
Teachers' and Students' Beliefs About Responding to ESL Writing: A Case Study

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The purpose of this study was to investigate ESL instructors' feedback techniques and the rationales behind these techniques, to explore ESL students' beliefs about the relative effectiveness of various types of feedback, and to compare students' beliefs with those of their instructors. A university-level ESL instructor and two of her students participated in this case study. Data were collected by think-aloud protocols and semistructured interviews, and results revealed four major categories: (a) types of feedback the instructor emphasized, (b) the instructor's beliefs about teaching writing, (c) students' beliefs about learning to write, and (d) students' views on the effectiveness of teachers' feedback strategies. Because some of the instructor's beliefs seemed to conflict with her students' views, it was concluded that teachers should make an effort to explore their students' beliefs about writing, feedback, and error correction and to try to bridge any gap between their own and their students' expectations.

Cette étude avait trois objectifs : (a) examiner les techniques en rétroaction des enseignants d'ALS et le fondement de celles-ci; (b) fouiller les croyances des étudiants en ALS quant à l'efficacité relative de différentes formes de rétroaction; et (c) comparer les croyances des étudiants à celles de leurs professeurs. Une professeure d'université en ALS et deux de ses étudiants ont participé à cette étude. Les données proviennent de discussions orales et d'entrevues semi-structurées. Quatre grandes catégories se sont dégagées des résultats : (a) le genre de rétroaction que la professeure privilégiait; (b) les croyances de la professeure relatives à l'enseignement de la rédaction; (c) les croyances des étudiants au sujet de l'apprentissage de la rédaction; et (d) l'avis des étudiants quant à l'efficacité des stratégies de rétroaction de la professeure. Puisque certaines des croyances de la professeure semblaient être contraires à celles des étudiants, nous concluons que les enseignants devraient faire un effort pour connaître les croyances de leurs étudiants au sujet de la rédaction, la rétroaction et la correction d'erreurs, pour ensuite essayer de réduire l'écart entre leurs points de vue respectifs.

Responding to students' writing is one of the most controversial topics in second- and foreign-language (SL and FL) instruction and theory. Do students benefit from teachers' corrections and written comments on their writing? If so, what types of feedback are effective? What are students' attitudes toward teacher feedback? Research evidence on the effects of error correction

and feedback on SL and FL students' writing seems to be generally inconclusive. Leki (1990), Huntley (1992), and Ihde (1993) all reach this conclusion based on their respective reviews of the literature on the topic. Controversy especially abounds in the area of explicit error correction, more specifically whether such correction helps SL or FL students improve the accuracy and quality of their writing (Ferris, 1999; Truscott, 1996, 1999). Relevant research generally implies that SL and FL writing teachers should provide feedback on content and organization (Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Huntley, 1992; Kepner, 1991; Sheppard, 1992). However, research on pedagogy shows that teachers' feedback often focuses on form rather than on content (Kassen, 1995). In addition, studies exploring second-language (L2) students' preferences and reactions to teachers' feedback suggest that surface-level correction is precisely the kind of feedback these students want and expect from their teachers (Diab, 2005; Enginarlar, 1993; Ferris, 1995; Leki, 1991; Radecki & Swales, 1988; Saito, 1994; Schulz, 1996, 2001). It is important that the few studies that have examined both teachers' and students' beliefs about error correction and feedback reveal several discrepancies in beliefs between the two groups (Diab, in press; Schulz, 1996, 2001), which obviously may hinder successful language teaching and learning.

In this article I present the findings of a case study aimed at investigating how university English-as-a-second-language (ESL) instructors respond to students' writing and how ESL students react to various kinds of teachers' feedback on their writing. More specifically, the study attempted to explore the following questions. First, what are university ESL instructors' feedback techniques? Do they attend to content-level issues and minimize error correction as most research suggests they should? Second, what are ESL instructors' rationales behind their feedback techniques? Third, what are university ESL students' beliefs about error correction, the relative effectiveness of various kinds of feedback to their writing, and learning to write? Finally, do ESL students' beliefs about what constitutes effective teacher feedback to their writing generally correspond to their instructors' beliefs?

Review of the Literature

Relevant research suggests that correction of surface-level errors in L2 classes seems to be generally ineffective. In an early study, Semke (1984) found that corrections did not increase students' writing accuracy, fluency, or general language proficiency. Similarly, Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986) argued that students' writing improvement was independent of type of feedback and that direct correction of surface-level errors was not worth the instructor's time and effort even if students claimed to need it. Kepner (1991) also concluded that error correction neither helped students to avoid surface-level errors nor facilitated the production of higher-level writing; and Sheppard (1992) found that responding to content resulted in improvement in

grammatical accuracy, whereas responding to form did not seem to have any effect on students' writing. Moreover, Ihde (1993) found no relationship between type of feedback and students' improved spelling ability; however, he suggested that the results might have been different had the study investigated long-term as well as short-term effects.

One study that contradicts these findings is Ferris and Roberts' (2001) investigation of ESL students' differing abilities to self-edit their texts across various feedback conditions. The authors concluded that less explicit feedback helped students to self-edit just as well as corrections coded by error type. Similarly, Fathman and Whalley (1990) found that both grammar and content feedback positively affected students' rewriting. However, one needs to keep in mind that the study reported on the short-term effects of the treatment only. Moreover, as Truscott (1996) pointed out, Fathman and Whalley's study revealed that students' compositions would improve when teachers helped them with these particular compositions, but it did not actually show that the students would be better writers in the future because of this help.

In a more recent study, Ashwell (2000) found that content feedback followed by form feedback did not produce significantly different results from other patterns in terms of improvement in accuracy or content. In addition, findings revealed that some students may have relied on form feedback more than content feedback. These results are tentative, however, due to several weaknesses in the research design such as small sample size, small size of treatment groups, and the interrater reliability figures for content scorers. Moreover, Yates and Kenkel (2002) emphasized the importance of identifying features of the interlanguage constructions occurring in L2 texts. Unlike Zamel (1985), Yates and Kenkel claimed that L2 writing instruction could not be separated from L2 language instruction and, therefore, that L2 writing instructors should emphasize surface-level corrections.

Nevertheless, both Huntley (1992) and Truscott (1996), based on their respective reviews of the literature, argued that correction of surface-level errors was generally ineffective. Truscott went even farther to conclude that this type of correction should be abandoned because it can have harmful effects. Ferris (1999), however, evaluated Truscott's case and concluded that his argument was too strong. In an ongoing debate, Truscott (1999) responded to Ferris by arguing that the criticisms she presented are unfounded and selective. Thus although many experts in the field agree that correction of surface-level errors and grammar correction in SL writing classes seems to be generally ineffective, controversy still abounds. In addition, according to AlJaafreh and Lantolf (1994), feedback should be provided in accordance with the stage of the learner's linguistic development; the effectiveness of various types of error correction and feedback cannot be determined without considering the particular learner's developmental level and

interactions with other learners and the teacher. Moreover, Ferris, Pezone, Tade, and Tinti (1997), based on their examination of over 1,500 ESL teachers' comments on students' writing, argued that descriptions of teachers' feedback on student writing must go beyond discussion of responding to *content* or *form* and that the form of teachers' commentary can greatly differ depending on the type of writing being considered, the time during the semester at which the feedback is given, and the abilities and personalities of the students.

Despite the research evidence above pointing to the futility of error correction, studies investigating L2 students' preferences and reactions to feedback generally suggest that surface-level correction is precisely the type of feedback these students want and expect. For example, Radecki and Swales (1988) found that ESL teachers might lose their credibility among their students if they did not correct all surface errors. Similarly, Leki (1991) found that ESL students equated good writing in English with error-free writing and that they expected and wanted all errors in their written work to be corrected. In addition, based on their respective surveys of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) students' attitudes toward feedback techniques, Enginarlar (1993) and Diab (2005) concluded that students were concerned with accuracy and perceived attention to linguistic errors as effective feedback from teachers. Saito (1994) and Ferris (1995) reached similar conclusions based on their respective surveys of students' attitudes toward feedback in an ESL context. Thus L2 writing teachers are faced with the dilemma of whether they should correct students' surface errors or not, as students seem to expect this kind of correction although research evidence generally suggests that such feedback is ineffective.

Finally, regarding comparisons between students' and teachers' beliefs about error correction and feedback to writing, Schulz (1996) found that FL students favored a focus on form, but some discrepancies appeared in teachers' beliefs and in a comparison of students' and teachers' beliefs. A follow-up study (Schulz, 2001) compared the 1996 data with those elicited from Colombian FL students and teachers and revealed relatively high agreements on most questions between students as a group and teachers as a group across cultures. However, several differences were again evident between students' and teachers' beliefs in each culture. Diab (in press) also found various discrepancies between EFL instructors' and students' preferences for error correction and paper-marking techniques. Such differences between students' and teachers' expectations and views about feedback may obviously be a cause of miscommunication and unsuccessful teaching and learning; therefore, it may be especially important to explore further this relatively unexamined area of research in L2 writing.

Method

Participants

An ESL instructor and two of her students who were enrolled in a large state university volunteered to participate in the study. The instructor, a native speaker of English, is a 27-year-old woman with five years of teaching experience and a master's degree in education with a specialization in teaching English as a second language. The two student participants in the study were 19-year-old female international undergraduate students enrolled in the instructor's ESL class. At their own request, aliases are used: Vivian and Zeina, whose native languages are Portuguese and Arabic respectively.

Data Collection

The instructor was asked to mark a set of papers, rough drafts of an essay assignment, as she normally would and to think aloud as she marked two randomly chosen papers. These think-aloud protocols were audiotaped and later transcribed. Moreover, a follow-up semistructured interview, which lasted about an hour, was held with the instructor two days after the marking task to explore her preferences for feedback techniques and the rationale behind her feedback strategies. The questions used as prompts for the teacher interview are listed in Appendix A. Finally, semistructured interviews lasting about 25 minutes each were conducted with two students in the instructor's class to examine their beliefs about learning to write and their perspectives on what kind of feedback they considered beneficial. The questions used as prompts for the student interviews appear in Appendix B. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

The think-aloud protocols and interview transcripts were analyzed by developing coding strategies and identifying concepts and categories in the data. The two initial coding categories developed were (a) writing areas on which the instructor focused when correcting papers, and (b) beliefs the instructor and students seemed to hold about certain aspects of learning and teaching writing, including views on various feedback techniques and methods. After these two preliminary categories were established, the transcripts were examined again in order to identify more categories or subcategories. Finally, a set of codes was established, and the data were scrutinized and labeled; each unit of data, often paragraphs but sometimes single sentences, was assigned one or more codes.

Results

The results of the data analysis revealed four major categories: (a) types of feedback the instructor emphasized; (b) the instructor's beliefs about teach-

ing writing; (c) students' beliefs about learning to write, and finally (d) students' views on teachers' feedback strategies. Each of these major categories includes several subcategories, all of which are discussed below. As an overview of the focus of the teacher's comments in the think-aloud protocol, Table 1 summarizes the frequencies of some key words in various categories and subcategories.

Types of Feedback the Instructor Emphasized

Feedback on grammar/sentence-level issues

The instructor seemed to focus on grammar issues in general including punctuation, spelling, and clarity. As to direct error correction, the instructor seemed to be aware that such correction was not desirable. For example, in the think-aloud protocol, the instructor states: *I try not to correct them [grammar errors] myself, but point out the mistake*, but she also acknowledged that this is difficult to do.

I'm trying not to correct the mistakes, as I mentioned earlier, but I think it's difficult to do that. Here, I just corrected the comma splice myself ... OK, I'm going to write down "that's one way of revising it. You can revise it in different ways, but make sure you get rid of the comma splice."

Thus the instructor is aware that such correction should be avoided, but she also seems to believe that grammatical errors should at least be pointed out to the student, if not corrected. The following excerpt from the interview confirms the instructor's view of students' need for grammar correction,

Table 1
Think-Aloud Data: Frequencies of Key Words in Various Categories

<i>Category</i>	<i>Word</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
The subjectivity of grading	Grade(s)	7
Feedback on grammar/ sentence-level issues	Grammar	7
Feedback on grammar/ sentence-level issues	Spelling	2
Feedback on grammar/ sentence-level issues	Tense	2
Feedback on grammar/ sentence-level issues	Punctuation	1
Feedback on content-level issues	Development	2
Feedback on content-level issues	Thesis statement	2
Feedback on content-level issues	Consistency	2
Feedback on content-level issues	Organization	2
Feedback on content-level issues	Content/ideas	0
"Less traditional" types of feedback	Checklist(s)	2
"Less traditional" types of feedback	Conference(s)	2

which can obviously have profound effects on how an instructor provides feedback.

I don't think students really benefit from grammar correction ... most of the current research shows that they don't, but I think it's important, as a "security blanket." Students need to see those red marks on their papers ... If they get a blank one [with no corrections], they wouldn't know how to start revising ... They wouldn't know what to do.

The term *security blanket* is particularly interesting in describing how students view error correction. This instructor believes that although error correction probably does not improve students' writing, it should nevertheless be provided because students expect it.

Feedback on content-level issues

In addition to grammar and sentence-level feedback, the instructor responded to content-level issues such as structure and organization, development, logic and consistency, attention to audience, and focus or thesis statement, all of which were included in the instructor's checklist as shown in the following excerpt from the think-aloud protocol.

Well, the logic seems sound and the paper is consistent in general ... there could be more support for this point though. It could be developed more I guess ... I'm writing down "develop this point, elaborate here if you can" ... what I need to do now is go over my checklist, let's see, OK, the most important things are ... thesis statement, focus, the introduction and conclusion paragraphs, attention to audience, logic and consistency ... OK, mostly satisfactory, logic is good, also organization in general.

Similarly, the follow-up interview with the instructor revealed that she believes that such feedback to content is essential in responding to ESL writing.

I really think students need a lot of feedback about organization and structure ... comments about developing their ideas are very important. Sometimes a student would have a wonderful idea, but they wouldn't know what to do with it, how to develop it.

Less traditional types of feedback

The instructor emphasized conferences and peer reviews as useful feedback methods. As revealed in the interview, she believes that such feedback techniques can be important.

I also like to have conferences with students, right after I correct their rough draft. It's extremely beneficial to both [instructor and students] I think, because we can get to know what the student meant by a certain

phrase, a certain idea, and so on ... Also, if they don't understand my comments, I can explain to them face-to-face. Conferences are time-consuming, but they're worth the time and effort. Also, we have peer reviews, which give students a chance to see how others tackled the same assignment. Also, they get a chance to respond to a draft, of course.

Data from the think-aloud protocol corroborate the instructor's belief concerning the effectiveness of conferences as feedback techniques.

Also, I have conferences with students after the rough draft. Well, not for every paper but for a few, and I think conferences help. You get to know what the student really meant in certain parts of the paper, and of course the student will be able to ask you about your feedback, what you meant by a certain comment and so on ... It's beneficial all around.

In addition, the instructor emphasized the use of checklists as especially effective, particularly for the purpose of reducing the subjectivity in grading, as revealed in the following excerpt from the interview.

I give them [the students] the checklists before they write the drafts, because I think it helps them to see what they need to do ... For me, it helps because it makes the grading process easier, sort of ... it can be very holistic and then there's the danger of being subjective. If I'm looking at that checklist as I'm correcting, then it makes it easier a little bit ... I always give guidelines to students, specific guidelines concerning the assignments, and the checklist is made up of these points ... so I think that's very helpful, for both the instructor and the students. I really believe all writing instructors should use some sort of checklist.

Thus the instructor emphasized conferences, peer reviews, and the use of checklists as effective feedback methods supplementary to written comments on students' papers.

Feedback on a work in progress versus feedback on a final draft

Not surprisingly, the instructor seemed to differentiate between providing feedback on a work in progress or rough draft and providing feedback on a final draft. As revealed in the think-aloud protocol during which the instructor was marking rough drafts, she does not provide a grade on such drafts. She also states that she tends to emphasize students' effort more heavily when correcting a final draft than a work in progress.

Since this is the first draft, I won't put a grade, but for my own use, I always put a general grade for the first draft ... to refer to it later when I'm correcting the final draft. Actually, for the final draft I mostly look for the revisions, if the student revises well, takes all my comments into

consideration and so on. I think that's very important, how much effort the student puts into the revision stage.

As shown in the above passage, this instructor views students' effort as particularly important when correcting a final draft as opposed to a work in progress because a final draft reveals how much effort the student has shown in revising and following the instructor's comments and feedback provided on earlier drafts. This point was corroborated in the follow-up interview.

I don't have as many comments and feedback on the final draft as I do on rough drafts. I try to focus on how much effort the student shows when I correct a final draft. Did the student follow my comments and take the suggestions I provided into consideration ... Also, if they took the peer reviews into consideration.

Thus the instructor identified several differences between correcting and providing feedback on a work in progress and doing so on a final draft.

The Instructor's Attitudes Toward and Beliefs About Teaching Writing

Frustrations and joys of teaching writing

In the interview the instructor revealed some dissatisfaction with teaching writing: "Correcting papers is so time-consuming ... It takes one whole night to correct a set of 15 papers. Teaching writing is one of the most thankless jobs one can have." On the other hand, she also revealed some positive aspects.

I do feel good when I see an improvement ... I taught the "semicolon however/moreover comma" construction recently and then I suddenly started seeing it in students' papers ... used correctly too! That kind of thing makes it all worthwhile ... Also, when you correct something or point out a certain problem to a student and then they take care of it, you don't notice it in their writing later, that's also wonderful.

As shown in the above excerpts, the instructor acknowledged both positive and negative aspects of teaching writing. Because teachers' feelings and attitudes about teaching are important factors to take into account, it is worthwhile considering such variables that undoubtedly influence how teachers do their jobs.

The subjectivity of grading

The instructor tends to believe that grading is important to students, as revealed in the following passage from the think-aloud protocols.

I would really like to think that students do care about writing or improving their language per se, but I think it's safe to assume that most students care a lot about grades ... I guess they [students] do pay atten-

tion to the ones [comments] on the rough draft at least, since they need to follow those comments in order to improve the paper and more importantly the grade.

As mentioned above, such beliefs about students' views would undoubtedly influence how instructors provide feedback. For example, at least partly because of her beliefs about students' views on grading, this instructor tends to provide less feedback on final drafts than on rough drafts. Moreover, in the interview the instructor revealed a fear of being subjective or biased when grading papers.

The subjectivity of it, that always scares me. I'd like to think that I'm as objective as I can be, but when I correct a paper, I know the student, I know his or her level let's say, and I mean, let's face it, correcting papers can be very subjective!

As mentioned above, this instructor uses checklists as one technique that might reduce this kind of subjectivity in correcting papers.

Students' Beliefs About Learning to Write

Writing as an innate ability versus effort or practice

Both students seemed to believe that effort and practice are important in learning how to write. According to Vivian,

Some people are good at writing, but also practice is important. I feel that my writing become better when I practice. If I stop writing in English for a while, then it's hard to go back I think. So yes, I think, uh, both are important.

Zeina was more adamant that practice is indeed more important than talent:

No, it [writing]'s not talent! I think we should practice more and more to become better ... I know some people think it's a talent or something like that, but I don't think so, or we shouldn't be learning it. No, I definitely think practice is very important.

An obvious implication of this kind of belief is that students who think practice will help them improve will practice and put in much effort, whereas those who believe it is primarily a talent would be less likely to do so.

Goals for learning writing.

Not surprisingly, both of these university students mentioned academic purposes as the primary goal of learning to write well in English. In addition, Zeina referred to the importance of English as an international language and consequently the need for non-native speakers of English to become fluent speakers and writers of the language.

Differences between writing in the native language versus writing in English

An interesting finding was that both students strongly believed that there are differences between writing in their native languages and writing in English, and they seemed to be aware of the possible influence that their mother tongue might have on their learning English. According to Vivian,

It's easier to write in Portuguese, of course, because it's my language, but also in Portuguese we don't get to the point quickly, you know? It's hard for me to write good papers in English. Teachers write to me about getting to the point and not giving too much information in the beginning.

Clearly Vivian is aware that her native language interferes with her learning to write well in English. Moreover, Zeina stated,

Arabic is not the same at all like we write in English ... I always get "conclusion should be revised; doesn't summarize the paper" and I get very frustrated. When we write in Arabic, we never really conclude. I don't know if you know what I mean, but I think it's stupid, or silly maybe, to just say again what you said in the paper. Do you know what I mean? So maybe teachers should remember all this when they want us to learn how to write conclusions.

Asked whether she thought teachers should take each student's background into consideration, Zeina replied,

I know it sounds, well, too difficult maybe, but yes, I think they should. I don't mean that my teacher should know all about Arabic, for example! But if she knows that I have certain problems because of Arabic, that would help, you know?

Thus both students revealed an understanding and awareness of the influence and possible interference of their native languages on their learning to write well in English. Such insights on the part of ESL learners are obviously worth looking into.

Students' Views on Error Correction and Feedback Strategies

Much in accordance with the instructor's expectations and beliefs about ESL students, both students emphasized the importance of feedback and comments in general and the relevance of grammar and error correction in particular.

Importance of teachers' comments

Both students acknowledged that teachers' comments are essential. According to Vivian, "I read the comments at the end of the paper first, because they are the most important, but also all the comments are important I think."

Moreover, Zeina said, "The more comments I see the more it's useful to me ... I want to see them [comments] because I want to see what I should do, what I'm doing wrong."

Feedback on a work in progress versus feedback on a final draft

Vivian did make the distinction between looking at feedback on a rough draft and looking at it on a final paper. However, she also claimed to read any comments on final drafts: "Oh, of course on the rough draft it [feedback]'s more important, but I also read any notes [comments] on the final paper too." Zeina, however, did not seem to meet the instructor's expectations by saying that she gave as much importance to comments on final drafts as to those on a work in progress: "I like to read comments always [even on final drafts]. Maybe some students don't care about notes on final papers but I like to read them. I want to become better, you know?"

The need for error correction

In accordance with the instructor's belief about ESL students' need for error and grammar correction, both students revealed that there may indeed be such a need for this "security blanket." Both used the phrase *I want (my/all the) grammar mistakes corrected because I want to become better/it's better*. Such statements are revealing and may help us to understand the expectations and needs of ESL writing students. Zeina said,

I need to see inside the paper what I'm doing wrong and [what I'm doing] right. I want all the grammar mistakes corrected, because it's better I think ... OK, maybe it's frustrating when you see all that writing on your paper, but later when you read it again, you start thinking, oh, OK, now I know I should do this, and that.

Obviously this student clearly believes in the effectiveness of such correction. Moreover, Vivian said directly that she thinks grammar correction does help her to improve: "Yes, I think so [grammar correction does help me improve], I mean, how will I know if I'm doing right or wrong if the teacher doesn't correct the grammar?" Hence the students participating in this study seem to corroborate the general finding that ESL students need grammar correction despite research evidence that argues that such correction is futile.

Discussion and Conclusions

Clearly a description of one ESL teacher's and two students' views cannot be generalized to all ESL instructors and students, and the shortcomings of the self-report measures used in this study such as the ability and willingness of the participants to respond accurately and conscientiously to the interview questions are important to mention. Nevertheless, two main conclusions regarding beliefs about feedback to writing can be drawn based on observa-

tions made in this study. First, although the ESL instructor seemed to agree with the general recommendation that writing teachers provide feedback on content rather than on form and use alternative feedback methods to traditional error correction such as peer reviews and student-teacher conferences, she still recommended using error correction as a “security blanket” for students, an assumption that was shared by the two students who seem to need, or at least think they need, surface-level correction. Thus in line with earlier findings (Diab, 2005; Enginarlar, 1993; Ferris, 1995; Leki, 1991; Radecki & Swales, 1988; Saito, 1994; Schulz, 1996, 2001), the ESL students and instructor who participated in this study seem to agree that surface-level error correction is necessary.

Nevertheless, it is essential to consider whether students who report benefiting from surface-level error correction really need it and improve because of it (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, 1996; Radecki & Swales, 1988). Few research studies have investigated the relationship between students’ preferences for various types of feedback and the improvement and development of their writing ability. Investigations of this type are crucial before any conclusions can be drawn about whether students’ need of the correction of surface-level errors is indicative of the effectiveness of such feedback on the development of their writing skills.

Second, the two students in this study revealed several interesting beliefs about ESL writing such as the influence of their native language on learning how to write in English and the importance of practice and effort as opposed to talent or innate ability. It is essential that instructors become aware of their students’ views on such issues, in addition to their becoming acquainted with students’ specific beliefs about feedback to writing. In this study, although many of the instructor’s beliefs about feedback seemed to correspond with her students’ views, others did not. For example, the teacher admitted minimizing her feedback on final drafts because of her belief that students do not pay as much attention to final drafts as they do to a work in progress. However, one of the students emphasized the importance of receiving comments on a final draft.

Therefore, in line with recommendations made by Schulz (1996, 2001), observations made in this study suggest that teachers should make an effort to explore their students’ beliefs about writing, feedback, and error correction and to try to bridge any gap between their own and their students’ expectations. Teachers are responsible to be aware of their students’ perceptions of what helps them progress and somehow to incorporate these perceptions into their teaching. It is important that some students may hold unrealistic beliefs about writing, usually based on limited knowledge or experience. Such students may simply not have had their preconceptions challenged, so in line with Ashwell (2000) and Ferris et al. (1997), it is strongly recommended that teachers help students understand how feed-

back is intended to affect their writing and why it is given as it is. Otherwise, students may not be able to interpret the teacher's feedback or act on it as the teacher has intended. Therefore, incorporating classroom discussions on error correction, feedback, and writing can be essential in helping the classroom teacher become familiar with her students' beliefs and modifying or reinforcing these beliefs accordingly.

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Appendix A

Prompts for the Teacher Interview


1. How do you feel about teaching ESL writing?
2. What kind(s) of feedback to student writing do you think are important? Why?
3. What kind(s) of feedback to student writing do you think your students believe are important?
4. I've noticed from the think aloud protocols that you use a checklist. Do you always use checklists and how do you think they help?
5. Do you respond differently to rough drafts and to final drafts? Why or why not?
6. What else can you think of concerning teaching ESL writing, responding to students' papers ... ?

Appendix B

Prompts for the Student Interviews

1. What are your goals in learning to write in English? What do you hope to achieve?
2. Do you think writing is something some people are good at, or can someone become a better writer by practice?
3. What do you look for when you go over a draft the teacher just gave you back? Describe the process that you go through as you're going over the paper.

4. What kind of feedback/comments from the teacher would you most/least like to see and why?
5. Do you look at rough drafts and final drafts in the same way? Do you focus more on the comments on one than the other? Why or why not?
6. Do you think writing in English is different from writing in your native language? How?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to add about learning to write, your writing class, feedback ... ?



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