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The CATESOL Journal

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8295s25r>

Journal

The CATESOL Journal, 23(1)

ISSN

1535-0517

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Publication Date

2012

DOI

10.5070/B5.36194

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Written Feedback, Student Writing, and Institutional Policies: Implications for Novice Teacher Development

This study analyzes the methods that teachers employ in written feedback to student writing and how the policies of the program and the teachers' embodied histories influence the strategies used. Data were gathered from 2 novice teachers as they taught their first graduate-level ESL writing course and consist of the teachers' feedback in addition to interviews and personal narratives. Participants were educated in the same MA TESOL program and taught the same course; however, striking similarities and differences in their written feedback indicate identity and personal history are as important as program policies in determining the methods and content of the feedback. Implications for novice teacher development are that reflective teaching should include reflections on both beliefs and classroom practices to identify misalignments between the two.

Introduction

Like all texts, teacher feedback is a concrete expression of recognized social purposes ... it is also mediated by the institutions and cultures in which it occurs. Every feedback act carries assumptions about participant relationships and how teachers think these should be structured and negotiated. Our experiences and perceptions as teachers thus influence not only what we choose to focus on but also how we structure our responses.... In giving feedback we simultaneously offer a representation of ourselves as teachers and as individuals, revealing our beliefs about language, learning, writing, and personal relationships. (Hyland & Hyland, 2006, p. 207)

Through many different modalities of discourse we demonstrate for others our positions and identities. From the way we talk to the way we write, discourse is indicative of our identities and those of our audience. Although previous research has focused on policy, identity, or feedback, little attention has been given to how these interact in the context of novice teacher development. As the above quote from Hyland and Hyland (2006) points out,

feedback is fluidly connected to a teacher's beliefs, knowledge, and identity as well as to social and institutional policies. This study aims to address each of these realms through a qualitative analysis of 2 master's students of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (MA TESOL) in their 2nd and final year at the University of California, focusing on their teaching practicum. The novice teachers' written feedback to student writing will be analyzed in relation to the program's policies and to their developing identities. All of these realms—policy, identity, and feedback—are fluidly connected to each other and this fluidity should be better understood to inform language teacher–education programs.

Written feedback to student writing is a unique written dialogue in which the positioning of the student (as learner) and teacher (as expert) is implicit and the corresponding identities are negotiated through successive comments and revisions. Written feedback includes “error correction” and margin and endnotes (see Ferris, 2003, for full definition and description). Additionally, the type of feedback that teachers give is dependent on the type of writing expected in the schools or programs where they teach (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995). Program policies can be both explicit and implicit and connect to feedback regarding how much a student should write and of what genre. For novice teachers, the policies around their education, their emerging identities as teachers, their embodied histories, and institutional policies are additionally influential (Rosowsky, 2006).

Danielowicz (2001) provides a definition of identity from which I will be drawing: “Identity is our understanding of who we are and of who we think other people are” (p. 10). She also sets up a series of oppositions to define the concept further: “Theoretically, the concept of identity involves two notions: similarity and difference. So identities are the ways we relate to and distinguish individuals (and groups) in their social relations with other individuals or groups” (p. 10). She further describes identities as being multiple, conflicting and constantly changing, individual and collective, and often produced or reproduced through discourse and negotiation. Thus, identity connects to both policy and feedback through negotiations of the self and others. Finally, teachers exhibit their identities and negotiate with the policies imposed on them by giving physical form to their practical knowledge in the form of written feedback. The effects between policy, identity, and feedback are circular, fluid, and constantly being reassessed, and so these are the key themes that will be woven throughout this research. It is from these that I will be reflecting on the teacher-education program educating the 2 MA TESOL students.

My specific questions for this research are: To what extent do institutional policies around the assessment of writing influence the methods and content of the feedback? What are the salient features novice teachers choose to provide feedback on and why? What aspects of the novice teachers' embodied history and identity are enacted through their written feedback? To answer these questions, I will draw from current research on identity, writing feedback, and institutional policies as well as an in-depth analysis of written feedback from 2 MA TESOL student teachers teaching their first academic writing course. I am

one of the participants, and a member of my cohort is the other. This reflective act addresses Hirvela and Belcher's (2007) call for more studies that focus on writing teacher education and reflective teaching methods.

Relevant Literature

In this section I will explore the previous research on written feedback and educational policies and weave identity throughout this discourse. Much of the previous research on written feedback has focused on the various methods or forms of the feedback, the effects on the student's learning, or on his or her identity development. However, the reasons teachers choose a particular method are not theorized at all. Additionally, educational policy studies have recently moved from the macro-impact of policies to more localized and everyday interpretations of these policies as well as their effect on educators. Research is overwhelmingly silent, however, on the everyday negotiations between a teacher's identity and program policies.

Written Feedback, Plagiarism, and Appropriation

During the past 10-plus years the usefulness to and effect of feedback on ESL student writing has been debated, particularly as regards error correction. Since Truscott's (1996) article on error correction, and Ferris's rebuttal in 1999, a steady controversy on the effect of error correction has ensued. Truscott (2007) is a staunch believer that it has no positive effect, and in fact, he says that it "has a small negative effect on learners' ability to write accurately" (p. 255). On the other hand, Ferris (2003, 2006), Bitchener (2008), and Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, and Takashima (2008) indicate that error correction is useful and improves students' accuracy in the short and long term. The department in which the current study took place adheres to Ferris's view that error correction is important, necessary, and useful for students' learning. Because of this, the arguments surrounding the effects of error correction will be set aside, and Ferris's arguments will be presented.

Ferris (2003) found that combinations of notes in the margins and end comments, in addition to error feedback, are successful methods for responding to students' writing. She also found that comments that are imperatives, information questions, and grammar corrections are the most successful in terms of improvement on subsequent revisions. However, Ferris does not delve into the particular reasons why teachers choose one form or method over another, only how effective they are and how they are received by students.

Other issues around feedback, beyond their type and effectiveness, are those regarding appropriation of student texts. The traditional view of appropriation sees the power as being in the hands of the appropriator; however, this discounts methods of appropriating academic language, a useful method for writers who are at the initial stages of learning a particular discipline's discourse (Tardy, 2006). According to Tardy, "Appropriation not only acts on writers but also serves as a tool *for* writers" (p. 73, original emphasis). Of course, in academic English writing, appropriation may cross the line into plagiarism, and academic institutions have strict policies against plagiarism. Abasi and Graves

(2008) discuss how international students are quickly warned when they enter a university of the consequences of plagiarizing. They argue that the policies are not supported by clear resources to help international students negotiate this boundary in their writing, often causing them to overcite and leave their own voices hidden behind those of the authorities. Teachers are keenly aware of the consequences of plagiarizing, yet in ESL settings teachers often handle the situation with overly sensitive and sometimes misleading comments (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). The current research documents some of these issues around plagiarism, and it aims to answer the question of why teachers might or might not comment on the problem.

However, when a teacher or mentor appropriates a student's or mentee's writing, a hierarchical power relationship occurs that can have negative effects on the student's identity as a writer. An example of such a situation is Tardy's (2006) case study of Chatri, a nonnative-speaking (NNS) postgraduate student whose native-speaking (NS) mentor rewrote much of his research to make it sound "better." In this study, the NNS wrote his research and the NS changed about 75% of it. Many of the changes made by the NS were grammatical, but some of the content was changed as well, and the NNS, Chatri, recognized the content changes but felt unable to disagree with the mentor because of his identity as a NNS. Appropriation of students' texts by teachers in which meanings, voice, attitude, and so forth are changed abuse the power relationship, which may result in students' losing confidence in their writing and their own voices within their writing—in other words, their identities as writers are lost through such feedback. While serious appropriation should be avoided, it must be balanced by the need for the teacher's feedback on writing for two main reasons: students expect it (Ferris, 2003) and they need to know if their writing is unclear or if it may identify them as L2 writers, for which they may be stigmatized (Flowerdew, 2008; Tardy, 2006).

The relationship between the student and the teacher (or mentor) is a negotiation of identities. As Lee and Schallert (2008) show, a trusting relationship between students and teachers is important for an effective dialogue between the teacher's feedback and the student's revision. Casanave's (2002) study of 5 MA TESOL students' writing processes (including professors' feedback) show how these processes are indicative of the enculturation into a new field. She concludes that students were able to "reimagine their identities" (p. 129) as contributing members of their field with the help of learning the writing genres. The expert-novice relationship in this case was a trustful one that helped students develop their professional identities. However, although Casanave discusses the effects of individual professors' styles of feedback on MA TESOL students' developing identities, she does not address the motivations of the professors in choosing a particular style of feedback and focuses instead on how students must adapt to the professors' style.

Policy

Although language-education policy studies have recently focused attention on the local enactments and interpretations of policies (Ramanathan &

Morgan, 2007), little attention has been given to the effects of the individual teacher's beliefs, knowledge, and identity in interpreting policies in the classroom. When research does not address these individual influences, the analysis can cause teachers, especially novice teachers, to look like programmed robots instead of critical and reflective educators. However, overly dichotomizing the external (policies) and internal (teacher identities) would be a false representation of their natures because there is much engagement, discourse, and negotiation between these realms, making the boundaries fluid. As Golombek (1998) says, knowledge is nonlinear and fluid in response to different contexts.

Some research neglects the internal forces entirely. Grossman and Thompson (2004), for example, fail to account for identities when interpreting the effects of district policies on new teachers. They contend that the "districts shaped the concerns of beginning teachers" (p. 294); however, they leave out teachers' interests and prior experiences in their analysis. Furthermore, the complex negotiations between where a teacher chooses to work or is hired to work are also left unaddressed in this article, although as Ramanathan (2002) points out, the hiring of a new teacher into a particular department or school can be a reflection of the culture of that school, and the new member may, in turn, reshape the culture.

The balance between teachers' identities and the policies they are required to follow are nearly addressed in Jia, Eslami, and Burlbaw (2006), though they fall far short of addressing clear internal and external forces on educators' practices. Jia et al. separate external and internal influences on teachers' ESL reading assessments, but the separation is superficial because the *external* influences they identify include statewide policies regarding standardized testing, district and school administrators, and "teamwork" between teachers, while *internal* influences are students, materials, and time, but not beliefs about teaching or the teacher's identity. This separation seems to represent external as outside the classroom, and internal as inside the classroom, though this is a misleading analysis because materials are often chosen outside of the classroom and are connected to the external district or state policies that require certain books and subjects to be covered. Time and teamwork are also problematic within their respective categories, and the fact that the teacher's internal agency and identity are ignored in this study weakens the argument of internal and external impacts.

However, other recent studies have addressed the negotiations between the teacher and the policies on a highly individual level though minimally addressing the fluidity of these two forces on practice. In Costigan's (2008) article on novice teachers in urban schools, he discusses the importance of opening conversations and communication with teachers, novice teachers, and policy makers. He argues that because of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the enforcement of strict curriculum and observation policies, novice teachers are denied the room to build their own identities and are often restricted from engaging in the type of instruction they learned in their teacher-education programs. Teacher morale was seriously affected, causing some novice teachers to want to leave the profession.¹ This was also attested in McCarthey (2008),

where she described how important location was for teachers because schools with a high NCLB rating experienced few changes and teachers were allowed more agency in the classroom than in low-rated schools. In low-rated schools, teachers were given a scripted curriculum and were told to teach to the tests. However, McCarthy (2008) also incorporated teacher identity in her study on one teacher in particular, who was in a low-rated school. This teacher rejected the scripted curriculum and pressure to teach to the tests, and she made an extra effort to do “hands-on activities” (p. 488). McCarthy argues that because the teacher was experienced (26 years’ teaching experience and getting close to retirement) and had a master’s degree, she refused to trade her beliefs about teaching to satisfy the policy makers. The other teachers in the low-rated schools were often less educated and less experienced than this teacher, and based on that they were more likely to adapt their instruction to the scripted curriculum. This may have been to keep their employers happy or because of an overreliance on the framework for support. In a British study of novice teachers, Rosowsky (2006) says, “Newly qualified teachers of English take comfort from the existence of a Framework that purports to provide a logical and structured basis to the English Curriculum” (p. 85). However, he also argues that there is a balance between this comfortable reliance on a framework and a reflective process. He says, “These student teachers are clearly engaging actively in the process of matching their prior knowledge and experience with the seemingly, at times, monolithic structures, frameworks and pedagogies of the National Strategies” (Rosowsky, 2006, p. 85). A dialogue between novice teachers and the policies that affect them is important and policy studies need to balance the top-down and bottom-up views employed in their analyses to fully portray the negotiation that occurs between these realms. Additionally, however, none of these studies addresses the teachers’ choices in regard to feedback.

Some work has been done on policies in relation to identity in MA TESOL contexts, such as Kanno and Stuart’s (2011) research on two MA TESOL students whose practicum is followed to chart their development as teachers and their eventual embodiment of authority in the classroom. They describe multiple aspects of their identity development but focus especially on their authority in the classroom and over the subject matter. The authors say that by the second quarter of instruction, the novice teachers’ notions around authority had developed and that by the end of their first year of teaching, they felt comfortable grading, correcting, and being strict with any preset rules or assignments—whereas before they had catered to the students to try to earn their affection. They also felt more confident in the role of “expert” in the classroom, although this did not translate into all skills. Both students felt unprepared to teach grammar, and one who had been assigned to teach an advanced grammar course in the winter quarter changed classes because of his deficient training in teaching grammar. The students were enrolled in a MA TESOL program in an English department, which, according to Ramanathan (2002), can have particular effects on the local culture and cognitions of the students, better preparing them for teaching rhetoric and literature than grammar. She argues that programs housed in Linguistics focus more on the structural side of language

and better prepare students for grammar instruction. She documents how the national TESOL “Guidelines for Certification and Preparation” for TESOL teachers (reprinted in TESOL, 1997), developed by the TESOL organization, are open to interpretation by individual programs and departments and argues that while both are valid foci in TESOL, they should be taken into consideration when discussing the programs. The politics of the department in which a program is housed has a noticeable effect on the students who are enrolled, on their cognitions and their expertise, though it is important to note that MA TESOL students choose their programs or are admitted based on an underlying interest and fit between department and student—much like the hiring practice mentioned earlier.

Methodology

This study is action research with an in-depth description of the feedback provided for students by two MA TESOL student-teachers. Action research is a “systematic approach to carrying out investigations and collecting information that is designed to illuminate an issue or problem and to improve classroom practice” (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 171). As such, it muddies the boundaries between professional development and research, and it was because of my own struggles with providing written feedback that I undertook this research. The study is an inherently qualitative analysis.

I will show that a teacher’s voice and identity are reflected in written and oral feedback and that the authority with which teachers comment on their students’ writing reflects their beliefs. As I am one of the subjects, this is an introspective look at my approaches, which calls into question “the observer’s paradox” (Labov, 1972) because although I have attempted to be unbiased when analyzing the data, I may have attended to my feedback responsibilities differently than if I had not been planning to analyze my data. Likewise, the other participant’s feedback may have been similarly affected. At the same time, because I have been reflecting on my feedback from the beginning of the course, it may provide greater insights than could otherwise have been attained.

The Program

At the time of the research the participants, Emily and Cory, were students in the MA TESOL program at a large West Coast research university in a program housed in the Linguistics Department. The courses required in this program included six courses of Linguistics instruction, including semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, phonetics, and historical linguistics, plus a series of applied linguistics courses: theories of SLA, bilingualism, and research in SLA. Furthermore, there was a series of courses for pedagogy, LIN 300, 301, and 302, each with a different focus (300: Language Pedagogy, 301: Teaching Academic Writing, and 302: Focus on Form), and students were also required to teach a single-unit ESL course as a practicum. Throughout the practicum, students were required to plan lessons, activities, keep reflective journals on their teaching, develop a curriculum and syllabus, and evaluate students’ progress (grades were not reported—Pass or No Pass only). Feedback to student

writing was addressed in LIN 301, Teaching Academic Writing, and was practiced in the class, and then implemented in the practicum three quarters later.

The course taught by the two graduate students in this study, LIN 25, was a graduate-level ESL course whose main focus was on writing and grammar, though speaking, listening, pronunciation, and oral presentation skills were included in the syllabus. In Fall 2007, there were nine sections, taught by nine teachers who met once every 2 weeks to coordinate exams, assignments, and discuss any concerns. The course was coordinated by an experienced ESL teacher, who constructed the syllabus and exams with input from the other teachers. Lessons, activities, and grading were the responsibility of the individual teachers. The policies left room for the novice teachers to build their identities (Costigan, 2008) in the classroom and while providing feedback. The class met twice a week, for 2 hours each meeting, and consisted of, on average, 18 students who were placed in the course based on a timed writing exam. Students came from a variety of countries, such as Chile, China, Korea, Japan, Thailand, Germany, and Mexico.

Lane and Lange's (1999) textbook was used for this course. It instructs teachers and students in error feedback and correction through the use of direct grammatical feedback in which the type of error is identified for the student by a symbol or word. For example, an error in tense is marked as *VT*, an error in word choice is *WC*, and an article error is *ART*. The textbook also provides an explanation of each type of error in a chapter devoted to the form and meaning of that particular issue. Students are encouraged to track their errors to find patterns and develop a meta-awareness of the types of errors common in their writing with an aim toward reduction in these errors through time and promotion of better self-editing techniques. The current study's student population is international students, so the marked error with identification fits well with Ferris's (2003) findings regarding the most appropriate type of grammar correction for this population.

However, there is no explicit instruction in the textbook on how writing should be organized or developed to fit academic English norms—nor is there a guide on how to provide feedback on these aspects in the textbook. The instructor's manual contains content-response guidelines, but during the course these were never discussed and the coordinator never made reference to these as a model. Rather, the teachers were free to practice giving feedback on content in whatever way they chose. Thus, the participants in this study were forced to draw from their own beliefs about academic writing, personal preferences for feedback, and past histories as language learners to write comments on content to their students.

The course was a quarter long, 10 weeks, and I gathered samples of feedback throughout the quarter. I analyzed copies of the teachers' feedback on student papers, which entailed a range of genres, including four in-class writing assignments, two summaries, and two formal essays. Additionally, I gathered language-learning and teaching narratives, reflective journals, and held biweekly informal interviews to contextualize the feedback and add insight to the data.

The MA TESOLers

Cory was chosen as a participant in this study because of her enthusiasm about the topic and for her availability and willingness to give her time. Additionally, we are in the same year of the program, we come from the same socioeconomic background, and we had similar language-learning experiences before entering the program. We also are both from the US, we are the same age, and we are white middle-class females from monolingual English families. We took many of the same courses throughout the program, but this is where the similarities end.

Cory. Cory fell into the MA TESOL program after deciding not to attend an MA of Social Work program. She said in her narrative: “I’m still not convinced I really want to be a teacher. While teaching I enjoy what I’m doing. But I don’t enjoy talking about pedagogy.” As an undergraduate she had a dual major in Spanish and Linguistics, and she enjoyed the structural courses she took in the MA program. The applied courses did not appeal to her as much, though she says she learned a lot from them. Her research projects revolved mostly around corpus studies of passivity in academic writing and phonological acquisition, perception, and variation, especially in L2 language learners.

As a language learner she appreciated teacher feedback on grammar but thought that the comments at the end were of little value. This is one point where her beliefs have changed because of the courses in the MA TESOL program: She said she “sees the importance of endnotes more now than before” (narrative). However, she also said that she enjoyed teaching content courses more than language courses because language courses too often teach language in an overly simplistic way with content that is not challenging or stimulating for adults, in effect treating adults like children. In her classes she drew from as many “real” texts as possible in an attempt to counter this.

Cory’s experience in the 1st year of the program’s practicum had little effect on her feedback to students’ writing, although she worked with an experienced writing teacher in the department during the winter quarter of the first year. However, she did very little grading for that class, and she did not cite this experience as pivotal to her development.

Emily. For many years my career objective was to become a teacher, thus, unlike Cory, I did not think that I fell into teaching, though my decision to teach ESL was not initially planned. As an undergraduate student I majored in Cultural Anthropology, not Education or Linguistics, and because of this, when I entered the MA TESOL program I had to take many prerequisite courses in Linguistics, in addition to the courses on pedagogy and language learning. Perhaps because of my background, I found the Applied Linguistics courses much more salient than the structural ones, and my projects have revolved around language teaching and pedagogy, though I am also interested in world Englishes. Also, unlike Cory, I prefer to receive extensive feedback on both grammar and content. This is for both my first and second languages.

My spring-quarter practicum was conducted at the University’s Extension Program, which is an Intensive English Program for all levels. I worked with two teachers who shared the quarter teaching a low-intermediate writing

course and it was there that I received my first practice providing written feedback on students' papers. The first teacher I worked under focused on grammar and the basic structure of paragraphs and essays. She provided a lot of grammar feedback on student papers and made many suggestions for revision, both grammatically and stylistically. The second teacher I worked with was less meticulous with grammar and focused much more on content and flow. She gave feedback more holistically and didn't correct each grammar error. Both teachers had been in the profession for more than 20 years and were very accomplished. Students responded to both styles and I believe I took from this a more balanced understanding of the varieties of feedback that are available. This experience also propelled me into the current research.

Findings

The following section is divided into two parts: grammar corrections and margin/end comments. The grammar-corrections section is focused on the coded grammar feedback and this section shows the similarities between the two teachers' feedback. The second section, on margin and end comments, examines the differences between the teachers' feedback styles on the content of the paper. This section does not deal with sentence-level coded grammar-error feedback.

Grammar Corrections

Analyzing the data showed a few striking differences between my feedback and Cory's, though it also showed similarities. The similarities were especially apparent in our use of grammar corrections in students' writing because, with a few exceptions, our grammar notes were based on the table provided in the textbook *Writing Clearly* (Lane & Lange, 1999). Because the data were gathered at the same time as I began researching for this project, my position as researcher influenced my methods of providing grammar feedback on the short writing assignments. Outside of the method of identifying each error with a symbol as defined in the textbook, I attempted:

- Underlining errors without identifying them;
- Coding only a few of the most significant errors;
- Directing students' attention to the page in the textbook that defined the grammar rule they were struggling with.

I explained the different methods I was using to the class members and told them I was interested in the effects each method had on their writing. The fact that I was experimental with my feedback was particularly influenced by my previous experience with the different styles of grammar feedback that I had been introduced to through the practicum with the two experienced writing instructors: one who meticulously corrected every error, and the other who provided less grammar correction in favor of content. Additionally, my position as researcher exposed me to a greater variety of methods of providing grammar feedback. Thus, my style of grammar feedback was influenced by my

identity as a teacher/researcher interested in pedagogy, as well as my prior experiences during the practicum. Cory, meanwhile, kept her feedback uniform throughout the quarter, using the method espoused in the textbook. Because she was more interested in speaking instruction as related to phonology, her interests did not lead her to explore styles of grammar feedback as mine had. Additionally, her practicum included little opportunity for practicing giving grammar feedback, and what little experience she received was guided by a single instructor who used the method from the same textbook. Our interests and background guided us in the nature of our grammar response, as evidenced by my experimentalism and Cory's uniformity, though we both additionally drew from the policy of the program to provide grammar feedback using the method provided in the course textbook.

From a corpus of 30 student papers from each teacher in which we used the same method—the one represented in the textbook—it is clear that we were providing the same amount of overall grammar feedback (see Table 1).

Table 1
Synopsis of Grammar Feedback

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Corrections average</i>	<i>Corrections w/o answers</i>	<i>Corrections w/ answers</i>
Cory	11.9	64%	35%
Emily	11.9	49%	51%

Research shows that teachers should identify problem areas without correcting them for the student (Ferris, 2003). According to Cory's interview, she provided answers because students were having particular difficulty with the word-choice errors when she did not provide answers, so she started providing more answers with her corrections as the quarter progressed. The data above were collected midquarter, and her expressed motivations for providing answers were represented accurately in the data. My corrections depended on whether the student's paper was a first draft or a final draft: I provided more answers on the final draft than the first draft, though on the first draft I often gave answers if the correction was something idiomatic or if we had not been over the grammar in class. The percent of corrections with answers that I provided was greater than Cory's because I did not limit answers only to word-choice errors but regularly marked answers on final drafts.

The numbers in Table 1 are only superficially relevant, and overall there appears to be a strong similarity between the grammar corrections provided by both teachers, based on the program policies for providing feedback. Nevertheless, these policies were not so compulsory as to prevent experimentation with different modes of feedback for teachers whose lived experiences and interest in these methods led them to try different methods, as evidenced by my experimentalism with different feedback methods.

Margin/End Comments

Although the grammar corrections throughout the text were similar between Cory and me, the end comments and comments in the margins were noticeably different. Analysis of one multidraft essay from the course makes it apparent that we were each addressing very different aspects in our students' writing. This essay in particular was chosen because it was one in which all the feedback was provided by us in written form without peer feedback or writing conferences.² The topics were:

1. Write about a person or concept important to your field (for graduate students).
2. Write about your major or department at this University (for EAP students/undergrads).

Students wrote two drafts of the essay, a first draft and a final draft, and received feedback on both.³

Although genre was the most immediately obvious difference between the two novice teachers—and thus is explained first—there were three additional themes around which issues of feedback clustered:

1. Praise;
2. Grammar; and
3. Content.

The genre and themes differ in language and word choice and shed light upon the cognition of these particular teachers as they performed the act of giving feedback to their students' writing.

Genre. Learning a genre of writing in the classroom that will be used professionally is not always congruent with what is later used in the professional setting, because of multiple constraints, policies, and workplace dynamics. For us as students, the concept of “learning as doing” was incorporated in our courses; we practiced giving feedback with authentic student papers in our methods class, LIN 301. However, we were able to spend a lot of time analyzing and discussing types of feedback in the classroom because there were no pressures to turn the papers back to the student writers. This highlights the lines between “facilitated performance” (in the classroom) and “attenuated authentic participation” (in the workplace) (Freedman & Adam, 1996); we had the theories and the policies around feedback to guide us, but the pressures of turnaround time and our different embodied histories caused us to practice our feedback differently.

At first glance, the differences between Cory's and my feedback are apparent: Cory's endnotes are short, to the point, and nearly formulaic, while mine are formed as letters, with the student's name at the top, my feedback, and my signature at the bottom. For example:

Cory

Good revision—your voice and enthusiasm really shine through.
Does still need work on organization and details of grammar

Emily

[Student's name],

This Professor sounds amazing, I hope you will be able to learn a lot from him. Your writing is well organized and clear, though you do have some grammar issues. Prepositions and noun phrases seem to cause you the most problems, so you should focus on that for the next paper.

—Emily

The endnotes are noticeably shorter in Cory's feedback than mine. The average number of words written in her endnotes is 10, while for me it is 36 (not including the student's name and my signature). The range of hers is 0-36 words while mine is 15-110 words in a single endnote. However, she said she gave verbal feedback to each student as she handed back each paper, with more detailed feedback about the content of the papers at this time. Unfortunately, this feedback from the classroom was not recorded, though it could have validated her claim and provided some additional insight into the differences.

The form of a teacher's feedback is a widely theorized matter that novice teachers must struggle with as they develop their authority and identity as "teacher." Ferris and Hedgcock's (2005) chapter on feedback informs the novice teacher of the modes of feedback and includes a summary of recent research. The chapter gives examples of feedback mostly in the form of letters to the students with very personalized feedback regarding content and language problems (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). In our training, about 9 months before teaching this class, we read this chapter and discussed it in one of our pedagogy courses, which is one reason I chose to follow this format. Additionally, I was researching feedback at the same time as I was teaching the course and giving the feedback, and this chapter informed my decision to respond to students in letter form because I wanted to develop a trusting relation with my students, and I thought that the personal form of a letter would help in this. As Lee and Schallert (2008) demonstrate, trust is important between the teacher and student, particularly regarding writing feedback, and I wanted students to trust that I was interested in their writing and in helping them improve. Additionally, because I highly valued feedback as a language learner and writer, I was prolific in my responses.

Cory, on the other hand, chose to write shorter and more direct comments without a letter format because, as she intimated in her interview, as a writer in her second language she did not find end comments to be as helpful as grammar feedback. Additionally, in her interview she said that the theorizing about and practice giving feedback did not influence the form of her end comments, though it made her realize that end comments were important and appreciated by many students. The instruction she received before teaching influenced

her feedback because, as she said, she was willing to add more end comments than she otherwise would have. Her knowledge gained through the program encouraged her to give end comments, although her preference for grammar comments over end comments kept them short.

Theme 1: Praise. Praise was the most universal theme in both our comments—very few students received no praise. We were both aware, as previous language learners, that it is important to include praise in feedback so that students do not become discouraged with their writing and know what was done well, in addition to what needs improvement. We were very familiar with how difficult and discouraging only negative comments could be, and as such we both included positive and encouraging comments regularly, though not necessarily for every student on every draft.

A few students did not receive any end or margin comments from Cory on their first drafts, thus there were no notes of praise. Two students received no praise from me in their first drafts, though there were comments of interest in the topic, and one student did not address the comments on the first draft, so no praise was given on the final draft. An example of a comment of interest without actual praise from my comments is: “Dr. Temple Grandin sounds like one in a million! I’m sure she’s very inspiring and I’ll certainly look at her website.” Although this would not be considered praise of the student’s writing, it implies praise of the topic that was chosen. Some examples of typical praise are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2
Examples of Praise From Cory

- 1 Very well explained
- 2 Good revision
- 3 Great job revising and expanding your writing
- 4 Great job on the revision, clear explanation of complex theories

Table 3
Examples of Praise From Emily

- 1 A very nice essay
- 2 Good revision, nice paper
- 3 This is greatly improved, I understand your topic much better now
- 4 A very good revision and paper—very academic and appropriate

Despite the prevalence of praise in the end and margin comments, the differences were noticeable in the organization and word choice we used when praising students. Cory’s praise was always at the beginning of the end comment with any suggestions for improvement or comments on the grammar following. She rarely used “but” or “though” between the praise and suggestions

for improvement; in fact, there are only three examples of this. Instead, she separated praise from suggestions by starting a new sentence or adding a comma between them. Common words of praise she used were: great, (very) good, (very) well or clearly written, and once she says “very polished.”

My word choice and placement of praise is more varied and less structured than Cory’s, and in some cases I do not specifically give praise at all. My praise was more often hedged by “but,” “however,” or “although” when transitioning from praise to suggestions for improvement. I also wrote the praise in different places, not only at the beginning. Sometimes it would come at the beginning, end, middle, or sandwiched around the negative comments. “(Very) Nice” was one of the most common praise words I used, though “well (done),” “better,” “improved,” “excellent,” “great,” “good,” “well (organized),” “interesting,” “academic,” and “appropriate” are all words/phrases I used regularly for praising. It is particularly interesting to note my preference for the word “nice” in my feedback, which occurs 12 times out of 22 comments of praise. This reflects the desire, common among many novice teachers, to be liked and seen as “nice” by their students (Danielewicz, 2001), and I confess this was a desire of mine. However, that I did not give praise to every student, even when there were end and margin comments, indicates that being seen as “nice” was not my top priority in giving feedback. Poole’s (1992) article on language socialization indicates that this could be a form of *teacher-talk* common among white middle-class American teachers in which the teacher accommodates to the student and suppresses the display of power differences.⁴

Theme 2: Grammar. In addition to coded error correction throughout the students’ texts, both Cory and I commented on some students’ grammar in the end and margin notes. These comments were not as prevalent as the comments praising students’ writing, though they comprised a significant proportion of the overall comments. As Ramanathan (2002) indicates, MA TESOL students in Linguistics departments are well prepared to deal with students’ grammar problems, so it would be expected that we would be comfortable commenting on this particular topic, and that we might do it more extensively in the end comments than would a MA TESOL student in an English program. Some examples of our comments are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4
Grammar Comments From Cory

1	First draft	To help keep the verb tenses and forms consistent use the past tense when talking about him if he is dead and the present/present progressive if he is still alive and still writing
2	First draft	Some persistent grammar errors

Cory’s grammar comments were concise and used simple phrases such as “a few grammar problems” and “grammar errors are problematic.” She includ-

ed some further explanations of grammar points in the first draft, but the second draft never elaborated on how to correct problems, nor did it explicitly guide students to the book where they could work on improving these problems. Rather, the comments in the second draft reported only if there were persistent errors. As the example above shows, there is a strong awareness of grammar and Cory discusses what the problem with the student's text is in clear and explicit terms, which shows her comfort and skill in analyzing grammar.

Table 5
Grammar Comments From Emily

1	First draft	Your biggest issue in your writing is your grammar. I think if you use the table in your book on pages xviii-xx you will be more aware of the types of errors you're making and will be able to self-edit
2	First draft	You do have some grammar issues. Prepositions and noun phrases seem to cause you the most problems, so you should focus on that for the next paper

I also commented on persistent grammar errors, but my comments displayed more variety and were generally longer. My comments also often attempted to identify one or two consistent errors and I commented on them in greater detail in the endnotes, as the examples in Table 5 show. Additionally, as the example above shows, I often referenced the textbook (*Writing Clearly*, Lane & Lange, 1999) for students to get additional help with their consistent problems, or to help them identify their most consistent errors on their own through the use of a template included in the book (pp. xviii-xx). I may have used the textbook to a greater extent because I did not have as strong a background in formal linguistics as Cory, and so I was not as able to explain the fine points of grammar in such a succinct manner.

Theme 3: Form/Citations. Comments on content such as organization, use of quotes and citations, and development of ideas were very common in Cory's feedback as well as in mine, although Ramanathan (2002) says that MA TESOL programs housed in Linguistics departments prepare students better for grammar instruction. These comments were the most varied in both Cory's and my feedback, showing that they were highly personalized. Some examples are shown in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6
Comments on Form/Citations From Cory

1	Write his full name out the first time
2	When did he publish his theories?
3	This sort of introduction is not necessary in an academic paper
4	Need closing to paragraph that sums up UB theory and transitions MO

Table 7
Comments on Form/Citations From Emily

- 1 I'm not sure if you got information in the 2nd two paragraphs from another source, but if so, you should have cited it.
- 2 You don't need to mention all the options unless you want to explain all of them.
- 3 You need to explain why these two theories are important.
- 4 Be sure next time to talk about what all the technical words mean.

Cory's feedback included some questions, but more often she used imperatives. She rarely hedged her comments and provided clear, short instructions. This fits well with Ferris's (2003) findings regarding the type of comments that are most effective. In my comments, hedging was much more common, such as "Usually, in academic writing ..." and "a bit unclear." My comments also used personal reaction: "I'm very confused by this paper because ..." and I used authoritative feedback with statements starting with "You need," which Cory does not do as often, though there were some comments like this. Additionally, there were many explicit statements about writing academic English, such as Cory's "need closing to paragraph that sums up UB theory and transitions MO" and my "You don't need to mention all the options unless you want to explain all of them." These reflect the standard practice in academic English of a linear progression of thought in which a theme is established, developed, and summarized before a new idea is introduced (Kachru & Smith, 2008). Not all languages or even varieties of English value this type of structure for a paragraph or any writing. Kachru and Smith (2008) describe other paragraph structures that tolerate or value digression and abrupt endings (German), spiral or circular argumentative prose (Hindi), and some that rarely contain a topic sentence (Persian). Despite the fact that we were unaware of the specific differences between academic writing standards in our students' native languages, Cory and I drew on our personal practical knowledge (Golombek, 1998) as members of the academic English community to address the differences we saw between our students' writing and what we consider to be the norm. Because we had been socialized throughout our careers as students in the ideology of what "good" academic writing is, we drew from this knowledge to provide feedback to our students. Additionally, our MA TESOL education made us aware that there are differences in academic writing norms between languages and disciplines, and so we were able to address these in our feedback.

Citations were a major focus of my comments because I caught one student plagiarizing, which heightened my awareness when responding to other students' writing. In this particular situation a student took many direct quotations from an online journal, although we had spent time in class discussing what plagiarism consists of, the consequences for plagiarizing, and how it can be avoided. Nevertheless, I also knew from my education that different cultures have different views on what constitutes plagiarism. Abasi and Graves (2008)

show that plagiarism in a North American cultural context is discussed with a high degree of stress on “wrongdoing,” which can “distract them from more important aspects of academic writing” (228). They argue that international students are often unfamiliar with the concept of plagiarism upon entering a program in North America, and they are likely to struggle with this mysterious form of writing that must combine other’s voices with their own. My focus on plagiarism in this situation was reshaped by the new context of having identified it within a student’s paper and wanting to effectively steer other students away from the consequences of these actions.⁵ Based on this desire, I commented on possible plagiarism using sensitive terms and hedging because although I wanted to alert students to the importance of citing sources, I did not want to wrongly accuse anyone of plagiarism. Thus, I wrote comments such as: “I’m not sure if you got the information in your 2nd two paragraphs from another source, but if so, you should have cited it.” Such comments were generally understood by students as indicated by the revisions, which then included necessary citations. Only one student responded to my comment “Please include a list of references and review how to cite direct quotes” by omitting the quote altogether without adding citations.

Finally, both Cory and I believed that we were focusing on problems with content, organization, and development in the first draft of each paper and on grammar in the second draft. However, there were multiple cases in which our beliefs did not align with our practice—there were some students who received mostly grammar feedback on the first draft and content feedback on the second. Here is an example of the comments provided on a student’s first draft:

[marginal comments] *write his full name out the first time*
[end comments] *Well done. To help keep the verb tenses and forms consistent use the past tense when talking about him if he is dead and the present/ present progressive if he is still alive and writing.*

This is followed in the second draft by comments on the development:

[marginal comments] *give an example of why these are interesting or what they can be used for*
[separate marginal comment] *here also an example would be good*
[end comment] *Well written, some points needed to be more fully developed.*

The teacher’s focus on grammar in the first draft and development in the second draft are contrary to her beliefs about how feedback should be structured. This is another reflection of the significant influence our formal linguistics training had; we were preoccupied with the grammar to the detriment of the rhetorical aspects of the students’ papers. In fact, three students received content feedback last (on the final draft, but not on the first draft) in both Cory’s and my class, indicating that reflecting on beliefs and practice is valuable, especially for novice teachers, because drastic misalignments between what we think we are doing and what we are actually doing may otherwise evade us.

Discussion

Grammar feedback and end/marginal notes are useful for preparing graduate ESL students for their future careers and for providing individualized scaffolded instruction (Ferris, 2003 & 2006; Flowerdew, 2008; Hinkel 2002). However, teacher feedback is rife with the teacher's identity (Hyland & Hyland, 2006) and influenced by policies of their program (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Ramanathan, 2002). MA TESOL students should be aware of how their feedback to students' writing is affected by their own lived experiences and the policies of the programs where they teach. This critical engagement with the process of their socialization into the discipline will help them not only become more reflective teachers, but it will also help them to adapt to future teaching situations.

The program policies on feedback in this study were drawn upon by the 2 novice teachers in similar ways, though our lived experiences, interests, and beliefs about language learning influenced our interpretations of those policies. Cory and I agreed that we felt prepared to teach, correct, and explain grammar because of our extensive training in linguistics. Compared to Kanno and Stuart's (2011) discussion of the two novice MA TESOL students housed in an English department who felt unprepared to teach grammar, it is evident that socialization into the TESOL field is affected by the department in which the training is held (see also Ramanathan, 2002). The methods we drew from in providing feedback were balanced between the policies on grammar feedback that we were instructed to follow and our reliance upon our experiences as writers, language learners, and teachers for the content notes that we wrote. While our error corrections were strikingly similar, even here our knowledge of meaningful feedback was affected by our experiences as teachers, leading us to provide some answers on students' papers.

Salient features of prose that we responded to were different based on our orientations to the field. Cory focused on grammar while I addressed issues regarding plagiarism and building trusting relationships with students through comments on their topics. According to Hyland and Hyland (2006), feedback is not just a method for targeted instruction; it can be used to create a harmonious culture of learning, to negotiate a relationship, and to increase rapport with the students to maintain social harmony within the classroom. By providing clear and detailed grammar feedback based on the strength of her background in linguistics, Cory developed authority and rapport as a knowledgeable grammarian. My background in anthropology and applied linguistics led to more experimentation and dialogue in my feedback, and my experience with plagiarism in the classroom made me hyperaware of this throughout my 1st quarter of writing instruction.

The program's policy regarding grammar feedback left us with the freedom to develop our identities as well as our personal knowledge, beliefs, and style, though at the same time it provided us with a framework on which we could rely (Rosowsky, 2006). However, as the disconnect between our beliefs and our practice of giving content feedback on the first versus the final draft highlights, the importance of reflective teaching and the use of action research should be regularly engaged in during the enculturation process. Providing only "fa-

cilitated performance” in the classroom without guided “attenuated authentic participation” in the workplace (Freedman & Adam, 1996) results in novice teachers’ relying solely on their beliefs regarding feedback, particularly when there are no policies to fall back on. Thus, especially when policies regarding particular aspects of instruction are not explicit, reflection on teaching practices is necessary. This can be done without re-creating this study, though some steps that would be useful for promoting reflection would be:

1. Discuss beliefs about feedback with other teachers and critically engage with program policies and/or personal experiences with feedback.
2. Compare beliefs about feedback to papers with feedback, check for misalignments, and
3. Meet with students for writing conferences where feedback is discussed.⁶

These steps will allow teachers to become meta-aware of their participation in the social act of feedback and the multiple ways in which the act is framed, influenced, created, and interpreted.

Through the reflections on how policy, identity, and feedback are connected it becomes evident that these key words have fluid boundaries that are constantly being renegotiated by all the participants. Our developing teacher identity was reflected in our feedback, as were the policies of our MA TESOL program. Our feedback was in dialogue with our students’ writing, and our students shaped us and our feedback as much as we shaped their revisions. With this clear dialogue between teacher and student, it is possible to reflect on the positioning enacted in the written feedback as well as the embodiment of the teacher’s history and developing identity within the teaching profession. For teacher educators, an awareness of institutional policies, developing teacher identities, and the dialogue of written feedback is vital to instructing future writing teachers. For in-service teachers, an evaluation of policies, identities, and actual feedback may be an enlightening act that will help align beliefs and practice as well as increase attunement to students’ needs.

Author

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Notes

¹See Alsup (2006) for cases in which preservice teachers have difficulty identifying themselves as members of the teaching community and cite other factors (such as sexual orientation, appearance, and age) as aspects of their identity that conflict with that of the “ideal teacher.” She argues that addressing these conflicts are pivotal for keeping otherwise motivated preservice teachers from

abandoning their chosen careers in teaching.

²Additionally, Cory thought that this topic required more end comments than she might otherwise provide, so these essays are richer in data than others.

³No rubric for these essays existed, and to normalize the grading all novice teachers submitted 3-4 papers to be reviewed by the ESL coordinator of the program. She reviewed the novice teachers' comments and informed them of any problems with the grades or scale that were being used. This functioned to normalize the grading scale. The feedback and grades that Cory and I gave were both approved by the coordinator without changes.

⁴Unfortunately, I did not gather student responses to our differing modes of feedback, though praise and other responses are included in detail in Ferris (2003).

⁵I did not turn the student in for plagiarism, but I used this opportunity to discuss once again what constituted plagiarism and how to avoid it.

⁶Although writing conferences were not a part of this particular study, they were a required part of the course and would be an excellent direction for further research.

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