears to confirm these opposing points of view. Certainly, the students agree with the latter view. Although, this looks to be a difficult position to resolve, in the

current climate of uncertainty, there is scope for instructors to cautiously try different techniques.

There are many points to consider when offering form feedback. For example, direct form feedback led to changes, but it also appeared to encourage the students to abandon any responsibility for editing their own papers. Instead, it encouraged a passive response and appeared to lead students to believe that their essays had been fully edited. Yet, opting for indirect form feedback combined with codes can be burdensome as when working with codes, students do not always bother to use the explanatory sheets provided. In addition, avoidance behavior can occur when students do not know how to correct the problems. Perhaps simply drawing attention to errors through underlining is enough as it allows students a chance to attempt a correction and eliminates the possibility of instructors making mistakes or misdirecting students in ways that can lead them to make more errors; however, care needs to be exercise din terms of what instructors choose to underline as changes in one part of a sentence can have ripple effect and do not necessarily lead to a higher quality product. The less directive approach, along with explaining the strategy, may minimize avoidance behavior. Alternatively, line editing a single paragraph may work for more competent students if instructors can use this approach consistently and students understand the strategy and the expectations on them.

The study revealed that when form feedback was applied haphazardly, such as when appearing to give full error feedback but not indicating some errors until the final draft, it irritated the students as they had lost the opportunity to make corrections. An essential precautionary step to avoid misunderstandings would seem to be to explain the technique in use to the students, particularly considering that some students thought that no 'red' meant no errors. Having outlined the technique, it must be used consistently. Whatever technique is used, it is not necessary to respond to every error; therefore, form feedback should be prioritized, concentrate on patterns of errors relevant and apposite to individual students and be offered selectively. This is important as concentrating on errors that are beyond individual students to understand or correct, increases student confusion and frustration.

The perception instructors have that students do not use their feedback to revise content has some basis in truth and can be linked to lack of understanding of the feedback, the extent of the revision anticipated and the limited resources students have for coming up with further ideas in response to vague prompts on content. Although the

desire for more specific advice is a contentious issue open to the interpretation that students want instructors to do the work for them, few writers, no matter what their level of expertise, would be satisfied with vague comments, such as *add details,* from their editors. Students writing in L2 are particularly vulnerable to frustration on receiving this type of feedback. Considering why details are needed and where they should be inserted may help instructors provide clear, unambiguous support. The position of feedback appears to be important with some students preferring marginal feedback on content due to its proximity to the weakness. Also, as instructors sometimes do not see where revisions were made, perhaps because the revisions do not necessarily lead to a marked improvement in the writing, they could be made clearer by having students revise using the 'track changes' word-processing option.

Rather than assuming the burden of giving more written feedback, feedback that has the potential to misdirect or confuse especially when offered under pressure, an alternative approach could be tried. One approach that should work is to prepare students for the types of feedback they are likely to receive and the type and extent of feedback anticipated. Students could be given examples from actual essays and asked to work together to resolve the issues presented. Also, when class numbers are high as in this institution, it is to use students' actual essays to draw attention to patterns of error, and then provide revision strategies, the specific support students want. One student had had this experience and had found she saw her essay in an entirely different way. Interestingly, this approach was specifically requested by one group of students who had been denied feedback. In terms of grammar feedback, the possibility of misdirecting students is minimized when this approach is taken. Also, avoidance behavior and appropriation concerns should reduce. Patterns of error could be targeted that relate to classroom instruction. With reference to dealing with content and organization, instructors could demonstrate how to locate gaps in logic and weaknesses in examples and explanations. Techniques for generating more ideas and grouping them appropriately could be demonstrated. Knowing how to go about gathering additional ideas and working these into essays was a concern for many students in the study. Modeling specific strategies in class using students' actual work seems like an ideal place to start offering this assistance and could, also, provide training for peer and self-review.

Taking alternative approaches means that some of the time currently spent on giving written feedback to individual students, could be put into designing better

classroom instruction and associated activities to help students overcome common problems. Reid (2002, p. 100) claims that "the longer [she] teaches the less [she] appears to teach". Perhaps one way to help our students to become more competent writers is the opposite of this idea. Since burnout is an issue when teaching writing, rather than expending effort giving vast quantities of potentially damaging feedback, instructors should put more time and effort into classroom instruction both as preparation for writing and offering repair strategies with students' actual writing.

As there are alternatives, why do instructors continue to put a lot of time into giving written feedback when they claim not to believe the students use it or even read it? Why do they continue to use peer review when they do not see any benefit in it? All in all, why do instructors continue with approaches to instruction that they have lost faith in? Perhaps, it is easier to keep doing what everyone else is doing, and there is always the possibility that the program requires instructors to justify their existence through liberal use of the red pen. Attempting to step off a moving treadmill is difficult and dangerous.

9. 4 Limitations of the Study

Working with people meant that procedures did not always go according to plan, and for different reasons, various materials were not handed in. In hindsight it may have been better to have stressed at the outset how important it was to supply all the materials asked for. However, it could just as easily have led to fewer students being willing to take part in the study as well as introducing an unwelcome and unethical element of coercion.

Also, not being able to go back to the students for more insights as the study proceeded was a limitation; at the same time the students were busy and had the right to limit the time contributed. However, starting the data analysis earlier may have alerted me to the areas where I needed more information before it was too late to get access to the students. The decision not to begin the analysis of the data until later in the study was an expedient choice as I had teaching obligations the same as those described in the study as well as data gathering activities.

Interviews gave an opportunity to discuss individual essays with the writers at length and to gather a wealth of ideas from the instructors, but ultimately, focus groups were the more dynamic method for accessing insights. The support of the group seemed to encourage both students and instructors to speak out. And in the case of the

instructors, more contentious issues were discussed openly in the focus group. Therefore, from my current perspective, I could have made more use of focus groups.

On the whole, the questionnaires produced consistent results for all three classes representing general perceptions of feedback procedures, and they confirmed general trends emerging from other data sources. However, the number of students willing to do the questionnaires was disappointing and the option to skip questions was exercised more consistently than I had expected. Also, although the questionnaires had been piloted and improved, difficulties experienced with questions 16 and 17 in questionnaire three suggest that more careful questionnaire design was needed.

The differences in the way the three instructors were viewed by the students, differences that did not seem to coincide with the amount of effort the instructors were expending in terms of written feedback, suggest that assessing classroom culture accurately is extraordinarily difficult and requires classroom observations. Unfortunately, the few observations that were part of this study were of limited use and targeted students' responses to receiving essays back rather than classroom culture in general. Due to lack of observations, the same limiting factor is evident in terms of whether or not Lydia, the instructor who gave the least feedback, was in fact preparing the students specifically for the types of revisions she envisaged through her teaching. Observations would have revealed more about the way all three instructors were preparing students for the feedback through the classroom instruction. But, instructors can be reluctant to agree to observations. Possibly a questionnaire on instructional practices would have provided some clues here.

Ethnographic research has the benefit of giving the researcher access to a lot of insider knowledge. However, this can also be a problem. This research took place in the university where I work, with people I know well. I also felt a debt of gratitude to the instructors who shared so much with me. Maintaining objectivity and reporting findings accurately were essential, and I found it was necessary to put myself at a distance from the participants to achieve this. Objectivity and accuracy were further achieved through searching the data rigorously and reporting findings neutrally.

The students in the study were not my students, so there was no conflict of interests there at all. However, one of problems with looking at revision patterns in response to feedback in the interview students' essays was that the students who volunteered to take part were likely to be reasonably motivated to work/learn as they had agreed to give up some of their free time possibly in the hope of understanding

something more about the feedback/revision cycle. Therefore, they may not be representative of typical revision patterns.

9.5 Future Research

Several important issues raised by the study but not resolved need to be explored in the future. In view of the possibility that the students who participated in interviews and handed over their essays for close examination were not truly representative of the class in terms of responses to revisions, it would be worthwhile taking an in-depth look at the revision strategies of a whole class.

The possibility that students' revisions, particularly on content, can be driven as much by classroom instruction as by written feedback arises when looking at the revisions Lydia's students made despite receiving limited generic feedback. This would require extensive classroom observations as well as reviewing essays and interviewing students.

Further research on the efficacy of different form feedback approaches and the impact form feedback has on students' willingness to take responsibility for searching for and correcting errors unaided are suggested by the dependence students showed when given extensive feedback. These studies could also be aligned to students' writing competence as it seems to have a bearing on students' willingness to revise with some degree of independence. The difficulties some students had accepting some feedback and dealing with 'untreatable' errors imply that oral feedback has a place; therefore, studies need to be done comparing the efficacy of oral feedback with that of written feedback, particularly with students for whom oral communication is highly valued as in this study.

Studies looking at the use of modeling strategies for revision on both content and form in contrast to written feedback have particular appeal. This is particularly important considering that extensive written feedback on content, as found in one of the case studies, still left some students struggling to revise the content of their essays. A study looking at the efficacy of explicitly explaining the actual feedback strategy in use, and the extent and type of revision anticipated would be of interest as students did not seem to realize what was expected of them. Another area of interest that suggests more research is the area of students' preferences and use of feedback depending on whether or not it is marginal, summary or offered through rubrics. Could rubrics, fast response tools, replace written feedback?

It may be worth trying to find out whether or not instructors persist with feedback techniques that they believe do not work or if, in fact, the impression given is more a reflection of instructors' frustrations with class numbers and their perceptions of the quality of the revisions. Also, as this study revealed that students did revise considerably despite the instructors' perceptions that little revision was done, further research on ways to make the extent of students' revisions easily apparent to instructors with large classes through simple techniques like the use of reviewing tools when word-processing could be beneficial and may help to change instructors' attitudes to students' revision processes. Boosting instructors' confidence in the complex and time-consuming task of responding to writing must be a good thing.

The study revealed that these particular students wanted to know that the instructor cared about them and valued their efforts. This suggests that more research on individual and cultural differences and the use of praise is needed. Finally, there is not much research published widely on L2 writing and Arab students, so this is an area where research is needed.

9.6 Summary

The findings of this research reveal that misunderstandings exist between instructors and students over responsibilities and the amount of effort anticipated in the feedback/revision cycle. Students do want feedback on all aspects of their writing, and they believe that, when the feedback is offered on drafts, they generally act on the advice given. Examination of essays revealed that most feedback is attended to leading to moderate success correcting errors and even some expansion of ideas on the subsequent draft. However, sometimes the feedback does not inspire revision for various reasons and not always because the students are at fault. While not giving up on the provision of feedback, alternative approaches to intensive error correction and the use of generic feedback on content need to be considered. Instructors need to know their students well and be alert to what works with different students, but for this to happen student numbers have to be taken into consideration. Considering the individual nature of writing, a one shot solution to problems with the feedback/revision cycle is unlikely.

During the time this study took place, one of the participating instructors moved to another department as well as taking on a significant public role in the university. Also, changes occurred in the writing department of GSU, some driven by expediency not pedagogical concerns. For example, class numbers came down for a time and have

now risen to the previous level or higher due to the university's cap on faculty appointments at a time of expanding student enrolments. Instructors have begun to look for alternatives to intensive feedback in an effort to cope with the workload and, as discussed above, some are experimenting with rubrics and others with responding to fewer drafts. Adjustments have been made to the curriculum: Reading is now emphasized, some research skills are now taught in WRI 101 and portfolio assessment has replaced final exams in some instructors' classes although there is still ambivalence over this approach.

Finally, the findings of this study have further revealed the complexity of responding to writing; therefore, I would like to return to the words of Dana Ferris whose insights have intrigued me throughout the research process. Although it appears that L2 writing instructors could benefit from taking a closer look at their written feedback practices, Ferris warns against a tendency to "prematurely embrace or dismiss various response strategies" before adequate, consistent research has been conducted (2003, p. 135).

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APPENDIX A

Degree Programs Offered at GSU as of 2007

College of Arts and Science	Majors
Bachelor of Arts (BA) in:	English Language and Literature
	International Studies
	Mass Communication
Bachelor of Science (BS) in:	Environmental Sciences
Graduate Programs:	Master of Arts in English/Arabic/English Translation and Interpreting
	Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
School of Architecture and Design	Majors
Bachelor of Architecture	
Bachelor of Interior Design	
Bachelor of Science in:	Design Management
	Multimedia Design
	Visual Communication
Graduate programs:	Master of Urban Planning
	Graduate Certificate in Urban Planning
School of Business and Management	Majors
Bachelor of Arts in Economics	
Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration	
Bachelor of Science in Business Administration in:	Accounting
	Finance
	Management
	Marketing
	Management Information Systems
Bachelor of Science in Finance	
Bachelor of Science in Management Information Systems	
Graduate programs:	Master of Business Administration
	Master of Public Administration
	Gulf Executive Master of Public Administration
School of Engineering	Majors
Bachelor of Science in:	Chemical Engineering
	Civil Engineering
	Computer Engineering
	Computer Science
	Electrical Engineering
	Mechanical Engineering
Graduate programs:	Master of Science in Engineering Systems Management
	Master of Science in Mechatronics Engineering

APPENDIX B

Department of Writing Studies Writing Courses

Table B.1.

WRI 001 Outline of Course 2005

	WRI 001 Fundamentals of Writing	
Course Duration	50 minute classes five times a week for 16 weeks	
Course Description	Concentrates on the elements of clear, focused essay writing through the recognition and development of topic sentences to build coherent and unified paragraphs and short essays. Students explore the relationship between reading and writing by responding to readings through informal writing tasks. WRI 001 provides focused attention on the fundamentals of written English, allowing students to achieve greater grammatical and mechanical competence in their writing.	
Outcomes	After completing this course, students will be able to:	
Writing	• demonstrate knowledgeable application of the writing process. • compose topic sentences with a clear opinion and controlling idea. • develop paragraphs using appropriate rhetorical modes and relevant support. • write a short essay that consists of an introduction, supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion.	
Vocabulary	• develop and adopt appropriate university-level English vocabulary.	
Grammar	• demonstrate an understanding of basic grammar competency. • correctly use basic punctuation.	
Reading	• apply basic reading strategies of prereading, scanning, annotation and outlining.	
Assessment	Writing Assignments	30%
	Reading Comprehension and Reader Response	20%
	Quizzes and Assignments	20%
	Midterm Exam	10%
	Final Assessment	20%

Table B.2.

WRI 101 Outline of course Fall 2005 and Spring 2006

	WRI 101 Academic Writing	
Course Duration	50 minute classes three times a week for 16 weeks Or 75 minute classes twice times a week for 16 weeks	
Course Description	This course develops academic writing skills with special attention to creating arguments and providing support through prewriting, thesis development, organization, drafting, peer and self evaluation, and revision. Students practice strategies for reading academic material by responding to texts in both formal and informal writing assignments and classroom discussion. Students develop accurate grammar and mechanical skills for written English proficiency.	
Outcomes	After completing this course, students will be able to:	
Writing	• illustrate proficiency in all stages of the writing process. • demonstrate the ability to write a well-organized, well-developed essay that has a clear thesis statement, introduction, support, and conclusion. • recognize and use rhetorical strategies common to academic writing.	
Vocabulary	• employ vocabulary building strategies for academic purposes.	
Grammar	• compose competent English sentences appropriate to university level writing.	
Reading	• employ reading strategies to enhance understanding. • engage in basic critical analysis of texts.	
Assessment	Writing Assignments	30%
	Reading Comprehension and Summary	20%
	Quizzes and Assignments	20%
	Midterm Exam	10%
	Final Assessment	20%
Textbook	Smalley, R., Ruetten, M. K. , & Kozyrev, J. R. (2001). *Refining composition skills.* Boston: Heinle & Heinle.	

Table B.3.

WRI 101 Outline of Course Fall 2006

	WR1 101 Academic Writing	
Course Duration	50 minute classes three times a week for 16 weeks Or 75 minute classes twice times a week for 16 weeks	
Course Description	Challenges students to recognize, understand, and produce academic writing. Students practice strategies for reading academic material by responding to texts in both formal and informal writing assignments and classroom discussion. Students enhance their writing skills through use of the writing process. Students also develop the necessary grammar and mechanical skills for written English proficiency through contextualized grammar instruction.	
Outcomes	This course is designed to help students master the basic literacy skills necessary for successful university achievement by providing instruction and guided practice in both reading and writing strategies. Through their experience in WRI 101 students will	
Writing	• recognize and use rhetorical strategies common to academic writing. • effectively use all stages of the writing process to compose academic essays, appropriate to university level writing. • produce well-organized, well-developed academic essays in support of a thesis, using the three-part essay structure.	
Vocabulary	• practice vocabulary building strategies for academic purposes.	
Grammar	• develop competence in grammar, mechanical, and presentation skills appropriate to university level writing.	
Reading	• employ reading strategies to enhance understanding, including composing formal summaries. • engage in basic critical analysis of texts.	
Assessment	Writing Assignments	35%
	Reading Comprehension and Summary	25%
	Quizzes and Activities	10%
	Midterm	10%
	Final Assessment	20%
Textbooks	Clouse, B.F. (2002). *Transitions: From reading to writing* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. Clouse, B. F. (2003). *Patterns for a purpose: A rhetorical reader* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. Buscemi, S. V., Nocolai, A.H., & Strugala, R. (2005). *The basics: A rhetoric and handbook* (4th edition). New York: McGraw-Hill.	

Table B.4.

WRI 102 Outline of Course 2005

	WRI 102 Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum	
Course Duration	50 minute classes three times a week for 16 weeks Or 75 minute classes twice times a week for 16 weeks	
Course Description	This course focuses on the development of critical thinking, active reading, and analytical writing. Students explore the relationship of thesis to structure and audience and develop and support those theses in response to complex questions raised by course readings and classroom discussion. Students deal with grammar and mechanical problems as they arise in the context of their writing.	
Outcomes	After completing this course, students will be able to:	
Writing	• incorporate productive writing strategies into their individual writing practices. • apply appropriate strategies for organizing ideas in a formal essay in support of a clear thesis statement and identifiable writing purpose. • effectively use rhetorical strategies within the context of argumentation. • evaluate and appropriately revise their own written work as part of the writing process.	
Reading	• understand essays and articles from a variety of academic and professional disciplines. • respond critically to readings through personal reflection, analysis and argumentation.	
Referencing	• integrate quotations and complex ideas from texts. • demonstrate correct in-text and end-of-text citation techniques, using APA documentation.	
Assessment	Writing Assignments	30%
	Reading Analysis and Critical Response	20%
	Quizzes and Assignments	20%
	Midterm Exam	10%
	Final Assessment	20%

APPENDIX C

Activities Involving the Instructor

	Action	Timing
1.	Discuss research objectives and time it would take and find out about feedback techniques (conferencing, written feedback and type of feedback) - select participants	Before semester
2.	Have instructor participants sign consent form	Week1-2
3.	Conduct instructor interviews	Week1-2
4.	Explain research objectives and extent of commitment to students and select 3 from each class representing a range of abilities. Have all participants sign the confidentiality form.	Week 3
5.	Set up opportunity to tape STUDENT conferences with teachers who use this technique. Transcribe	During semester
6.	Notify whole class about questionnaire 1	Week 5-9 Vary according to instructors
7.	Notify whole class about questionnaire 2	Week 5-9 Vary according to instructors
8.	Notify whole class about questionnaire 3	Week 10-15 Vary according to instructors
9.	Follow up interview at end of semester	Exam week or later

APPENDIX D

Instructors' Information Sheet

"Written feedback in a Freshman Writing Course in the UAE: Instructors' and Students' Perspectives on Giving, Getting and Using Feedback"

INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction
During the academic years 2005 through to 2007 **E. Anne Shine**, an instructor in the Department of Writing Studies at the XXXXXXXXX (GSU), will conduct a research project to examine the influence of feedback on English as a Second Language (ESL) students' written work. The research is being conducted for a Doctor of Philosophy Degree from Massey University in New Zealand (NZ).
The research supervisors are situated in New Zealand and the U.A.E. They are **Dr Cynthia White,** Department of Linguistics and Second Language Teaching at Massey University in NZ and **Dr Cindy Gunn**, Department of Language and Literature at GSU

The purpose of the research is to examine different methods of giving feedback on written work, both instructor and peer feedback, and how students' view this feedback and use it.

Recruitment and Participation
Instructors
As a freshman writing instructor, you are invited to volunteer to participate in this research. Three instructors will be involved in the project. Selection for inclusion will be on the basis of compatibility with the researcher's time scale and, if there are more than three people interested, random choice. Three is the maximum number for the scope of the project.

As the research is looking at the usual feedback procedures used, instructors will not be impacted significantly. Early in the project instructors will be asked to take part in an interview to discuss their usual feedback procedures and how students handle these. This will take, at most, two hours. An opportunity will be arranged to revisit some of the ideas expressed in the interview and clarify any matters that arise.

Instructors will be asked to allow the researcher access to the students of their freshman composition classes in five ways:
a) Access to the initial diagnostic writing of the participating students
b) Access to the participating students to do a final 50 minute writing task at the end of the semester
c) Access to participating students for the completion of surveys – outside of class time – on feedback procedures
d) Access to the graded essays, including feedback, of the students (three per class) who agree to participate in interviews
e) Access to those three students per class for interviews on how they understood and used the feedback they received.

Every effort will be made to keep the intrusion on class time to a minimum. All recorded and transcribed material will be kept secure.

Participant's Rights
You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study within the first four weeks of a particular semester;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;

- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

- As interviews will be recorded, you have the right to ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.
- All interviews will be transcribed and participants have the right to read the transcripts and edit any misunderstanding of recorded material.

Project Contacts
Should you have questions about the project please feel free to contact the following people at GSU for more information:

E. Anne Shine
Office: P 228
Email: ashine@xxx.edu
Phone 515 2713

Dr C Gunn
Office: NAB 236
Email: cgunn@xxx.edu
Phone: 515 2724

Dr Cynthia White
Linguistics and Second Language Teaching
Massey University
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
New Zealand
email c.j.white@massey.ac.nz
phone 64 6 3569099 x7711

Committee Approval Statement

a) This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Ethics & Equity), telephone 06 350 5249, email *humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz*.

APPENDIX E

Instructors' Consent Form

"Written feedback in a Freshman Writing Course in the UAE: Instructors' and Students' Perspectives on Giving, Getting and Using Feedback"

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

This form will be held for a period of five (5) years

During this academic year, E. Anne Shine, an instructor in the Department of Writing Studies, will conduct a research project to examine the influence of feedback on ESL students' written work. You are asked to take part in the project. Your participation is voluntary and every effort will be made to minimize the time it will take.

Instructor participants will be asked to take part in interviews about the feedback process, to allow the researcher to select three students for case study purposes and to give access to their essays and the feedback given on these essays. Instructors will also be asked to make their whole class available for two 50 minute writing tasks, one at the start and one at the end of the semester.

All information gathered will be confidential. In addition, individual participant's comments and perceptions will not be made available to other participants in the research process. The final written document will not identify the participants or the university.

Participants will be given the option to review transcripts of their interviews, and edit any misunderstanding of recorded material. Findings will be made public and thus available to interested participants.

I have read and understood the above information and consent to take part in this research.

Signature: ..... **Date:** .....

Full Name - printed .....

APPENDIX F

Students' Information Sheet

"Written feedback in a Freshman Writing Course in the UAE: Instructors' and Students' Perspectives on Giving, Getting and Using Feedback"

INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

During the academic years 2005 through to 2007 **E. Anne Shine**, an instructor in the Department of Writing Studies at the XXXXXXXXX (GSU), will conduct a research project to examine the influence of feedback on English as a Second Language (ESL) students' written work. The research is being conducted for a Doctor of Philosophy Degree from Massey University in New Zealand (NZ).

The research supervisors are situated in New Zealand and the U.A.E. They are **Dr Cynthia White,** Department of Linguistics and Second Language Teaching at Massey University in NZ and **Dr Cindy Gunn**, Department of Language and Literature at GSU

The purpose of the research is to examine different methods of giving feedback on written work, both instructor and peer feedback, and how students' view this feedback and use it.

Recruitment and Participation

Students

You are invited to take part in the research because your writing instructor has agreed to take part. However, your participation is voluntary.

You will be asked to complete simple on-line questionnaires throughout the semester. The questionnaires look at peer as well as instructor feedback. The answers are entirely confidential. Nobody, not even the researcher, will be able to identify individual participants' answers.

Three students from you class will be asked to volunteer to take part in interviews with the researcher. The interviews will look at the feedback you received from your instructor as you worked through the writing process for each of the three essays during the semester. Discussion will be on what you did and did not do and why you made these choices. These interviews will take no more than one hour for each session and there will be three interviews over the course of the 15 week semester.

All students whose instructors are participating in the research will have a chance to complete the questionnaires – approximately 120 students. The interview segment of the project will involve nine students as this is as many as one researcher can interview in the time allowed.

All recorded and transcribed material will be kept secure.

Participant's Rights
You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study within the first four weeks of a particular semester;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

- As interviews will be recorded, you have the right to ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.
- All interviews will be transcribed and participants have the right to read the transcripts and edit any misunderstanding of recorded material.

- Completion and return of the questionnaire implies consent. You have the right to decline to answer any particular question.

Project Contacts
Should you have questions about the project please feel free to contact the following people at GSU for more information:

E. Anne Shine
Office: P 228
Email: ashine@xxx.edu
Phone 515 2713

Dr C Gunn
Office: NAB 236
Email: cgunn@xxx.edu
Phone: 515 2724

Dr Cynthia White
Linguistics and Second Language Teaching
Massey University
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
New Zealand
email c.j.white@massey.ac.nz
phone 64 6 3569099 x7711

Committee Approval Statement

a) This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Ethics & Equity), telephone 06 350 5249, email *humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz*.

APPENDIX G

Students' Consent Form

"Written feedback in a Freshman Writing Course in the UAE: Instructors' and Students' Perspectives on Giving, Getting and Using Feedback"

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

This form will be held for a period of five (5) years

During this academic year, E. Anne Shine, an instructor in the Department of Writing Studies, will conduct a research project to examine the influence of feedback on ESL students' written work. You are asked to take part in the project. Your participation is voluntary and every effort will be made to minimize the time it will take.

All student participants will be asked to fill out questionnaires on both instructor and peer feedback.
Some student participants (**three volunteers** per class) will be asked to take part in interviews about the feedback process as they experienced it and the use they made of the feedback they received, supply copies of their essays for analysis and fill out questionnaires on both instructor and peer feedback. They will also be asked to take part in three 50 minute writing tasks, one at the beginning of the fall semester, one at the end of the semester and one at the end of the following semester.

All information gathered will be confidential. In addition, individual participant's comments and perceptions will not be made available to other participants in the research process. The final written document will not identify the participants or the university.

Participants will be given the option to review transcripts of their interviews, and edit any misunderstanding of recorded material. Findings will be made public and thus available to interested participants.

I have read and understood the above information and consent to take part in this research.

Signature: ..... **Date:** .....

Full Name - printed .....

APPENDIX H

Pilot Study Questionnaires

Table H.1.

Feedback on Teacher Evaluation

Name – (optional) Grade on Assignment 1

	Assignment 1 – comparison & contrast	**1. Strongly Agree**	**2. Agree**	**3. Disagree**	**4. Strongly Disagree**
1.	The objectives of the assignment are clear.				
2.	The directions for the assignment are clear.				
3.	The class activities and readings helped prepare me for the assignment.				
4.	The grading rubric for the assignment was clearly and fully explained				
5.	The feedback on the first draft helped me to improve the essay.				
6.	The feedback on the final draft helped me to see where I succeeded				
7.	The feedback on the final draft helped me to see where I need to make more effort or seek help.				
8	What kind of assistance do you feel you needed that you didn't get?				
9	What could you have done to improve your performance?				

Table H.2.

Evaluating the Peer Editing Process

Read the questions below and respond. You responses will help the instructor to assess the procedure used and make adjustments as needed to provide you with the service that best suits your needs.
Put a tick in the column that best indicates you view point and/or level of agreement - 1. Strongly Agree through to 4. Strongly Disagree

QUESTIONS			Yes	No
1. I have used the peer editing process before				
QUESTIONS	1. Strongly Agree	2. Agree	3. Disagree	4. Strongly disagree
2. The peer editing sheet was clear and straightforward.				
3. The teacher explained the process clearly.				
4. The time allowed for the activity was long enough.				
5. My partner and I managed the time allowed well.				
6. My partner took the activity seriously.				
7. My partner offered me advice in a constructive way.				
8. As a result of going through the peer editing process I was able to see weaknesses I had not noticed before.				
9. As a result of going through the peer editing process I was able to see strengths I had not noticed before.				
10. In what areas did you get the most benefit? E.g Overall organization, thesis statement, plan of development, topic sentences, adding specific details, identifying sentence skill errors,				
11. In what areas would you have liked more help from your partner?				

12. Any other comments

APPENDIX I

Questionnaire One Feedback Received from the Instructor

The questions below were delivered to the students through SurveyMonkey.com.

Read and respond to the questions below related to the feedback you received from your instructor.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Were you satisfied with the grade you received for the essay> Please say why or why not.				
2.	The essay instructions were clear.				
3.	The essay instructions helped me to understand what was expected of me before I wrote the essay.				
4.	The grading system for the assignment was clearly explained before I wrote the essay.				
5.	I read the feedback on the drafts of my essay.				
6.	I understood the feedback I received on the drafts of my essay.				
7.	The first draft of my essay was well written and needed few or no changes.				
8.	As a result of receiving feedback on the essay, I was able to see weaknesses I had not noticed before.				
9.	As a result of receiving feedback on the essay, I understood the changes I could make to improve my essay.				
10.	If you did not understand the feedback, what did you do? Why?				
	The instructor's feedback on the drafts of the essay helped me:				
11.	to improve the thesis statement and topic sentences.				
12.	to see where I needed to change the details/support so that thy related to the topic sentences.				
13.	to see where to add details to				

	expand the point I was making.				
14.	to improve the way I organized ideas.				
15.	to improve the way I connected ideas and used transitions to guide readers.				
16.	to improve subject/verb agreement, verb tenses, verb form problems.				
17.	to improve word order, missing word, word form, word choice problems.				
18.	to see the strengths of my essay.				
19.	to see where I need to make more effort or seek help.				
20.	What additional help from your instructor do you feel you would have benefited from?				
21	What could you have done to prepare yourself for writing the first draft?				
22.	Do you have any other information to offer on the experience of writing and receiving feedback?				
23.	What grade did you get for the essay?				

APPENDIX J

Questionnaire Two Instructor Feedback Wanted

The questions below were delivered to the students through SurveyMonkey.com.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	Generally, I learn most about how to improve my essay when my instructor:				
1.	Offers advice on vocabulary				
2.	Offers advice on the introduction and conclusion.				
3.	Offers advice on the thesis statement and topic sentences.				
4.	Offers advice on support given to make the point.				
5.	Offers advice on the development of ideas in my essay.				
6.	Offers advice on the organization of ideas in my essay.				
7.	Refers me to relevant pages in the textbook related to the problems I am experiencing.				
8.	Refers me to websites related to the problems I am experiencing.				
9.	Refers me to the Writing Center for help in certain areas.				
10.	Indicates the presence of grammatical errors.				
11.	Corrects grammatical errors.				
12.	Indicates the presence of other sentence skill errors such as word choice, word order, and spelling.				
13.	Corrects other sentence skill errors such as word choice, word order, and spelling.				
14.	Indicates the presence of run-ons or fragments.				
15.	Corrects run-ons or fragments.				
16.	Overall, I prefer the instructor to indicate errors or weaknesses and leave me to make the corrections.				
17.	Overall, I prefer the instructor to make corrections and changes to my essay.				
18.	Please add any other comments about what assistance you would like from your instructor on written work.				

APPENDIX K

Questionnaire Three the Peer Review Process

The questions below were delivered to the students through SurveyMonkey.com.

	1. Strongly Agree	2. Agree	3. Disagree	4. Strongly disagree
1. The instructor explained the process clearly.				
2. The peer editing sheet was clear and straightforward.				
3. The time allowed for the activity was long enough.				
4. My partner and I managed the time allowed well.				
5. My partner took the activity seriously.				
6. My partner offered me suggestions on how to overcome weaknesses.				
7. My partner offered advice in a constructive and helpful way.				
8. As a result of going through the peer editing process, I was able to see weaknesses I had not noticed before.				
9. As a result of going through the peer editing process, I understood the changes I could make to improve my essay.				
10. My peer editing partner offered a lot of help in terms of content, idea development and organization.				
11. My peer editing partner offered a lot of help in terms of grammar and other sentence skill issues such as word order and word choice.				
12. In what areas would you have liked more help from your partner? Can you suggest two or three areas where you needed more help?				
13. Do you have any other comments about the peer editing process?				

APPENDIX L

Instructors' Interview Questions

Some questions adapted from Hyland and Hyland (2001).

Strategies for teaching writing

1. What is the focus of the WRI 101 course? What are the goals and objectives?
2. How would you describe the WRI 101 students, as ESL/EFL students or in some other way?
3. Could you describe the approach to teaching essay writing that you usually use when teaching WRI 101 students?

Assessment of students

1. At the beginning of the semester, what is your opinion of the students' writing ability?
2. What kinds of weaknesses do you generally see in WRI 101?
3. What improvements do you expect to see in one 16 week semester?
4. What areas do you expect to see the least improvement in during the 16 week semester?

Assessment of Students' Attitudes to WRI 101 and Writing Tasks

1. What do you think the students' attitude is to WRI 101 and writing tasks?
2. How do you think students rate WRI 101 in comparison to the classes they take towards their major?
3. What do you think their attitude is to the writing process? Do you think they would prefer to skip parts of the writing process?
4. Do you think the students understand the amount of effort required to improve their writing abilities and make the required amount of effort?

Assessment of Feedback Techniques

1. What type of feedback do you give? For example, do you give direct or indirect feedback, coded or uncoded, marginal comments, summary comments at the end or a combination? Do you have a preference? If so, what and why?
2. What do you think is your main role when you respond in writing to a student's draft? And on a final draft? Do you respond differently to final drafts? Do you keep a copy of feedback and consult it so that you can build on previous feedback.
3. Do you give individuals oral feedback? How/Why/Why not?
4. Do you read the whole essay first and then give feedback or do you give feedback as you go? Why?
5. What do you attend to most when reading students' essays?
6. When reading students' essays, what do you give most feedback on, form or content?
7. How helpful do you think instructor feedback is for improving student's writing?
8. At what stage of the feedback revision cycle you think instructors can offer the most assistance?
9. Do you have doubts about the value of the feedback given on essays? Why?

Student Response to Feedback

1. What type of feedback do you think students want?
2. Do you think students value the feedback you give on essays?
3. Do students ever have difficulty accepting the feedback on drafts/final drafts? Why?
4. What procedure do you use for returning the essays with feedback? Do you think this works for the students? Is there another way to handle the return of essays that you do not use but would like to adopt? Please explain.
5. Do you think they respond to the feedback and make changes, which lead to higher quality essays?
6. What do you notice the students respond to most, feedback on form or content?
7. How much of the feedback you give do you estimate students use? Why do you think this is?
8. What do you expect students to do if they do not understand how to act on the feedback?
9. What percentage of students do you estimate make productive use of the feedback? Why?

General questions

1. What would you like to change about the WRI 101 course and why?
2. Do you have any difficulties/insights related to teaching these WRI classes that we have not covered?
3. What would you tell a new colleague, especially one new to the Arab world, about teaching WRI 101, the students and the feedback?

Additional Questions for Instructors

1. Do you feel that as you get to know the students and their particular wants and needs, or the way the react to advice, that you adjust the feedback you give?

APPENDIX M

Students' Interview Questions

Some questions adapted from Hyland and Hyland (2001).

General questions related to the student's attitude to writing to be asked at the first interview.

1. How do you rate yourself as a writer?
2. Do you enjoy writing?
3. Does your instructor require you to prewrite and plan?
4. Does your instructor require you to write multiple drafts? How many?
5. What method do you prefer to use when writing an essay? For example, do you think it is useful to use the writing process used in WRI101 or would you prefer to just start writing? Why do you have this preference?
6. At what stage of the writing process are you expected to word process the essay? Which do you prefer, writing by hand or on the computer?
7. Do you see WRI 101 as relevant to your university studies? Why/why not?
8. Do you see specific essay writing assignments done in WRI 101 as relevant to your university studies? Why/why not?

Specific feedback oriented questions related to the feedback received on a specific essay after the feedback has been responded to and a final draft submitted.

1. Were the objectives of the writing assignment made clear to you before you began to write the essay?
2. Was the grading system made clear to you?
3. Were the topics offered of interest? Did they seem relevant to you and your understanding of life or did they seem to be topics, which were more suitable for students living in America for example? If they were not relevant, what would you have preferred?
4. Would you prefer to choose your own topics without any prompting from the instructor?
5. What type of feedback do you get from your instructor? For example, do you get marginal comments, summary comments at the end or a combination? Do you have a preference? Do you attend to all feedback or do you ignore some feedback and look for certain types of feedback that you consider relevant, useful? If so, what and why?
6. Did you receive any oral feedback? Did/would that have helped? How/Why?
7. What does the instructor comment on most, the grammar of the writing, such sentence skill issues as word order, word choice, spelling etc. – the form - or the development and organization of ideas – the content?
8. What area would you like more feedback on – form or content? Why?
9. What feedback do you feel leads to you revise efficiently and produce a higher quality product?
10. Did you get feedback from anyone other than the instructor? How useful was this and why?
11. Did you get feedback from a peer editing session? How useful was this? Why?
12. How do you feel as you read the feedback for the first time? What do you do at the time related to how you feel? Do you go back and read the feedback again at a later time?

13. How long did you spend writing the essay? Did you use the writing process? Did you receive advice at stages along the way?
14. How long did you spend revising this draft?
15. What did you do as you revised? Describe how you approached the task.
16. What did you consider the most important changes?
17. There were some changes suggested that you did not make, why was that?

The following are examples of questions used to understand how a particular student responded or why he/she didn't respond to feedback on the essay. Actual interview questions will vary.

1. The instructor underlined this word and wrote the marginal comment WW. What does that indicate? What did you do and why? Why did you make no change? Do you understand the symbols used to indicate errors? How were they explained to you? Do you understand what to do when you see a symbol like his? What strategy do you use to overcome problems?
2. In the summary comments the instructor made the comment that the topic sentence and details did not seem to relate to each other or to the thesis statement. Did you understand what the instructor meant? What did you do to respond to this comment? Why?
3. The instructor suggested that you move this section of the paragraph to another paragraph because it was creating a unity issue. Did you understand what the instructor meant? What did you do to respond to this comment? Why?

General questions at the end of the interview.

1. Do you think there are any problems still with the essay?
2. Do you think you have made major or minor changes?
3. Do you think the essay has improved? How?
4. Have you learned anything from the writing of this essay that will be of use to you when writing essays in the future? That will be of use to you in other areas of study?
5. What do you expect to get as a final grade? [Or] What did you get as a final grade?
6. Do you consider the instructor is fair when grading? If not. Why not?
7. Why do you think you may lose/lost some points?
8. What extra help do you think you needed from the instructor? Why didn't you get it?
9. Did you understand the feedback at some point but not know what to do to improve the essay? Tell me about that.
10. Was there anything you could have done to improve the quality of the essay and possibly the grade that you didn't do? If yes, why didn't you do it?

APPENDIX N

Student Focus Groups' Prompts

1. What type of comments do you have difficulty understanding?

2. What do you do when you don't understand the feedback?

3. Your instructor usually asks you to deal with grammar problems such as subj/verb agreement, pronouns etc and issues to do with the logic, organization, support details – more global aspects of an essay. What do you think you attend to the most? Why is that? What is the process you go through when you appear to work on some suggestions and not others?

4. Sometimes it appears that students have made very few changes. Why do you think that is?

5. Sometimes instructors write on the essay and other times they fill in sheets. Do you have a preference and why?

6. If you could ask your instructor for any kind of feedback, what would you ask for?

7. What annoys you when you get feedback?

8. Is there anything else you can tell me about the feedback?

9. Look at these results. Logically, they contradict each other, yet these represent the results from about 45 students. Why do you think they made these choices?

APPENDIX O

Additional Participants' Consent Form

"Written feedback in a Freshman Writing Course in the UAE: Instructors' and Students' Perspectives on Giving, Getting and Using Feedback"

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

This form will be held for a period of five (5) years

During this academic year, E. Anne Shine, an instructor in the Department of Writing Studies, will conduct a research project to examine the influence of feedback on ESL students' written work. You are asked to take part in the project. Your participation is voluntary and every effort will be made to minimize the time it will take.

All participants will be asked to take part in a discussion group which will be recorded and transcribed.
Student participants only, will be asked to answer a short (2 questions) questionnaire.

All information gathered will be **confidential**.
In addition, individual participant's comments and perceptions will not be made available to other participants in the research process. The final written document will not identify the participants.

Participants will be given the option to review transcripts of their interviews, and edit any misunderstanding of recorded material. Findings will be made public and thus available to interested participants.

I have read and understood the above information and consent to take part in this research.

Signature: ..... **Date:** .....

Full Name - printed .....

APPENDIX P

General Trends from the Study for Discussion

1. Students arrive at GSU with an inflated sense of own writing ability due to grades received at school
2. Students are often immature in their attitude to study and need preparatory courses
3. Some students are not ready to read and write at an academic level despite their TOEFL scores and school grades

Feedback/Revision Cycle

4. Students do not put in the necessary effort to produce good initial drafts
5. Giving feedback is labor intensive and time consuming
6. Students don't make much use of the written feedback instructor offer
7. Students do not do the amount or type of revision instructors' anticipate their feedback will encourage

Students' Views and Wants in Terms of Feedback

8. Students report that they do appreciate the process approach and multiple drafts
9. Students report favorably on the feedback/revision cycle in contrast to what they experienced at school.
10. Students want more feedback
11. More particularly, students want more **specific** feedback
12. Students find it difficult to respond to general feedback such as "rephrase" "awkward"

Grammar Feedback

13. In terms of grammar, should we give direct feedback (make the changes) or indirect feedback (underlining or coding symbols), or does it matter?
14. Should we give little or no grammar feedback?

Content Feedback

15. Should we restrict our feedback to content?
16. Is it possible to be more specific in terms of content feedback and if not what are the limiting factors?

Other Issues

17. Classroom instruction may be more influential in terms of encouraging students to revise essays than written feedback
18. Students don't take WRI 101 seriously and focus more on majors
19. The above statement may be due to lack of need to write across the curriculum
20. Are there other institutional issues that limit what we can do?

APPENDIX Q

Instructors' Comments on Essay One and Two

Table Q.1.

Lydia Essay One

Drafts	Long and Short Comments on the Rubric	Long and Short Comments on the Essay
Huda First	Develop a clear focused thesis statement Connect your support to your thesis statement Review semi-colon use	Show don't tell This is not what we know about Jerusalem There's a lot of really good stuff in this essay
Rana First	Create a clear focused thesis statement Develop your discussion in support of your thesis statement Work on sentence structure	This essay ends up taking an abrupt turn – you need to prepare your reader for that
Mahar First	Compose a clear focused thesis statement Illustrate how the points you make support your thesis Develop your points completely	Unclear Tense What? Well-organized
Mahar Second	*No additional comments on the rubric*	Good job; this is improved from the earlier draft. You did a good job working. You implement my suggestions. As a result your writing is stronger.
Abdulla First	Decide on the tense of this narration and be consistent throughout Compose a clear, focused thesis statement Revise your introduction and conclusion	Really? That's quite a claim Really? You want religion to meet scientific standards Well developed

Note. Of the three second drafts received, only two had instructor feedback due to complications collecting final data in this semester.

Table Q.2. *Lydia Essay Two*

Drafts	Long and Short Comments on the Rubric	Long and Short Comments on the Essay
Abdulla	No rubric	Good job Abdulla – smart and well-written.
Rana	No rubric	Good job Be sure to proofread your polished drafts before turning them in.

Note. Of the two essays handed in only one draft was submitted.

Table Q.3.

Kitty Essay One

Draft	Long and Short Comments on the Rubric	Long and Short Comments on the Essay
Dima First	You need to organise your ideas better. Choose the correct word/expression and provide examples, details to support your ideas. Proofread your essay!	Explain in details Provide examples This belongs to a new paragraph This sentence does not relate to the rest of the essay.
Dima Second	Very good	
Maitha First	You have to organise your ideas in the body paragraphs, and compare/contrast the same points. Make sure to focus on what is being discussed.	These two paragraphs should be combined Here you are contrasting two things that are not part of the thesis ➔ you're off track When? Provide examples Should be part of the previous paragraph The same points are not contrasted What do you mean? Be consistent with your pronouns Good conclusion
Maitha Second	Use more transitional expressions of comparison/contrast. You topic sentences still do not accurately represent the main ideas of the paragraphs.	Need a transitional expression So what did they have
Mahmoud First	The ideas in the body paragraphs are often confusing, you need to better organize your argument. Your points are not supported or explained. You keep using the wrong verb tense Proofread your essay!	You are still young! Use the present tense Explain Wrong expression This paragraph does not have many good points, you need to contrast the same points! Rewrite this sentence Explain Explain your point

		These points are not discussed in your essay
Mahmoud Second	You have incomplete and run-on sentences. Your essay needs to be proofread! If you are not sure of how to correct your mistakes, please come and see me in my office hours.	You contradict what you said about hard life, war etc. No concluding sentence

Table Q.4.

Kitty Essay Two

Drafts	Long and Short Comments on the Rubric	Long and Short Comments on the Essay
Dima First	A very interesting piece of writing. Your ideas are well organized but you tend to use the wrong tense of the verbs.	Why are the people starving and poor? Explain Provide examples Rewrite - unclear
Dima Second	No comments	Be more specific
Maitha First	This is not a cause/effect essay but a narrative	No comments
Maitha Second	Your first two paragraphs should be combined and made shorter to make a good introduction. Your ideas are good, but your paragraphs ideas do not follow the topic sentences ➔ Write more appropriate topic sentences.	No cause/effect thesis Which paragraph is the introduction? The topic sentence is not clearly supported in this paragraph For example? Not a clear topic sentence for this paragraph Not a good conclusion if you previously discuss effects!
Mahmoud First	No rubric	What is your source? What is your point? This paragraph is incomplete how do different nationalities cause crimes? Explain
Mahmoud Second	Your writing is full of inaccuracies, so it is difficult to follow your ideas. Please see me in my office.	No Title No clear connection Rewrite this sentence. Irrelevant A wild assumption Your sentences do not follow each other logically, there is no clear connection Explain
Mahmoud Third	Your ideas in the paragraphs are not well organized. You need to proofread your work	I still don't like your opening Why the parentheses? Which one? What? Your recommendation belongs to the conclusion Confusing ideas in this paragraph Unclear

Table Q.5.

Jane Essay One

Drafts	Long and Short Comments on the Essay
Leila Prelim	Too vague Not all problems Obesity is not a true problem? Obesity is a real problems, too, but the attention it receives is "out of proportion" Good
Leila First	Take the "I" out of your paragraphs Can you define this broadly as a health problem? Isn't it more of an ecological threat Take "I" out of your essay to make it more impersonal and objectivity There's more than one reason for obesity Rephrase Para 1 Reconsider your definition of global warming as a health problem.
Leila Second	Better than your first draft Do you mean carefree? or thoughtless? Repetitive Your sentences in this paragraph are rather choppy I don't see the logic of your solution: Focus more attention on obesity because it receives too much attention? Your conclusion doesn't seem to sum up what you have expressed in the body of your essay
Najla Prelim	I'm not sure what you mean? The person is dressed as if for a holiday – an escape to a tropical island. However, it seems that it is impossible to escape the problems of the world: the sad reality follows us wherever we go as we continue to destroy the natural environment.
Najla First	Lead your reader into the cartoon. Don't introduce it too abruptly. Unclear what you mean How is this problem represented in the cartoon? Who is the person? You need to describe this before para 5. What child? Para 5: Write your description for someone who cannot see the cartoon. Para 6: Should come before para 5
Najla Second	Seems to imply the call can't be heard Unclear what crisis your are referring to I'm not sure what the issue is. Para 1: Your sentence order is difficult to follow. Visit the Writing Center for help with syntax. Para 2: You need to define what you mean by "This particular issue"

	What is the main idea of this paragraph? How are humans responsible for this? Para 5 Palm trees occur in tropical and semi-tropical regions throughout the world. Is this your focus? "research" is a plural noun – in the way that "information' is a plural noun Your paper focuses primarily on environmental problems, but you talk vaguely of "other issues". I'm not sure what your main point is.
Suad Prelim	Is this your thesis? Unclear what you see as the cartoon's main message. Are you sure about this? Unclear
Suad First	Rephrase Don't overgeneralize How is this expressed by the cartoon? Perhaps people are willing to undergo pain to change their looks. Good idea to describe the building Combine Unclear what you mean Para 2 Describe the layout of the cartoon so your readers understand the context in which the container truck occurs Para 4 Develop your ideas about what the building means more fully
Suad Second	Unclear. We are perfect because life is not. Need a transitional sentence Logical gap Vague What is the main idea of this paragraph? Off the topic of your essay Para 1 It's best to leave God out of academic essays. You readers may not conceive of God as you do. Create a logical flow from one sentence to the next.

Note. No rubrics were used in this class.

Table Q.6

Jane Essay Two

Draft	Long and Short Comments on the Essay
Leila First	I am not sure what you mean- were you startled? Nice image Maintain verb consistency This is your best writing so far Why are you telling your story? What value are you offering your readers? (Perhaps your story will help others who are shy.) Create a thesis expressing your purpose in writing this.
Leila Second	Is it still your school? I am confused about the time frame. Create a transition This image escapes me Good use of detail – your story is quite vivid. What value do you want readers to take from your story, even those who are not shy. How do you see your story relating to our eyes.
Suad First	Having money doesn't necessarily mean life is easier to deal with. Be careful of your generalizations Your introduction of "he" is very abrupt. Let us know who he is. Logical gap Be careful of overgeneralizations. Avoid absolutes Para 2 maintain verb consistency. Write out the numbers one through ten. Wordy Unclear. Explain what you mean by this Start a new paragraph This is a cliché. Can you say this in a more original way? Another cliché Para 3 You say that education meant more than life to Maen, but then you say the purpose of education is "to help one survive." Seems contradictory. Education in your story is about much more than just survival. Create a thesis statement for your introductory paragraph that emphasizes the value of a struggle for education: this struggle seems to be the focus of your essay.
Suad Second	Revise this part of your thesis Repetitive Difficult to read: rephrase You made major improvements in your writing since the beginning of the semester. Your thesis could be stronger – more tightly related to the context of your essay.

APPENDIX R

Students' Responses to Questionnaire One Feedback Received from the Instructor

Table R.1

Lydia's Students' Responses to Questions 2-9 & 11-19[a]

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Skipped
2. The essay instructions were clear.	3	9			
3. The essay instructions helped me to understand what was expected of me before I wrote the essay.	4	7	1		
4. The grading system for the assignment was clearly explained before I wrote the essay.	1	3	6	2	
5. I read the feedback on the drafts of my essay.	4	7	1		
6. I understood the feedback I received on the drafts of my essay.	4	8			
7. The first draft of my essay was well written and needed few or no changes.	1	3	6	2	
8. As a result of receiving feedback on the essay, I was able to see weaknesses I had not noticed before.	9	3			
9. As a result of receiving feedback on the essay, I understood the changes I could make to improve my essay.	7	4	1		
The instructor's feedback on the drafts of the essay helped me:					
11. to improve the thesis statement and topic sentences.	3	7	2		
12. to see where I needed to change the details/support so that they related to the topic sentences.	4	6	2		
13. to see where to add details to expand the point I was making.	1	9	2		
14. to improve the way I organized ideas.	1	6	5		
15. to improve the way I connected ideas and used transitions to guide readers.	2	6	4		
16. to improve subject/verb agreement, verb tenses, verb form problems.	4	3	5		
17. to improve word order, missing word, word form, word choice problems.	2	3	6	1	
18. to see the strengths of my essay.	5	6		1	
19. to see where I need to make more effort or seek help.	4	6	1	1	

[a] n=12

Table R.2

Kitty's Students' Responses to Questions 2-9 & 11-19[a]

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Skipped
2. The essay instructions were clear.	7	8	1		
3. The essay instructions helped me to understand what was expected of me before I wrote the essay.	3	11	2		
4. The grading system for the assignment was clearly explained before I wrote the essay.	4	7	4	1	
5. I read the feedback on the drafts of my essay.	10	4	1		1
6. I understood the feedback I received on the drafts of my essay.	7	8	1		
7. The first draft of my essay was well written and needed few or no changes.	1	6	8	1	
8. As a result of receiving feedback on the essay, I was able to see weaknesses I had not noticed before.	4	11	1		
9. As a result of receiving feedback on the essay, I understood the changes I could make to improve my essay.	7	8	1		
The instructor's feedback on the drafts of the essay helped me:					
11. to improve the thesis statement and topic sentences.	5	11			
12. to see where I needed to change the details/support so that they related to the topic sentences.	5	10	1		
13. to see where to add details to expand the point I was making.	3	9	3		1
14. to improve the way I organized ideas.	4	9	3		
15. to improve the way I connected ideas and used transitions to guide readers.	5	9	2		
16. to improve subject/verb agreement, verb tenses, verb form problems.	4	9	3		
17. to improve word order, missing word, word form, word choice problems.	4	10	2		
18. to see the strengths of my essay.	3	8	3	2	
19. to see where I need to make more effort or seek help.	4	12			

[a] n=16

Table R.3

Jane's Students' Responses to Questions 2-9 & 11-19[a]

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Skipped
2. The essay instructions were clear.	3	9		1	
3. The essay instructions helped me to understand what was expected of me before I wrote the essay.	3	7	3		
4. The grading system for the assignment was clearly explained before I wrote the essay.		7	6		
5. I read the feedback on the drafts of my essay.	10	3			
6. I understood the feedback I received on the drafts of my essay.	5	7	1		
7. The first draft of my essay was well written and needed few or no changes.		4	7	2	
8. As a result of receiving feedback on the essay, I was able to see weaknesses I had not noticed before.	6	7			
9. As a result of receiving feedback on the essay, I understood the changes I could make to improve my essay.	6	7			
The instructor's feedback on the drafts of the essay helped me:					
11. to improve the thesis statement and topic sentences.	3	8			2
12. to see where I needed to change the details/support so that they related to the topic sentences.	2	6	3		2
13. to see where to add details to expand the point I was making.	1	7	3		2
14. to improve the way I organized ideas.	1	9	1		2
15. to improve the way I connected ideas and used transitions to guide readers.	1	10			2
16. to improve subject/verb agreement, verb tenses, verb form problems.	5	3	3		2
17. to improve word order, missing word, word form, word choice problems.	2	5	4		2
18. to see the strengths of my essay.	1	8	2		2
19. to see where I need to make more effort or seek help.	5	6			2

[a] n=13

APPENDIX S

Students' Responses to Questionnaire Two Feedback Wanted from the Instructor

Table S.1
Lydia's Students' Responses to Questions 1-17 [a]

Generally, I learn most about how to improve my essay when my instructor:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Skipped
1. Offers advice on vocabulary	6	6	1		
2. Offers advice on the introduction and conclusion.	8	4			1
3. Offers advice on the thesis statement and topic sentences.	7	5			1
4. Offers advice on support given to make the point.	6	4	2		1
5. Offers advice on the development of ideas in my essay.	7	4	1		1
6. Offers advice on he organization of ideas in my essay.	6	5	1		1
7. Refers me to relevant pages in the textbook related to the problems I am experiencing.	2	6	4		1
8. Refers me to websites related to the problems I am experiencing.	2	6	3	1	1
9. Refers me to the Writing Center for help in certain areas.	5	7			1
10. Indicates the presence of grammatical errors.	7	5			1
11. Corrects grammatical errors.	8	1	2	1	1
12. Indicates the presence of other sentence skill errors such as word choice, word order, spelling.	4	7			2
13. Corrects other sentence skill errors such as word choice, word order, spelling.	4	6	1	1	1
14. Indicates the presence of run-ons or fragments.	3	8	1		1
15. Corrects run-ons or fragments.	3	8		1	1
16. Overall, I prefer the instructor to indicate errors or weaknesses and leave me to make the corrections.	5	3	3	1	1
17. Overall, I prefer the instructor to make corrections and changes to my essay.	6	3	2	1	1

[a] n=13

Table S.2

Kitty's Students' Responses to Questions 1-17[a]

Generally, I learn most about how to improve my essay when my instructor:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Skipped
1. Offers advice on vocabulary	3	9	3		
2. Offers advice on the introduction and conclusion.	5	8	2		
3. Offers advice on the thesis statement and topic sentences.	8	6	1		
4. Offers advice on support given to make the point.	5	9	1		
5. Offers advice on the development of ideas in my essay.	8	4	2		1
6. Offers advice on he organization of ideas in my essay.	7	6	2		
7. Refers me to relevant pages in the textbook related to the problems I am experiencing.	3	9	2		1
8. Refers me to websites related to the problems I am experiencing.	3	5	5	1	1
9. Refers me to the Writing Center for help in certain areas.	3	7	3	2	
10. Indicates the presence of grammatical errors.	4	9	2		
11. Corrects grammatical errors.	7	6	2		
12. Indicates the presence of other sentence skill errors such as word choice, word order, spelling.	5	8	2		
13. Corrects other sentence skill errors such as word choice, word order, spelling.	4	9	2		
14. Indicates the presence of run-ons or fragments.	6	8	1		
15. Corrects run-ons or fragments.	5	8	2		
16. Overall, I prefer the instructor to indicate errors or weaknesses and leave me to make the corrections.	3	7	4		1
17. Overall, I prefer the instructor to make corrections and changes to my essay.	5	7	2		1

[a] n=15

Table S.3

Kitty's Focus group Students' Responses to Questions 16 & 17

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Skipped
16. Overall, I prefer the instructor to indicate errors or weaknesses and leave me to make the corrections.	3	7	3		
17. Overall, I prefer the instructor to make corrections and changes to my essay.	3	2	3	5	

Table S.4

Jane's Students' Responses to Questions 1-17[a]

Generally, I learn most about how to improve my essay when my instructor:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Skipped
1. Offers advice on vocabulary	2	5	3		
2. Offers advice on the introduction and conclusion.	6	3	1		
3. Offers advice on the thesis statement and topic sentences.	5	5			
4. Offers advice on support given to make the point.	1	9			
5. Offers advice on the development of ideas in my essay.	4	5	1		
6. Offers advice on he organization of ideas in my essay.	2	6	1		1
7. Refers me to relevant pages in the textbook related to the problems I am experiencing.	1	3	6		
8. Refers me to websites related to the problems I am experiencing.	3	4	3		
9. Refers me to the Writing Center for help in certain areas.	3	5	2		
10. Indicates the presence of grammatical errors.	5	2	3		
11. Corrects grammatical errors.	4	5	1		
12. Indicates the presence of other sentence skill errors such as word choice, word order, spelling.	2	6	2		
13. Corrects other sentence skill errors such as word choice, word order, spelling.	3	3	4		
14. Indicates the presence of run-ons or fragments.	4	4	2		
15. Corrects run-ons or fragments.	4	3	3		
16. Overall, I prefer the instructor to indicate errors or weaknesses and leave me to make the corrections.	2	8			
17. Overall, I prefer the instructor to make corrections and changes to my essay.	2	6	1	1	

[a] n=10

APPENDIX T

A Record of the Number of Feedback Items on Students' Essays by Instructor

Table T.1

Lydia's Feedback Offered on First Drafts of Essay One

Student	Content long	Content short	Form Direct	Form Indirect	Spelling & mechanics	Uncertain/ other
Huda	3	3	12 [1][a]	2	9	6 [1] [a]
Rana	2	4	6	1	13 [3] [a]	8 [1] [a]
Mahar	1	5	4	6	5	0
Abdulla	2	4	11	3	24	5

Note. There were data collection difficulties: Huda's and Rana's essays had no comments on the 2nd drafts supplied, Mahar did not come for an interview, and Abdulla did not supply a 2nd draft.

[a]The numbers in brackets equal how many items or errors persisted in the revised draft.

Table T.2

Kitty's Feedback Offered on First and Second Drafts Essay One

Student	Content long	Content short	Form Direct	Form Indirect	Spelling & mechanics	Ticks
Dima 1	3	4	3	15[1] [a]	6	3
Dima 2		1		7		6
Maitha 1	4	8 [2] [a]	4	11 [3] [a]	2	1
Maitha 2	2	2	1	1		3
Mahmoud 1	5	5	18 [1] [a]	39 [2] [a]	5	
Mahmoud 2	2	1	9	17	11	1

[a]The numbers in brackets equals how many items or errors persisted in the final draft

Table T.3

Kitty's Feedback Offered on First and Second Drafts Essay Two

Student	Content long	Content short	Form Direct	Form Indirect	Spelling & mechanics	Ticks
Dima 1	2	3	1	6[1] [a]		3
Dima 2		1	6	9	1	3
Maitha 1	1			3		
Maitha 2	5	3		1		
Mahmoud 1	1	4	10	6	3	1
Mahmoud 2	2	7 [2] [a]	6	24 [4] [a]	4	
Mahmoud 3	1	8	3	13	2	1

Note. Maitha and Mahmoud rewrote the essay due to unusual problems with first drafts.

[a]The numbers in brackets equals how many items or errors persisted in the final draft

Table T.4

Jane's Feedback Offered on Preliminary, First and Second Drafts Essay One

Student	Content long	Content short	Form Direct	Form Indirect	Spelling & mechanics	Unclear
Leila Prelim	1	4	3	1	4	
Leila 1	5	1	12	1		
Leila 2	3	3	4	5	2	
Najla Prelim	1	1	8	1	1	
Najla 1	5	6	3	1	5	1
Najla 2	6	2	3	7	3	
Suad Prelim	1	3	7		2	
Suad 1	3	5	10	3	3	
Suad 2	4	4	7	3	1	

Table T.5.

Jane's Feedback Offered on First and Second Drafts Essay Two

Student	Content long	Content short	Form Direct	Form Indirect	Spelling & mechanics	Unclear
1 Leila	4	2	4	11	5	
2 Leila	3	2	4	2		
1 Suad	8	5	33	13	4	
2 Suad	2	3	7	1	1	

APPENDIX U

Students' Responses to Questionnaire Three Peer Feedback Received

Table U.1

Lydia's Students' Responses to Questions 1-11 [a]

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Skipped
1. The instructor explained the process clearly.	4	7	1		
2. The peer editing sheet was clear and straightforward.	5	5	1	1	
3. The time allowed for the activity was long enough.	4	5	3		
4. My partner and I managed the time allowed well.	3	4	3	2	
5. My partner took the activity seriously.	3	5	3	1	
6. My partner offered me suggestions on how to overcome weaknesses.		5	4	2	1
7. My partner offered advice in a constructive and helpful way.		6	5	1	
8. As a result of going through the peer editing process, I was able to see weaknesses I had not noticed before.	2	3	5	2	
9. As a result of going through the peer editing process, I understood the changes I could make to improve my essay.	1	5	5	1	
10. My peer editing partner offered a lot of help in terms of content, idea development and organization.		2	8	2	
11. My peer editing partner offered a lot of help in terms of grammar and other sentence skill issues such as word order and word choice.		1	7	4	

[a] n=12

Table U.2

Kitty's Students' Responses to Questions 1-11[a]

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Skipped
1. The instructor explained the process clearly.	7	6	1		
2. The peer editing sheet was clear and straightforward.	3	11			
3. The time allowed for the activity was long enough.	4	5	5		
4. My partner and I managed the time allowed well.	1	8	5		
5. My partner took the activity seriously.	2	9	3		
6. My partner offered me suggestions on how to overcome weaknesses.		10	4		
7. My partner offered advice in a constructive and helpful way.	1	7	6		
8. As a result of going through the peer editing process, I was able to see weaknesses I had not noticed before.	1	7	6		
9. As a result of going through the peer editing process, I understood the changes I could make to improve my essay.	2	4	8		
10. My peer editing partner offered a lot of help in terms of content, idea development and organization.		3	11		
11. My peer editing partner offered a lot of help in terms of grammar and other sentence skill issues such as word order and word choice.		5	7		2

[a] n=14

Table U.3

Jane's Students' Responses to Questions 1-11[a]

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Skipped
1. The instructor explained the process clearly.	8	5			
2. The peer editing sheet was clear and straightforward.	5	8			
3. The time allowed for the activity was long enough.	6	6	1		
4. My partner and I managed the time allowed well.	6	7			
5. My partner took the activity seriously.	9	3	1		
6. My partner offered me suggestions on how to overcome weaknesses.	3	7	2		1
7. My partner offered advice in a constructive and helpful way.	2	11			
8. As a result of going through the peer editing process, I was able to see weaknesses I had not noticed before.	2	8	3		
9. As a result of going through the peer editing process, I understood the changes I could make to improve my essay.	5	7	1		
10. My peer editing partner offered a lot of help in terms of content, idea development and organization.	1	7	5		
11. My peer editing partner offered a lot of help in terms of grammar and other sentence skill issues such as word order and word choice.		2	10	1	

[a] n=13

APPENDIX V

Peer Review Sheet Prompts and Reviewers' Responses

Table V.1.

Lydia's Class

Peer review prompt	Reviewer One	Reviewer Two	Reviewer Three
1. What is your overall impression of this piece of writing?	Good essay, details of the journey, overall interesting	Good but some poor statements & wrong information	Is of a simple structure, quite well-written, & easily comprehended
2. What did you like the most about this piece of writing? Be sure to include why.	She mentioned the difficulties of traveling to Jerusalem nicely – interesting	The paragraph that was talking about friends showed the benefit of friendship	Conclusion extremely well written as it perfectly sums up and ends on a beautiful note
3. Does this piece of writing have a title? If so, record it here. Does it capture your attention or imagination? Does it fit the piece of writing? If there is no title, what would you suggest?	Yes "My journey to Jerusalem" We can assume that it's about traveling to Jerusalem which is interesting Yes it fits this essay	Yes "Me: changing place to place" Fits – not much because doesn't speak about his previous life	"The City of Angels" Fits – yes Alternative – "AI Rehab: A city Unlike Others" - not used.
4. What is the subject of paper his essay? Has the author provided a clear connection between the place or event he or she is discussing and its significance to his or her life? Support your position.	This essay is about the difficulties of traveling to Jerusalem and characteristics of the city. She understood other people and their beliefs	The impact of places on people There is a clear connection betw the place and the events	Influence of a place – AI Rehab Mentioned in introduction and thesis
5. Is there a clear thesis statement? If so, write it here. If not, what thesis statement would you suggest? Where should it be located?	Although he was aware of the difficulties and risks we would go through, but he always said that a to a Jerusalem worth it No comment on it	Implied Suggestion: The influence of place over the person as whole (sic)	Yes "As for me the place that changed me into what I am today was the place where I lived in when I was in Egypt which is AI Rehab city."
6. Is there a topic sentence for each paragraph that clearly point out the author's main idea of the paragraph? If	Yes – I think there is a topic sentences at beginning of each paragraph	Yes	Yes

not, make suggestions.			
7. Is there enough relevant support for each point the author makes? Remember, each essay should have three main ideas and each main idea should be supported by three pieces of evidence. Has the author used specific examples as support?	His essay has 4 body paragraphs. She used specific support	Yes	Used specific examples, however gravely lacking evidence Number of main ideas are appropriate
8. Has the author used descriptive language to involve you in the narrative? Where did the author do this particularly well? Where would (sic) like to have had more descriptive language?	3rd paragraph descriptive language used well 6th paragraph not used well	Yes In 6th paragraph & introduction	Yes Uses descriptive words for the location of Al Rehab. Descriptions of people could have more descriptive language
9. What one change would you suggest to improve this piece of writing? Provide support for your position.	No comment made	Use more involving techniques to capture readers attention Read 2nd paragraph	More support in the place where he describes himself as an environmentalist or be omitted as it sounds cliché. Language can be improved

Table V.2.

Kitty's Class

Peer Review Prompt	Reviewer One
1. Does the introduction interest and orients (sic) you as a reader? At this point, why would you (not) continue reading this essay if you did not have to?	I think that the introduction is interesting because of the "questions" method that is used. Those questions made me wonder more about the essay which encouraged me to go on reading.
2. Write the thesis	Civilization has developed including technology, education, availability of resources and more job opportunities have made life much easier and more sufficient.
3. Explain whether the comparison and contrast rests on a definite basis and is readily and clearly expressed in the essay.	The comparison was really good but I have two things to point out. 1. The first paragraph about technology doesn't really explain the opportunities that he would have now compared to his grandparents days. It is just saying the difference in the way of living. 2. He didn't a lot of transitive words. He repeated some of them a lot.
4. Look at the evidence the writer presents in the essay. Explain how the evidence (examples) supports the writer's view and whether there is a clear link between the evidence and thesis.	The examples are good and logical since he stated things from his own experience as well as from his grandmother's personal life.
5. Explain how the presentation does (not) fit the standard essay format. Is the evidence arranged consistently (point-by-point or block)? If you see a better way to arrange the essay, show the writer.	The presentation was fine. He had three different paragraphs in the body explaining the predictors. And he followed the 'point-by-point method.
6. Look at the sentences within the essay. Do they all represent a clear, complete and developed thought? Within each paragraph, does each sentence develop the same point clearly?	Yes, the thought is clear in the essay except in the second paragraph on technology.
7. What is the outstanding feature of the essay? Explain and give example.	What I liked is it's interesting and makes me go on reacting. Also the points made and supported were good. One thing that he missed out is that he mentioned the 'availability of resources' in the thesis statement as a predictor) but it doesn't have a paragraph for itself. It is kind of included in the technology paragraph.
8. Show the author the most glaring mechanical errors that need revision. However, do not correct the mistakes.	There are a few spelling mistakes.
9. Does the conclusion summarize the main points of the essay? Is it effective?	Yes it kind of does. It states interesting questions and at the end he states his own opinion and point of view.
10. If you were to change one thing on this paper, what would it be?	I would just rethink of the second paragraph and the thesis statement and how it's used.

Table V.3.

Jane's Class

Questions to consider:
Introduction: Does the introduction engage your interest? Does the writer introduce the cartoonist and the topic of the cartoon? Do you understand what the main idea of the cartoon is?
Body Paragraphs: What is the main idea of each paragraph (topic sentence)? Is the paragraph unified; all the sentences work to support the main idea of the paragraph. What does the writer accomplish in each paragraph toward supporting his or her thesis? How can the paragraph be improved? Are there any sentences or ideas you don't understand?
Conclusion: Does the writer end this analysis essay effectively? Do you have a sense of closure – that the cartoon has been fully discussed? If the writer offers his or her opinion on the quality or ramifications of the cartoon, do you feel it is justified?

Peer Review Prompt	Reviewer One	Reviewer Two
1. Read the essay once quickly. What is your overall impression ? (Write one or two sentences here.)	The ideas in this essay are organized and well presented.	The topic is interesting and scientific information were included in a useful way. The ideas and paragraphs are organized.
2. Write at least three useful comments, suggestions, or questions on the essay. Label your comment with the number of the relevant paragraph. Write in complete sentences. Be as specific as possible.	In paragraph I: Good introduction, it is original. In paragraph 3: I like the use of the present tense phrase "As you look at the bench" In paragraph 4: Try not to repeat some of your ideas on obesity mentioned in paragraph 3.	Why did you consider the person in the cartoon a child? 2. I saw that the person's tears represented his grief over what has happened to the world also. 3. I think you have written some solutions or actions we could take to start saving the world.
3. Read the essay a third time. Then write a short note to the author. Tell her/him (1) what you like best about the essay so far and (2) what she/he might do to improve the essay. Be as specific as possible. Your note should be at least one well-organized paragraph (4-6 sentences).	I really like your writing style. Your ideas smoothly lead to each other, which makes your essay quite a strong one. Maybe if you discuss what the "Global Treat Waiting Area" represents, then your cartoon would be fully discussed. Try to indicate where the analogy and the irony in this cartoon lie. If I were you, I would state my opinion on the artistry. Overall, I find your analysis an effective one. Good job!	I liked the way you covered the whole subject, especially how you analyzed the comment "Why" in the cartoon. I think the head of the person "the world" was exaggerated not the palm tree, it was exaggerated to represent the world's huge problems and issues. I believe adding some solutions or actions we can take to save the world would have been helpful.

APPENDIX W

Departmental Responses to Questions on General Trends Emerging from the Study

Responses have been cut and pasted from the emails exactly as they were received including typing errors and the diverse fonts and sizes although comments that may have identified individuals have been deleted. This list of responses maintains participant confidentiality.

1. Students arrive at GSU with an inflated sense of own writing ability due to grades received at school

YES. Definitely some/many GSU students arrive from different schools with the attitude that they are excellent writers, excellent students and they are shocked to discover we are grading them as average 'C' or even less! Many claim they got 100% in high school. This may be, but I think it was based on rote grammar learning and had nothing to do with writing much beyond a sentence or two (my personal opinion).

Yes, but inflated egos can be easily dealt with, I've discovered, if I have to deal with them during a student's first semester. The biggest problem students, as far as I'm concerned, are those whose inflated sense of their own abilities continues to inflate after enrolling at GSU because they receive A's and/or B's in 001 and 101 for doing little more than showing up to class.

Yes and no. I find that students from the American or British high school often complain to me that they've always received 'As' and now don't understand why they are getting 'Cs.' In fact, there is one girl in my 102 class this semester who actually grew up in the States and she was wondering if she could stay in 102 even if she scored well on the placement exam. Actually, she is struggling now to even get a 'B' in the course. However, I find that the students who come from Arab curriculum schools (public schools) have less confidence in their ability. A Bahraini student told me last week that they were learning how to write "apple" and "banana" in high school; before coming to GSU, he never wrote more than a paragraph!
Yes
Yes

Actually, I think for the students who came from the public school system, they feel overwhelmed by the assignments and definitely do NOT have an inflated sense of their writing ability. Of course, I am generalizing, but it has also been my observation that the students who came from the British school systems are more certain about what is good and bad about writing. This "inflated" sense makes it sometimes difficult for them to learn new writing styles, other methods of writing, and accept constructive criticism.

2. Students are often immature in their attitude to study and need preparatory courses

YES. They are immature but mainly many have never had to develop the type of study skills needed for an American university. Many Arabic schools in the region still learn by rote

memorization. Students are rarely asked for their opinions and I find often actually do not have an opinion on many matters!!! They want others to tell them what is important and they do not wish to spend time reading critically to discover what is important themselves. I strongly believe this university could use a "Welcome to University 101" course that teaches them how to be a good students, study skills, time mgt, the works!

This is probably right because it seems to be right everywhere else I have taught—US and Morocco. It does accurately define some students.

Yes

Students at GSU are more immature in their attitude compared to the States. They complain a lot more about work load and sometimes parents are overly involved in the students' lives here. However, I'm not sure a whole course on how to study is really a good use of time. Maybe a day or two at orientation would help.

I wouldn't go so far to say that they need preparatory courses. I think that if teachers take off points for missing books, pens, etc, they learn pretty quickly that they have to come to class prepared. Students at GSU seem to respond better to threats than rewards. I think a full semester course would be a waste of the students' time and money.

3. Some students are not ready to read and write at an academic level despite their TOEFL scores and school grades

YES. Wow, I concur with all your findings. First off, TOEFL is just a grammar exercise. These students are good at memorizing rules. However, they have not done much, if any, reading in high school, or in their personal time. I usually take a poll in the beginning of the semester to find out who reads "for fun" who "has ever read a book", etc. The results are appalling. No one reads for fun and most have made it all the way thru HS without ever having to read one cover to cover. To say they have 'no interest' in reading is an understatement!! Since they don't have strong reading skills when they come in, their writing is also poor. We all teach writing based on the importance of reading, unfortunately, they don't see the connection and the fact that they hardly wrote in any language in HS again puts them at a disadvantage when they get into our courses that are full of writing and reading assignments.

I can definitely agree with this. TOEFL can be prepped for, look-alike cousins can take it; TOEFL is just not predictive of academic preparedness

Yes.

In general, their speaking and listening skills are VERY good; unfortunately, this doesn't really apply to reading and writing. If you ask students to read aloud in class, you will find about 4/19 really struggling. I'd say it's roughly the same statistics for writing ability.

In response to questions 1-3 above I find few differences between what you are saying here and Fr. in the States. My own research @ *** in the '90s found basically the same thing. I don't think preparatory course are necessarily the answer. They are

inexperienced writers and readers. So, they should be doing a lot of both... perhaps much more than they are now ACROSS THE CURRICULUM!
Coming from the American school systems, I am not too familiar with TOEFL. Per my discussion with other colleagues, I have a sense that TOEFL scores are unreliable and do not always reflect the student's true writing ability. If the TOEFL were indeed reliable, why do we still need to give EPT exams?

Feedback/Revision Cycle

4. Students do not put in the necessary effort to produce good initial drafts

In my classes, I see that my students, as a whole, are putting in the necessary time to produce good initial drafts. There drafts are 'long/complete,' and they are prepared to discuss it if necessary.

I see a pattern in many of my classes of a 'quick fix' solution to producing writing which many students feel negates the need for proper drafting of work – the drafting process, particularly in 101 classes, is seen as redundant by many and the first draft is often the final draft

I believe this goes to thinking they are better than they are in written expression and not recognizing the need for developing a writing process.

Initial drafts are definitely a problem. I want to get them into the idea of thinking through ideas so I don't put pg./wd. Counts on drafts, but then you get the weak paragraph for the 2-5 pg. paper... I've had some success this semester with giving a percentage of the whole paper to the drafts so I'll let you know how that goes if you like...

No, students seem to put very little effort into initial drafts. I just heard from one colleague, my alzheimers, that she gives part of the grade on draft one. She may be on to something. I have been looking at drafts as just that, drafts, works in progress therefore was reluctant to even hazard a guess at a grade, most would be Ds the way they look. But it does seem that might be a way to improve those first drafts. They are often disorganized and full of grammar errors, as though just getting something on paper is enough to meet the requirements.

I agree with this statement to a certain extent. If you grade or give points for initial drafts, they will put more effort. It seems like that is the general attitude here though—no work for nothing.

5. Giving feedback is labor intensive and time consuming

Yes, for me, giving feedback takes a lot of time at first. However, it does get easier.

YES IT IS! I have developed two ways to try and alleviate some of the time issues here – 1) first I have a feedback form which is stapled to every assignment that allows for focused written feedback without the need to scrawl all over the paper; 2) I use digital feedback through the use of a voice recorder that I then save as mp3 files and email to individual students. The beauty of this is that it can easily be done in the car, or garden.

I only occasionally see any benefit from the effort. If students read and write, their ability to express themselves in writing improves. I'm not convinced the feedback matters.

It IS time-consuming and of course there are always the writers who do things that just won't fit a category on your excellent and well-thought out rubric. I find that they actually prefer papers to be written up rather than get review sheets around these parts.

Labor intensive is an understatement. As we apparently are the only people in CAS teaching 4 classes, aside from English this particular year (people left), we are way overloaded in our attempts to give any feedback that is constructive. Sometimes I forgo some of the grammar, just circle it and let them decide the problem, so I can focus on content and organization. There just get to be too many to attempt to correct everything.

For our department, given our workload, no doubt about it! It's exhausting to read so many bad papers!

6. Students don't make much use of the written feedback instructors offer

In my classes, all of them, students use a folder to help them with their work. On one part of the folder, students are to list problems that they have encountered through the editing phase of their paper and from my grading. When students write their next paper, they are to check this part of their folder and not make the same mistakes, again. If the same mistakes are made, I count off dearly. So, they have make a list of points that their peers and I found through the phases of writing.

True, I have no real solution to this other than have very specific feedback and target areas for the writing

Absolutely true.

I really don't think they look too much at the feedback. In fact, with these last set of midterms, I posted the grade but didn't return the midterm. I invited students to drop by office hours so I could give them one to one feedback on their marks. So far, only one student out of 72 asked me about his grade. I know this is a bit different than written feedback—with written feedback, I have maybe two more students per set of essays ask me what I meant by a certain comment. Per our previous conversation in the last faculty development committee, the difference between written feedback and using a rubric may be minimal.

Yes, this has to be the number-one peeve around here. All that whining and did they even bother to look at the comments? Again, a quick question-and-answer session when they conference with you on the comments you made to the draft works wonders I find – but it's all so Gestapo...

True. Not many pay close attention to our comments. I have even had some/many where they don't even bother making some minor corrections, such as "word choice" "unclear" etc. They don't even bother to change,

fix, or do anything. So if they are unwilling to make those little changes, it becomes even more difficult for them to get around to "expand on this idea" etc.

7. Students do not do the amount or type of revision instructors' anticipate their feedback will encourage.

Certainly, there are students who do not do what is expected but for the majority, I have students clarifying with me my notes to them via email and face-to-face to write the best paper possible.

In all but a few vey good students, revision seems to be correcting spelling and formattin errors with little regard for content

True, and I find this one particularly odd. Initially, I thought it must be my particular brand of feedback, which I think is partially true but this was not my experience in the states and that makes me wonder if it is the students' lack of English proficiency is responsible, at least for part of this.

This one is a little trickier. I find they expect feedback to be like spoon-feeding or a magic wand that will turn anything into an 'A' and let them do it constantly.

They don't really put in much effort despite the hours of feedback we write on papers. They seem to think a few grammar changes and they will be ready for an A. Unfortunately, they also are of the belief that if I have not made many changes then they must have produced an A paper. Therefore we get stuck in a cycle where we have to mark and make a lot of comments in order for them not to feel PERFECT. Yet, when we do make many comments they choose to ignore them!

This depends on the type of feedback. I think oral feedback is much more effective. I conference with students for one set of essays and I noticed that their revisions reflect my commentary much more than when I just write on their papers.

Students' Views and Wants in Terms of Feedback

8. Students report that they do appreciate the process approach and multiple drafts

More than not. I have asked this question to my students and most reported that they did appreciate this process as they were able to read how others wrote and learned of new vocabulary. The ones that did not said this because they were concerned that they did not trust their peers comments.

I cannot say 'yes' to this. Mine want the feedback, but they don't seem to think the feedback I give is much more than correct the grammar. I write long informational bits at the end about: lacking clarity, get focused, etc. Next to paragraphs I write "where is the topic sentence?" etc. But many don't seem to understand the feedback.

I haven't really discussed whether or not students prefer the process approach and multiple drafts to a more final product approach. I think GSU students are not really aware of other approaches so they take for granted the process approach and tend to

think that it is more time consuming and "busy work" than anything else. Basically, I don't think that students have the metacognition to truly be appreciative.

9. Students report favorably on the feedback/revision cycle in contrast to what they experienced at school.

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Don't know. Can't say that we have discussed this. Most of mine never
wrote at school, and those that did claim they are "A" students.
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Although, many students are new to peer review, they are familiar with the revision cycle to a certain extent. I really can only think of one student who mentioned to me that he has never turned in drafts and participated in peer reviews.

10. Students want more feedback

Hum. I don't know about this. I tend to correct a lot of my students' errors which is why they cannot re-write things for a better grade.

```
Not that they have indicated. The dedicated ones will come up after
receiving a draft and ask if there is more I can tell them to help
them with their paper. But those are usually about 3-4 in each class.
The others don't seem to notice.
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I don't think students care one way or another if you use a rubric or if you give lots of written feedback in the form of comments. When I was an undergraduate student, I hardly ever read my teacher's comments. I'd say even in grad school, I wouldn't always read my professor's comments. Students who are really concerned with their writing will generally come into your office hours before the final draft is turned in anyway and I think that this type of one-on-one, face-to-face feedback is more effective.

This semester, I did the portfolios and the students' letters of reflection were all banal…much like writing teacher's, especially those with heavy workloads, written comments.

11. More particularly, students want more **specific** feedback

I give this in written and/or verbal form. I have noticed they some, at times, cannot read or hear as they ask the same questions over and over.

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Yes, those that do ask for more would like it to be more specific. If
I only indicate grammar, because they actually did a good job, they
want to know what else they can do.
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A few students want more specific feedback, but short of writing their essays for them, this can be a difficult feat because there is only a certain extent to which the feedback can be specific.

12. Students find it difficult to respond to general feedback such as "rephrase" "awkward"

I would have to say, yes. Some just don't realize it. However, the use of the folder in my classes does help to eliminate this 'problem' or more so, it puts it back in the students lamp and takes it off of the teacher.

No. However, sometimes students want the instructor to revise the draft instead of revising it themselves. They may repeatedly ask what is to be done if only to get the instructor to correct the sentence.

It may be that they have trouble with the phrases. However, at the beginning of the semester we go over all the terms I will use on their papers. Of course, the beginning of the term and the day they get back their first draft are like two different years for them!!!

Not at all. I think that students find this type of feedback equally helpful. Again, writing teacher's should not give such specific feedback to the student so that their job of figuring out the process for themselves is done for them.

Grammar Feedback

13. In terms of grammar, should we give direct feedback (make the changes) or indirect feedback (underlining or coding symbols), or does it matter?

I would say that this depends on the professor and how s/he wants to do it. Yes, it does matter as without good grammar being written and explained, we have chaos.

Over the years I've gone from marking and correcting every mistake on every paper to now focusing on content based rubrics because in my experience (and lots of other studies as well) students don't read comments or corrections. With a rubric, they know exactly what's required of them and whether or not they've achieved it. At some point they have to become responsible for their own mistakes and it shouldn't be our job to "correct" them. My opinion, at least.

I tend to give directed feedback on persistant issues that arise or patterns that I see regarding useage of particular grammar elements

I tell the students I am not their editor and that I will not mark their mistakes unless it is something persistently annoying within the text. However, I will take off points from their rubric if their final draft is not free of grammar mistakes or errors.

14. Should we give little or no grammar feedback?

Actually, I've had experience teaching 100-400 level classes and the standard approach of acting as an editor for students just doesn't work. I've come to believe that we have to put the responsibility onto them to improve things like grammar and spelling and if they don't want to do the work, well, their grade suffers. I've taught plenty of 2nd and 3rd language learners (also taught ESL for 5 years) and giving them Murphy's grammar book helps them much more than circling something and writing "watch comma splice." I often think we do all that to justify the grade we're giving.

Give grammar feedback. The way and amount depends on the professor. I, as you know, give direct feedback so that they can place it in their folder for future reference.

I give little unless there are patterns or similar problems arising within a group

I don't think it is our job to do this. They should already be past the level of needed grammar instruction.

Content Feedback

15. Should we restrict our feedback to content?

NO. I think we need tio tackle content as the primary facot and use the content of the work to examine issues of grammar/punctuation/spelling/formatting etc etc

No, organization is important too. However, perhaps that is included in content. Then, yes.

16. Is it possible to be more specific in terms of content feedback and if not what are the limiting factors?

I find it much easuer to deal with content in detail and specifically and use this as a vehicle to tackle the nuts and bolts of the writing – but this may stem from my background as a teacher of English and literature as I do not have a language / TEFL background – I was trained and worked in schools where the holiostic approach to english was favoured, ie, it is not so much how they write but what they write and how they express their ideas.

When there is a logical fallacy, yes, you can be specific in why the content is wrong. Or, if the writer has contradictory statements, does not cite, etc. I would include this as specific content feedback.

Other Issues

17. Classroom instruction may be more influential in terms of encouraging students to revise essays than written feedback

Do you mean peer review? If so, yes. Otherwise I've found that talking about common errors (subject-verb) for eg. simply does not translate to their pages, teacher☺

Not necessarily. Classroom instruction focuses on general feedback, but written feedback should be tailored to the writer's specific weaknesses and offer more practical constructive suggestions.

I do think, however, that one-on-one feedback in conferences is probably the most influential.

Perhaps. Again, I don't spend lots of time on this in the classroom, as I have to return their papers. But I do hold up some examples for them on occasion, examples of problems with subj/verb agreement, other grammar issues, etc. Actually this has just given me an idea of using a classroom session to let them revise on their own with me standing by. I know some of our colleagues do this. However, I will get the whiners who only work on a computer and refuse to make changes in the classroom. If I give them the option to bring in their computers it may help, but many forget!

I have found here that students generally prefer the personal approach to revision of work, although they often seek info on a one-to-one basis rather than in the forum of the full class. The written feedback I give seems to be either misinterpreted by the students or ignored as they just come and ask questons – my latest gimmick / strategy is the use of audio recordings to give feedback which are emailed to students as mp3 files to their email addresses – this I find has gone down well and is more useful as it allows me to say a lot more in a short period of time.

18. Students don't take WRI 101 seriously and focus more on majors

--Absolutely! And what about 102?

True, but you could say the very same about WRI 102. And if more students received C's, D's and F's in 101 and 102, they would probably take the courses more seriously. But 101 and 102 have a reputation at GSU as being easy to pass with little effort--if the student chooses the instructor carefully.

Definitely. They do not seem to see it as something that helps throughout their GSU career, but something they must just get thru. Rather how we language people felt about math and science when we were undergrads. But they continually have the nerve to come out and say things that insinuate, rather boldly, that they have other midterms and other assignments that need to be turned in and Writing will just have to wait. Such nerve!

Yes, yes and yes!! Also I find this with 102 as well – i am fed up listenting to excuses for missed classes and late work because professor so and so in engineering has given a test this week or there is a business midterm due that is far more important – i do think writing studies is not taken seriosuly by the vast majority of the students i teach

19. The above statement may be due to lack of need to write across the curriculum

I haven't been here long enough to speak to that definitively… but a straw poll in my classes confirms that they do NOT do a lot of early writing, later on, courses may require reports or projects that entail writing, but by then they've probably forgotten anything we've said anyway.

I do not think that the statement is completely true; there is a meager need for writing across the curriculum in this institution! Most of the freshmen have to produce technical writing for their labs, or some of them have to write synthesis reports for their engineering classes. I know that from my students in 001. Of course, writing across the curriculum occurs later for them at the end of their first year. Yet, the problem for these students is their inability of knowledge transfer; they fail in transferring what they learned in their writing classes to their other classes as they tend to think of the two classes as two separate discourse communities. As you know, cognitive research, in writing, exhausted the issue of knowledge transfer, and so far there is not any concrete proposal to overcome this aside from the deconstruction of writing programs to incorporate more WAC courses.
Therefore, I think that your statement about the lack of seriousness towards 101 is quiet right as the students feel its futility as it does not have any developmental value for them for their inability of building , or transferring, knowledge from it. WRI101 is not like Math 101 where

Math 101 is a foundation course that they need to understand and enroll in other sequential classes.
I guess that the third statement should be about the students' lack of understanding of the requirements or the conventions of writing across the curriculum, which leads to your fourth point about the institutional limits. Many of these problems can be evaded if there was a structured writing program that is unorthodox in its dealing with writing across the curriculum matters. As you know, this school is highly technical; there are two or three programs in humanities while the rest are either engineering or engineering. Our own instruction can incorporate more technical or scientific writing that suits first year students. This solution may help the students in understanding the different discourse communities around them, and ,most importantly, start participating in them.

As I said above, I think it's because too many teachers give all their students A's and B's. How do you expect students to take a course seriously if failing isn't even possible?

If students sail through 101 without learning anything but still receive A's, what motivation do they have to take the course seriously?

I have a student in 102 this semester who belongs in the IEP, but she got A's in 100 and 101 even though she told me she learned nothing in the courses, didn't deserve the grades and knows next to nothing about writing, reading and grammar.

Other students in this predicament usually drop my course. It's my fault--not theirs--that they're receiving C's, D's and F's for the first time. This girl, to her credit, is mature enough to acknowledge that she needs to learn and is sticking out the semester with me. She's also making a huge effort--becoming a regular visitor at the writing center and during my office hours.

But the lack of emphasis on writing at GSU clearly plays a role, too. Last week, I spoke with a former 102 student who complained that her 203 class was a joke--her teacher was having all students do a fill-in-the-blank research paper...

I totally agree. If they ever used what we taught them often during their years at GSU it would have some lasting effect. But we all know that "across the curriculum" is a catchy phrase that no one pays the slightest bit of attention to. (don't quote me ☺) Our students, who hear from friends, all know that writing disappears pretty much after our courses. So they have no worries if they forget what a thesis statement is.

I am not sure about the lack of need to write in other subject areas, but i do think that the writing element is not as valued in some fields, and therefore the students do not see any worth in what they are asked to do – I feel that a wider cross-campus writing strategy is needed to link writing to other subjects to make the courses seem relevant to the students

20. Are there other institutional issues that limit what we can do?

--Let me count the ways…☺

Too many to list here...

Where should I begin?? There is not enough time in a day or room in this email.

- Class sizes, overwhelming.
- No importance given to writing across the curriculum statement
- Little respect given to DWS and our role by admin and other colleges/schools
- The Admin needs to view us more than a service dept, as it does most of CAS

Only being able to offer 3 courses in the department is a huge limiting factor and one that does not allow the department to work to faculty strengths and interests and develop new and exciting courses for the students – the department can be viewed as a writing mill, churning out students with a required course and that be it – if there were scope to broaden the remit of the department and faculty, to offer new courses that allow students to grow as writers and focus on other issues (such as writing as social practice etc) then the students may view the department and courses as a route to wider opportunities to write, rather than as 2 or 3 classes that need to be knocked out before the 'real' major work gets underway