
Eva Kartchava
Carleton University

Yushi Bu
Carleton University

Julian Heidt
Carleton University

Abdizalon Mohamed
Carleton University

Judy Seal
Carleton University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/journalrw

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons, Language and Literacy Education Commons, and the Other Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Recommended Citation
Kartchava, Eva; Bu, Yushi; Heidt, Julian; Mohamed, Abdizalon; and Seal, Judy (2021) "Towards A Better Understanding Of The Complex Nature Of Written Corrective Feedback And Its Effects: A Duoethnographical Exploration Of Perceptions, Choices, And Outcomes.," Journal of Response to Writing: Vol. 7 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/journalrw/vol7/iss2/4

This Featured Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Response to Writing by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Cover Page Footnote
We are grateful to the editors and two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and helpful suggestions. Any remaining errors are ours alone.
Toward a Better Understanding of the Complex Nature of Written Corrective Feedback and Its Effects: A Duoethnographical Exploration of Perceptions, Choices, and Outcomes

Eva Kartchava, Yushi Bu, Julian Heidt, Abdizalon Mohamed, and Judy Seal
Carleton University

Abstract: Despite a large body of research into the benefits of corrective feedback (i.e., teachers’ reactions to students’ incorrect use of the target language), little is known about how new and experienced second-language (L2) teachers supply feedback to writing and what factors guide their decisions. This paper is a collaborative effort of 1 teacher-educator and 4 graduate students to examine the process of providing written corrective feedback (WCF) to university-level L2 learners. Findings point to complexities involved in WCF provision and the importance of examining CF holistically, as preservice teachers’ corrective choices and learners’ responses to them are often interlinked.

Keywords: written corrective feedback, preservice teachers, reflective practice, second-language writing, teacher training

In their recent volume on *Good Language Teachers*, Griffiths and Tajeddin (2020) described “good” teachers as aware, reflective, autonomous, and “complex individuals who are expected to have a range of personal qualities, to be able to satisfy the needs of their students, and to have the knowledge and skills to provide instruction in a range of language areas” (p. xxvi). In light of the ever-changing requirements, expectations, and instructional contexts that teachers encounter throughout their careers, these qualities, the authors argued, are necessary for practitioners to develop and consistently refine as they work to become, and remain, effective. While teacher quality is generally equated to performance that can be observed in the classroom, it is the unobserved process of how teachers arrive at knowing what they know and doing what they do that may be the key to understanding teachers’ perceived competence. Discerning this “unobservable dimension of teaching” (Borg & Santiago Sanchez, 2020, p. 17), or teachers’ “inner lives” (Farrell, 2018), is, in fact, the basic premise of research on teacher cognition since “we cannot properly understand teachers and teaching without understanding their thoughts, knowledge, and beliefs that influence what teachers do” (Borg, 2006, p. 163); this understanding may also be instrumental in cultivating self-aware, reflective, and self-directed (i.e., “good”) teachers.

Attempts to understand teachers’ effectiveness have primarily investigated their beliefs and ability to reflect on practice. While inquiries into teachers’ beliefs have confirmed a link between beliefs and practice, they have also exposed the bidirectionality and complexity of the relationship (e.g., Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Borg, 2018) that precludes making reliable predictions of teachers’ behavior based solely on their stated beliefs (e.g., Basturkmen, 2012; Kartchava et al., 2020). Still, Borg and Santiago Sanchez (2020) posited that because “beliefs are just one of the many influences that determine what teachers do” (p. 17), adherence or nonadherence to one’s beliefs in practice should not “detract from a teacher’s perceived

---

1 The term *beliefs* is used to refer to teachers’ “suppositions, commitments, and ideologies” (Calderhead, 1996, p. 715) or the “hidden elements” of teacher cognition (Borg & Santiago Sanchez, 2020). As such, *beliefs* is used as an umbrella term for perceptions, attitudes, thoughts, and so forth.

competence” since numerous external factors (e.g., curriculum, contextual constraints, learner needs) may influence teachers’ actions. However, being able to analyze one’s actions, beliefs, and thoughts about teaching through reflection can help teachers become aware of and understand the factors that shape their practice, with the goal of critically assessing and positively affecting its quality (Alemi & Tajeddin, 2020; Farrell, 2018). Empirical examinations of teacher reflection have shown it to be both beneficial and challenging (e.g., Wolfensberger et al., 2010; Yayli, 2009) and have identified factors (e.g., teaching/learning experiences and lack of reflection training) that can promote or impede the practice (e.g., Farrell, 1999a, 1999b; Soodmand Afshar & Farahani, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Studies of reflection on teachers’ corrective feedback practices are rare (cf. Delante, 2017), especially those that address feedback to second-language (L2) writing—“a written response to a linguistic error that has been made in the writing of a text by an L2 learner” (Bitchener & Storch, 2016, p. 1). Having teachers reflect on their written corrective feedback (WCF) practices is important since feedback to writing is a staple of L2 instruction and carries benefits for the development of learners’ accuracy and L2 knowledge (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Bitchener & Storch, 2016). Moreover, language learners have consistently signaled that they value teachers’ feedback and expect to receive it on their writing (e.g., Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 1995). Asking teachers to reflect on their WCF views and actions, then, can not only help them connect theory to practice and make informed pedagogical decisions as a result but also raise awareness of the existing gaps and potential obstacles in the general as well as the context-specific implementation of WCF. Such reflection opportunities, or reflective practice, need to begin during preservice teacher training to engage trainees in “feedback literacy development” that exposes them to “broad WCF [theoretical] principles [and] entails a [contextualized] understanding of effective feedback principles” (Lee, 2019, p. 533). To support trainees in their WCF reflective practice, teacher-educators are advised to take on the role of “critical friends,” who guide and constructively assess the reflection.
process with the goal of enhancing the trainees’ awareness and understanding of effective WCF procedures (Lee, 2019). The present study represents such an endeavor.

This paper is a collaborative effort on the part of one teacher-educator and four candidates for a Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics attending a graduate seminar on pedagogical grammar. It examines the process of guided reflection the graduate students underwent in providing WCF to L2 learners attending a university-level English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. The study adopts duoethnography to investigate the participants’ experiences when they provided feedback to student writing.

**Teacher Reflection**

The ability to reflect on one’s teaching—before, during, and after the act—is a hallmark of successful teachers, who strive to not only understand the reasons for their actions in making informed decisions about their practice to increase its effectiveness but also avoid pitfalls that lead to impulsive teaching, or worse, burnout. Farrell (2015, 2018) claimed that it was precisely to avoid the latter that the field of TESOL adopted reflective practice, a now commonplace component of language-teacher education programs worldwide. The reflection that new teachers are asked to engage in, however, is often individual, highly regimented, and written, and it primarily focuses on a taught lesson (i.e., “reflection-on-action,” Schön, 1987) to engage teachers in “remedial” thinking on what went wrong with their teaching and why (Farrell, 2015). While “reflection-for-action” and “reflection-in-action” activities may be more impactful in helping teachers connect theory to practice in order to anticipate and skillfully address future and on-the-spot issues, many available models of reflection prioritize the technical issues in teaching, foregoing the person doing the reflection (Farrell, 2015). Furthermore, these models do not systematically differentiate between new and experienced teachers, who tend to have different concerns and needs when it comes to their development and who may require additional, tailored supports in reflecting “on their practice if

their reflections are going to be more than mere descriptions of what they do” (Farrell, 2015, p. 20). To account for the whole person, Farrell developed a holistic framework that considers both the cognitive and affective aspects of a teacher in terms of his or her philosophy, principles, theories of practice, and actual practices, as well as the effects of these four factors on the teacher’s impact on society and vice versa. Still, Mann and Walsh (2013) posited that the process that practitioners undergo when reflecting often goes unreported and called for a “rebalanced” approach to reflective practice, “away from a reliance on written forms and taking more account of spoken, collaborative forms of reflection; in sum, [they] argue[d] for a more dialogic, data-led and collaborative approach to reflective practice” (p. 291).

Lawrence and Lowe (2020) argued that duoethnography can be that “rebalanced” approach for language teaching and applied linguistics. A method of qualitative research, duoethnography involves two or more people reflecting on and (re)conceptualizing their experiences with and understanding of a particular phenomenon (Norris & Sawyer, 2017). Duoethnographers are simultaneously investigators of a given phenomenon and the sites of research themselves (Lawrence & Lowe, 2020). In this way, the participants tell and “interrogate” their own stories to learn from an experience that is subject to contextual and societal changes; the experience, in turn, requires the contributors to be open, self-critical, reflective, and trusting of the process (Norris & Sawyer, 2017). This makes duoethnography an effective tool in enabling deep and rich reflections among teachers at any stage of their development.

Duoethnographies in applied linguistics are rare. While some studies have used the method to investigate such issues as native-speakerism (e.g., Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016) and the successes/failures of teaching English as an international language (Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018), the most recent volume on the subject (Lowe & Lawrence, 2020) expanded the use of duoethnography to studies that employ it as a method of research, a reflective practice, and a pedagogical tool. We, however, know of no investigation...
that has used duoethnography to examine the feedback provision that L2 teachers undertake. Using the method with preservice teachers—that is, those with no or limited formal teaching experience, undergoing initial teacher training (Borg, 2006)—may prove especially useful in identifying possible gaps in their WCF knowledge to allow for “in time” learning within the training program they are attending. Having preservice teachers themselves examine the processes they undergo in learning about WCF may deepen their engagement with feedback and promote future reflections necessary for their development as teachers.

WCF

Although many scholars have agreed that WCF plays a facilitative role in L2 development (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Kang & Han, 2015), various factors that may contribute to or impede the effectiveness of WCF are not yet well understood. One such factor is the effectiveness of the strategies teachers use to address learners’ errors. While direct feedback includes strategies that supply an actual correction of an error, indirect feedback cues learners to the presence of an error with the goal of having them provide the correction themselves. Crossing out a problem word, inserting a missing morpheme, or writing the correct form above or near the error, alone or with an accompanying explanation, are all examples of direct-feedback techniques (Ferris, 2006). To provide indirect feedback, teachers can hint at the presence of an error without locating it, mark its location, provide a metalinguistic clue about the error, or use codes to indicate the error type. While both feedback types can positively affect written texts (Ferris, 2010), their contributions differ. Direct feedback clearly outlines the error and a way to correct it, reducing the cognitive processing required by the learner, yet its long-term effects are unclear (Ellis, 2009).

2 As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, the studies reviewed in this section include those in which CF was provided by researchers and by classroom teachers. While we acknowledge this important distinction, our aim here was to highlight the findings of extant research on the various decisions that teachers tend to make in determining how to address L2 students’ writing. This information was deemed essential in preparing the participating preservice teachers for the task of providing WCF and represented the readings done for this purpose in the graduate seminar.

Indirect feedback is more likely to yield durable learning effects thanks to its problem-solving orientation (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Empirical investigations that have compared effects of the two feedback types in the short (incorporation of feedback in revisions) and long (improved accuracy in new pieces of writing) term have suggested a more prominent role for the direct type (cf. Truscott & Hsu, 2008), which has been found to positively affect learners’ accuracy in revisions and new texts alike (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012; Kim et al., 2020; Shintani & Ellis, 2013; van Beuningen et al., 2008, 2012). Yet, a recent meta-analysis on WCF effectiveness (Kang & Han, 2015) did not find a clear difference between the WCF types, suggesting that efficacy may be intertwined with other moderating variables, such as learner proficiency.

Ferris (2002) posited that direct feedback should be supplied to lower proficiency learners who do not yet possess sufficient L2 knowledge to self-correct. This advice has been supported by teachers, who prioritize direct feedback with beginners and indirect feedback with intermediate and advanced learners (Bitchener, 2012; Lee, 2004). In a recent study on the types of WCF techniques Canadian English as a second language (ESL) teachers used in three different educational contexts (primary, secondary, and college), Lira Gonzalez and Nassaji (2020) found that teachers employ direct feedback to address errors of primary and secondary students and indirect feedback to treat college learners’ errors. Furthermore, the more proficient (secondary school and college-level) learners were able to revise their writing more accurately than their lower proficiency counterparts. Similar results were found in Korean as L2 classes (Park et al., 2015), in which intermediate learners revised more errors than the beginners.

Error type may be a factor in determining the effectiveness of WCF types. Ferris (2006), for example, found that teachers supply indirect feedback to “treatable” errors and direct feedback to “untreatable” errors. Linguistic structures that follow a grammatical rule belong to the “treatable” category, whereas “untreatable” errors are idiosyncratic and may include many structures (Ferris, 2011). Ferris (1999) suggested that direct
feedback may be more effective with untreatable errors since it clearly marks the error and supplies correction; indirect feedback may yield more impact with “treatable” errors. Still, Ferris and Roberts (2001) found that indirect feedback could also be effective at least some of the time in addressing “untreatable” errors. Other error categorizations have been developed and include such dichotomies as global versus local (errors that interfere with whole/global intelligibility [i.e., content and organization] vs. those at the surface [i.e., grammar and mechanics]), stigmatizing versus nonstigmatizing (errors that might offend native L2 readers), and frequent versus infrequent (frequency of a particular error type in relation to other types) (Sheen, 2011). While Ferris (2002) advocated for teachers to address errors that are treatable, global, stigmatizing, and frequent, “it is not easy to see how such criteria can be applied by teachers” (Sheen, 2011, p. 46). Descriptive studies (e.g., Furneaux et al., 2007; Lee, 2008) have, instead, categorized types of errors that teachers address with CF, finding prevalence for errors in grammar and lexicon. Having analyzed 2,506 errors addressed by preservice ESL teachers, Guénette and Lyster (2013) developed 13 categories that focused on grammar (sentence structure, verbs, agreement, word order), lexicon (determiners, word choice, word form, word missing, prepositions), mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, spelling), first-language (L1) use, and style. The preservice teachers prioritized spelling, grammar, and lexical errors, seeing them as either most common among the learners they worked with or belonging to the “treatable” category. Using similar error categories, Lira Gonzalez and Nassaji (2020) found a comparable distribution of error types (grammar, lexical, and spelling errors) that their in-service teachers addressed with WCF.

Another factor in WCF-effectiveness research is the scope of correction because teachers are often faced with a decision of whether to respond to all (unfocused feedback) or a selected few (focused feedback) errors in a student’s text. When making the decision, teachers worry about both pedagogic and affective aspects (Ellis, 2017), wanting to balance learners’
preference for feedback to all in-text errors (e.g., Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Jean & Simard, 2011) with the affective dangers that overcorrection may yield (e.g., Brown, 2009; Ellis, 2017). Researchers working within a cognitive paradigm of L2 development have seen focused feedback as superior since it allows learners, especially those of lower proficiency, to readily notice and process the corrective information they receive (Bitchener, 2008; Sheen, 2007). Unfocused feedback might be better suited for written versus oral communication due to “the permanence of written texts,” which allows learners to repeatedly refer to the supplied CF and have the time “to draw upon stored L2 knowledge in their long-term memory and consider it in relation to the information provided in the written CF before hypothesizing the correct L2 form/structure to use” (Bitchener & Storch, 2016, p. 4). Advanced learners might be better able to attend to unfocused feedback since their knowledge and practice with L2 are arguably more developed than those of their lower proficiency peers (Bitchener & Storch, 2016). This argument finds support in a sociocultural perspective in that a more self-regulated learner (i.e., one that requires less scaffolding from a more proficient L2 user) may be better able to deal with CF on a wider range of errors and to readily attend to indirect feedback strategies (Bitchener & Storch, 2016). Still, CF treatment from this perspective needs to meet the needs of individual learners, providing them with as much or as little feedback on as many or as few structures as they deem necessary. Research comparing the effectiveness of focused versus unfocused CF has been limited to a handful of studies that together cannot yet ascertain advantages of one CF approach over another (Ellis et al., 2008; Frear & Chiu, 2015; Sheen et al., 2009). For example, while Ellis et al. (2008) and Frear and Chiu (2015) found no differences in accuracy gains between focused and unfocused groups, Sheen et al. (2009) and Kang and Han (2015) revealed advantages for focused WCF provision.

Research has recently suggested a role for such factors as instructional context, task type, and learner differences in mediating the effectiveness of WCF. Kang and Han (2015), for example, showed that learners in L2...
settings benefitted from WCF more than their foreign-language (FL) counterparts. This is because L2 settings, especially EAP classes, prioritize the development of writing skills, which might be of a lesser concern in FL settings (Ferris, 2010). The type of writing task can also affect the impact of CF, as essays/compositions and narratives may be more susceptible to feedback than journal writing (Kang & Han, 2015). Finally, various individual differences may determine whether or not learners attend to provided WCF. Bitchener (2017) argued that learner-internal variables of working memory, processing capacity, and language-learning aptitude can, individually or collaboratively, affect cognitive processing of WCF. Similarly, a motivated learner is likely to engage with feedback, as is the learner with positive attitudes “to language learning in general, to target language communities, to the learning of a particular language, to a focus on form and/or meaning, and to written CF and particular types of written CF” (Bitchener, 2017, p. 136).

**Teachers’ WCF Practices**

Despite the ample knowledge on WCF effectiveness, “much less research . . . has investigated how teachers respond to their students’ writing and what justifies their pedagogical choices” (Guénette & Lyster, 2013, p. 130). The investigations that have addressed L2 teachers’ corrective practices have primarily juxtaposed teachers’ beliefs about WCF with their in-class actions (e.g., Ferris, 2014; Guénette & Lyster, 2013; Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Lee, 2009). Guénette and Lyster (2013), for example, examined the WCF beliefs that 18 preservice L2 teachers held and whether the teachers acted on these beliefs when providing feedback to high school ESL learners. Most teachers preferred to selectively focus on learners’ errors that they addressed with direct CF or a combination of direct and indirect types. While these beliefs were confirmed in practice, the teachers reported struggling with a fear of incorrectly diagnosing an error, overwhelming the students with too much feedback, knowing how to adapt feedback to learners’ proficiency levels, and managing time constraints.
When providing WCF, similar concerns were reported by Junqueira and Payant (2015), who investigated the WCF beliefs and practices of a graduate student teaching university-level ESL courses. This teacher’s beliefs and practices, however, were inconsistent. Although she believed in addressing global issues before addressing local issues, the teacher prioritized feedback to local over global issues. She also preferred using direct feedback with explanation to help learners understand errors but, in practice, supplied comprehensive feedback without explanation.

WCF beliefs-practices inconsistencies have also been documented with in-service teachers. Although the university writing teachers in Ferris (2014) saw it necessary to supply feedback to both content and language, they provided less feedback to stronger learners; when they did, the focus was on surface-level concerns. While some teachers claimed to prefer the use of questions (indirect feedback), in reality, direct feedback in the form of statements and imperatives dominated. Similarly, the English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Lee (2009) believed that WCF should focus on both content and accuracy, but attention to language form dominated their feedback. The teachers also preferred to focus on select errors indirectly; yet, in practice, they used direct feedback to treat errors comprehensively. The teachers in a Saudi-university context (Alshahrani & Storch, 2014), in line with their institution’s expectations, provided comprehensive feedback using prescribed indirect techniques, albeit they believed that students’ proficiency should determine the type of WCF supplied (i.e., direct feedback for lower proficiency learners and indirect feedback for more advanced learners). However, there is evidence that CF-focused training—which combines opportunities for both preservice and in-service teachers to engage with research, apply findings in practice, and reflect on the experience and resulting knowledge—can positively amend teachers’ views about feedback (e.g., Busch, 2010; Li, 2017; Vásquez & Harvey, 2010).

These findings have been communicated by researchers, not the actual teacher-participants. Yet, examining one’s own corrective practices...
can yield new understandings of teacher practices and thought processes, sustaining a practitioner’s development in the long term. Delante, an English-learning advisor and teacher at a university in Singapore, examined the written feedback he provided and its effects (2017). Although his feedback addressed issues of both form and content, he focused on form more and prioritized direct feedback. By reflecting on his practice, Delante identified factors related to his instructional context, himself as a teacher, and his students as the reasons for his WCF choices, and he outlined strategies to mitigate these factors’ effects. Examinations such as this are rare, especially with preservice teachers. By having four graduate students engage in a duoethnography to relay firsthand the processes they undergo in understanding their feedback practices and the reasons for them, this study aims to highlight how preservice teachers engage with WCF and what pedagogical issues they face in the process. To reflect the personal nature of this duoethnography, the analysis is reported using the first-person plural “we” since the teacher-educator considers herself an active participant in the professional development that occurred.

**Method**

This study was conducted with four Canadian MA candidates (3 males and 1 female; mean age 35) attending a graduate seminar on pedagogical grammar taught by the teacher-educator. The graduate students were in the 2nd year of a 2-year program and had already completed courses (taught by other instructors) in L2 methodology, L2 acquisition, and a required 60-hour teaching practicum; two students reported additional teaching experience, which was outside of the L2 field. While three participants reported English as their L1, Chinese was the native language of the fourth student; however, his English proficiency was high. The teacher-educator designed the graduate seminar to (a) focus on pedagogical descriptions of English grammar, (b) have students critically evaluate theories and empirical work related to the teaching of grammar, and (c) explore methodological approaches and techniques for developing/
enhancing learners’ grammatical knowledge. As part of the course, the students empirically investigated their attitudes about and practices with CF as they each tutored an L2 learner enrolled in a 13-week EAP course at the same university. The EAP course was the second in a three-level program, which, in line with the curriculum in place, indicates intermediate proficiency (i.e., each learner obtained a score of at least 5.5/9.0 on the IELTS [International English Language Testing System] test) and emphasizes the level-appropriate development of general academic skills, language forms, and study tasks. The EAP students were to write a two-page literature review to add to a research report on the teacher-prescribed topic of addiction.

For the assignment, the graduate students tutored EAP learners (who came from China, Japan, Senegal, and Syria) one-on-one to (a) determine tutees’ views, needs, and expectations about grammar and CF; (b) provide CF on the tutees’ EAP assignment; (c) interview tutees about their understanding of the feedback provided; and (e) have tutees rewrite the essay, incorporating tutors’ suggestions. Then, the tutors reflected on the project, analyzing the choices they made while completing the four steps and how these choices affected their WCF attitudes and resulting practices. These reflections were later orally discussed by the tutors and the teacher-educator to compare individual findings with those of the group. Before the students commenced the assignment, the teacher-educator instructed the students on CF and WCF, assigned key readings on the topic, and led class discussions on the topic. Throughout the project, the teacher-educator provided detailed instructions, reflection guidance, PowerPoint slides, time in class, and additional ad hoc assistance.

The teacher-educator structured the assignment to align with available WCF research and pedagogical advice. As Table 1 shows, the tutors met with the tutees three times (1 hour each time), with each meeting serving a specific purpose. The goals for the first meeting were to interview the tutee about his or her views, needs, and expectations about grammar and CF and to collect their writing for feedback. Learning about tutees’ views...
Table 1

*Assignment Structure and Rationale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>Tutee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interview tutee about their views, needs, and expectations about grammar and CF; collect writing for feedback</td>
<td>Meet tutor one-on-one to answer questions; provide the assigned writing for feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deliver the corrected essay and discuss what tutee understood from the feedback; seek/provide clarifications as necessary and ask tutee to rewrite the essay, incorporating the WCF provided</td>
<td>Meet tutor to review the WCF provided and ask any questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Compare tutee’s revised draft with the original to determine which corrections were incorporated (or not) and seek answers for the choices made; suggest ways for tutee to continue to improve their writing</td>
<td>Meet tutor to review differences between initial and revised drafts, explain choices made, and ask additional questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
on feedback, past experiences with it, and preferences for it is supported by research that has found that learners’ beliefs about feedback mediate the noticeability and effectiveness of CF (e.g., Kartchava & Ammar, 2014; Li, 2010). This information may help teachers tailor the feedback they deliver to the (changing) needs of one or many learners at various points of their L2 development (e.g., Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Having teachers compare their CF beliefs with those of their students may ascertain the extent to and areas in which their CF perceptions differ. Research has shown that teacher and learner beliefs about CF diverge, with learners wanting more attention to error than teachers are willing to supply (e.g., Jean & Simard, 2011; Li, 2017). Teachers’ CF actions, however, can depend on the length of their teaching experience and their experience with feedback. Experienced teachers provide more CF and use a greater variety of corrective strategies than their less experienced counterparts (e.g., Junqueira & Kim, 2013; Rahimi & Zhang, 2015), who tend to draw on their language-learning experiences to inform their general (e.g., Borg, 2006, 2018) and CF-specific (e.g., Kartchava et al., 2020; Junqueira & Kim, 2013) behaviors.

In the second meeting, held a week later, the tutors delivered the corrected essay in person to determine what the tutees could understand from the feedback on their own and to provide clarifications. The session, a form of oral conferencing, allowed the learners to review and discuss their writing and the provided feedback individually with a tutor. Such opportunities are well-received by learners who prefer to orally discuss their errors with the teacher in lieu of receiving a marked-up essay, the errors in which they are to decipher on their own (Nassaji, 2017). When learners negotiate provided CF, they are more likely to revise as well as address more errors in terms of degree and type (Sze, 2002; Williams, 2004). The resulting corrections are also more successful and remedied more quickly in subsequent oral conferences (Nassaji, 2007). The individualized format of oral conferences is conducive to providing learners with developmentally appropriate feedback and time to process it; such

sessions can help teachers understand the cause of particular errors (as articulated by a learner) and select suitable CF types with which to address them (Nassaji, 2011).

For the third meeting, held 2 weeks after the second, the tutees compared the revised draft with the original one, explaining the corrections they chose to incorporate (or not). The tutors assessed the students’ effort holistically, answered questions, and suggested ways to improve their writing skills further. This was done to determine how engaged the tutees were with the supplied WCF and to identify obstacles in their understanding of the corrections. Having tutees describe what they think a correction means or the type of error it targets may help teachers determine “how and why learners respond to, process and use the feedback they are given” (Bitchener & Storch, 2016, p. 63) as well as identify specific challenges a learner may be facing in attending to the feedback (Bitchener, 2017). This may also help teachers reevaluate the effectiveness of their CF practices going forward (Delante, 2017).

The written reports and group interview notes were analyzed holistically to identify general themes in our responses, the intended meaning of which were verified through a members’ check, which ensures that the data gathered match what the participants mean to convey (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although the results of duoethnographies are generally reported dialogically, the traditionally written duoethnographies have adopted a more mainstream format (R. Lowe, personal communication, July 24, 2020), which we employed here.

**Results and Discussion**

In this study, we explored the choices we made in providing WCF to student writing and the effects of these decisions on our immediate and future interactions with L2 writers (see Table 2 for a summary). Our analysis revealed five themes (expectations, feedback scope, feedback type, time commitment, and complexity of WCF) that guided our thoughts about and provision of feedback. Before embarking on the project, we had

all experienced receiving feedback in our own language learning and saw its provision as important; however, we were not sure about “best practices” in feedback provision, and we worried about providing corrections that maintained a balance between being effective and, at the same time, being mindful of the learners’ feelings and expectations.

**Expectations**

*Julian*: Based on my experiences, I have come to question writing as a whole. EAP at [this university] assumes that writing is a universal skill based on how it is employed in a content-based fashion, i.e., students are given a thematic unit to work on throughout the term. . . . Since the classes are so general, while it may not be intended, the pedagogical assumption here [is] that writing is a general set of formative language skills. However, there is so much more. The ideas of being able to think critically and synthesize information are expected to be shown by the students’ writing, but I imagine that the concepts themselves are often not explained clearly . . . as students often struggle with these broader, more academic concepts. . . . When I even use the term writing, I think more of the ability to write grammatically associated sentences to send across meaning from one interlocutor to another in a common and understandable fashion. I feel that the broader pragmatic context is more justifiably associated with the term that we know as composition, which has been taught through product, process, and socio-rhetorical approaches.

Before meeting the tutees, we discussed the idea of what writing meant to us and the assignment the tutees were working on. We also considered how to best respond to the assignment’s topic, writing genre, and possible errors. The tension demonstrated in Julian’s excerpt stems from the writing-to-learn/learning-to-write dichotomy (Manchón, 2011) that, for a long time, had L2 teachers use L1 instructional approaches that emphasized process-to-product writing, redefining language teachers as L1 writing instructors (Leki, 2000) and leading to the near abandonment of
WCF. In terms of the genre of the tutees’ assignment, we too had once had to learn how to write a literature review, and having produced several of them, we could empathize with the struggles the EAP learners were likely encountering (see Beaufort, 2007; and Tardy, 2011 for an overview of the challenges in learning to write in a discipline). Much like the EAP learners we tutored, we did not have any control over the topic or the assignment they were working on, but we planned to offer the tutees as much support in the process as possible, ensuring that their writer voices came through in a clear and grammatically accurate way. It was important to us to adopt a supportive stance toward their ideas and language differences (Horner et al., 2011) as we tried to see the learners as language resources, not challenges (Zawacki et al., 2007, cited in Zawacki & Habib, 2014). Still, we realized that accuracy in writing is of great importance to academic and professional audiences and that in order for L2 learners to “write like an insider” (Zawacki & Habib, 2014, p. 188), they would need to learn the various genres and discourse conventions of the academe by engaging in relevant writing and research processes as well as addressing issues of form. Many of our expectations were rooted in our experiences as language learners, which, in line with previous research on teacher cognition, is to be expected of new (e.g., Borg, 2006; Kartchava et al., 2020) and even more seasoned professionals (e.g., Junqueira & Kim, 2013). Given our own experiences in learning to write in an L2 and the learning outcomes for the EAP course established by the program, we expected the learners to struggle primarily with issues of genre, grammar, and lexis, and in terms of the task, we thought that issues in verb forms, sentence structure, and word choice were likely to prevail.

Feedback Scope

Yushi: [The tutee] confirmed that she received CF from instructors in previous ESL programs but normally just on her written work. She believed that feedback was helpful and that it helped her check and correct any grammar issues that she had trouble with. In this

specific assignment, she asked me to look at her work as a whole and correct it as much as possible.

**Judy:** [The tutee] requested that her grammar be corrected and asked for “many red marks to mark her mistakes,” mentioning word choice, word order, vocabulary, and the need for academic English. Later, she listed connecting words, paraphrasing, and citation formatting as areas that required extra focus. She was unaware of any error patterns and simply requested, “Tell me everything I do wrong.” She stated that she preferred written feedback because she could refer back to it and did not have to depend on her memory.

**Abdizalon:** Overall, [the tutee] saw CF to be helpful and wanted to be corrected often on his use of English. Moreover, he highlighted that when it came to receiving CF, he expected to be corrected on all aspects of his writing, both at the sentence and discourse level.

After meeting with the tutees for the first time, it became abundantly clear that although they all had had some experience with WCF and welcomed it, they could not identify problem areas they wanted us to focus on in our feedback. Instead, they asked for “all errors” to be addressed. Not having enough information to draw on, we found ourselves struggling to decide how to approach the task. The instructional setting and the prescribed task type were conducive to feedback provision (Ferris, 2010; Kang & Han, 2015), but we did not know the scope that our feedback should take. Given that our tutees leaned toward a comprehensive focus and that WCF research has not yet reached a consensus on whether focused feedback is more effective than unfocused feedback, we decided to address all the errors (in structure and language) we could find in the tutees’ initial writing. This, sadly, proved to be a disappointing choice, for when we presented the tutees with feedback, they appeared overwhelmed, lamenting “too much correction” and feeling unable to address it all. A lack of clear focus in the feedback probably yielded cognitive and informational overload, making the task of responding to the feedback appear
unbearable to the tutees (Bitchener, 2008). Furthermore, since the main focus of the feedback was primarily on grammatical and lexical errors, it likely confused and discouraged the learners, who often could not explain the errors or find ways to remedy them on their own (Lee, 2019).

However, the oral conference allowed us the time to explain some of the errors and to reassure the learners that they were good writers despite the errors identified. This assurance was important since unfocused feedback can negatively affect learner motivation to write in an L2 (Lee et al., 2018). The conference also helped us develop a more informed understanding of the causes for the tutees’ errors (Nassaji, 2011); one of these causes was their lower proficiency. In retrospect, focused WCF would probably have been more helpful to these intermediate-proficiency tutees since lower proficiency learners are better able to notice and attend to fewer errors (Bitchener, 2008; Sheen, 2007), which may translate into learners’ willingness to engage with a teacher’s feedback (Zheng & Yu, 2018) and more successful revisions. However, emotions (surprise, happiness, dissatisfaction, disappointment, frustration, etc.) that learners feel at the sight of WCF can impact the extent to which they choose to engage with and uptake feedback. Mahfoodh (2017) found that when EFL university learners accepted feedback, they revised successfully 95.2% of the time. Although our tutees appeared disappointed with the amount of feedback offered, they appreciated the oral conference and felt reassured to revise their writing. Interestingly, Mahfoodh’s study showed that it is not always the positive emotions about feedback that lead to revisions; dissatisfaction and frustration can result in successful revisions as well.

Feedback Type

*Abdizalon:* I utilized a mix of both direct and indirect options. Specifically, I used four different WCF techniques: underlining errors without explanation, underlining while highlighting error type, underlining with metalinguistic/rule explanation, and direct correction.

The first type provided a more implicit indirect CF and was used for

errors where the student was deemed able to identify and correct the error on his own. The second CF type was used when the student was perceived to be familiar with the form—although had not fully mastered its use—requiring some assistance. The third CF type was more explicit and was provided for complex errors and register-specific rules [i.e., referencing]. The fourth CF type was provided where the student was deemed unable to self-correct the error. I hoped the first three types would help build the student’s self-editing strategies in different ways, and . . . the fourth CF technique would supplement the three in improving the writing.

Judy: I decided to utilize a “judicious” combination of both direct and indirect correction. The direct correction consisted of cross-outs, rewrites, and additions. Indirect correction was used when obvious patterns of errors were detected. A simple visual cue was used to identify the pattern (rectangle around word usage errors, circle around the incorrect use of are with an additional triangle when the problem was noun/verb agreement).

Yushi: I used two major feedback techniques on her paper: direct correction [DC] and indirect correction. I used a lot of DC to correct her paper, such as cross-out[s], rewrites, and additions. I also provided some indirect corrections in the form of codes.

For lower level learners, the type of CF instructors use could prove the deciding factor in how much WCF is successfully modified since “direct correction is best for producing accurate revisions, and students prefer it because it is the fastest and easiest way for them as well as the fastest way for teachers over several drafts” (Chandler, 2003, p. 267). Indirect feedback, in turn, could be more challenging for less proficient learners to respond to since they lack the necessary knowledge and resources. Although our tutees had experience with feedback and preferred direct WCF to the indirect type, we opted to use both: direct feedback for editing surface errors and indirect feedback for raising tutees’ awareness to the errors and promoting
the use of their L2 knowledge to self-correct. The tutees successfully revised all the errors highlighted with direct CF but struggled to deal with the indirect type—when they encountered indirect feedback, they often had to consult with their tutors for more explanation and support. This reaction is expected given their proficiency level and extant research on the superiority of direct feedback in yielding accurate revisions (e.g., Bitchener, 2012). Still, we wanted to challenge the tutees with indirect feedback to “help [them] become independent writers capable of self-editing” (Lee, 2019, p. 525). We found that mixing the WCF types was especially helpful when tutees could not understand or act on indirect clues in the feedback. For example, one tutor, focusing on the paper’s content, advised his tutee to narrow down his topic. Initially, the tutee nodded and appeared to understand the request, but when the revised draft was unchanged in this regard, Julian, his tutor, explained the meaning of the feedback and suggested ways to address it. This explanation brought on excitement from the tutee and willingness to attempt another revision. Hence, less proficient writers can benefit from indirect feedback that they understand and know how to act on.

Time Commitment

Abdizalon: The effort I put into providing CF to [my tutee] in this project and the use of a full meeting to provide WCF may be luxuries not possible in a real-world context [that] involves limitations such as time constraints, [an] increased number of students, external objectives, etc. These factors restrict opportunities to arrange lengthy one-on-one meetings with the students as well as opportunities to provide significant CF to each student on individual errors.

Judy: After witnessing the power of direct CF, one wonders at its usefulness for the overall goal of assisting L2 writers to learn strategies to improve their writing. Simply editing the student’s writing seems counterproductive. This suggests that the treatment of the students’ drafts requires something other than a simple “proofread” and that perhaps there should be a series of tasks at the level of metalanguage

to help students appreciate indirect CF and develop their own editing skills.

The graduate students’ concern about the commitment of time and effort that WCF provision requires is echoed throughout the research on writing, since new and experienced teachers alike spend inordinate amounts of time correcting learners’ writing (e.g., Guénette & Lyster, 2013; Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Lee, 2008, 2019). To lighten the burden, some teachers may amend the amount or quality of supplied feedback. For example, the preservice teacher in Junqueira and Payant (2015) forewent providing explanations to 80.6% of local errors, likely to cope with the time pressure she was under. Similarly, preservice teachers in Guénette and Lyster (2013) supplied direct feedback to save time. Delante (2017) noted a negative change of tone in his comments when he was flooded with assignments to provide feedback on. Time constraints may yield inaccurate feedback, which may prove more harmful than helpful (Ferris, 1999; Lee, 2004). However, it is important, as Judy said, to question the role of the teacher in the learning process. After all, teachers should not be “simply marking machines . . . that repeat the same tedious job mechanically, day in and day out” (Lee, 2019, p. 525) but should provide learners with opportunities to self-edit their work and benefit from indirect feedback (Ferris & Roberts, 2001).

Complexity of WCF

*Abdizalon:* [This assignment allowed me] to see, firsthand, the many theoretical, practical, and contextual factors involved in providing CF and the difficulty of balancing them effectively. Some of the challenges I experienced would not have been considered had it not been for this eye-opening experience, some of which I hope to account for more effectively in the future.

*Yushi:* The takeaway message that I got from this project is that CF is complex. Having been able to work with a real student allowed me
a perfect opportunity to put the theories I learned in the course into practice. We also need to consider learners’ differences and beliefs, accommodation for which should be a priority for teachers.

We found the project an illuminating experience that allowed us to appreciate the complexity of WCF and the many factors that impact its effectiveness. While some of our choices made intuitive sense to us and were reflective of the kind of experiences and instruction we had received as language learners, they were not always effective for the learners we worked with. This knowledge makes it important to consider learner differences and amend our feedback accordingly (Bitchener, 2017). While the effectiveness of the various WCF types is contingent on learners’ proficiency, the maturity level teachers assign to learners may affect the CF type chosen. Delante (2017) used indirect feedback with learners he perceived as “mature,” which he defined as having the ability to think and work independently. We are aware that although learners can play an active role in providing feedback to each other, which may alleviate the time-commitment concerns we endured, learners may need training to be effective (e.g., Sato & Lyster, 2012; Tigchelaar & Polio, 2017); however, we did not have a chance to test this in practice. Having interacted with CF research, we plan to be vigilant in applying the advice given to practitioners, as it may not always be supported by extant evidence (e.g., Ellis, 2017; Tigchelaar & Polio, 2017). Finally, similar to the preservice teacher in Junqueira and Payant (2015), we realize that additional practice with WCF, both in individual and group settings, may improve our comfort level with and understanding of feedback provision. The findings from this study give the teacher-educator evidence-based ideas on ways to amend this project in the future.

Table 2

Summary of Choices Made and Their Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Choices made</th>
<th>Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>Provide WCF (as it is important to L2 development) but respect tutees’ writing styles</td>
<td>Struggled to balance tutees’ expectations/needs with the extant WCF theoretical and empirical evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expect issues with grammar (i.e., verb forms, sentence structure, and word choice) and lexis</td>
<td>Confused tutees, who could not easily explain the errors (which were primarily focused on grammar and lexis) or remedy them independently; oral conferences addressed some of these concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback scope</td>
<td>Supply WCF on all errors (i.e., comprehensive approach)</td>
<td>Overwhelmed tutees with too much correction and inability to address the CF supplied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback types</td>
<td>Use direct feedback to address surface errors and indirect feedback to help tutees notice their errors and promote self-correction</td>
<td>Enabled tutees to successfully revise all errors marked using direct feedback, but tutees struggled with errors highlighted using indirect WCF types, and they required additional explanation/support to address the issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time commitment</td>
<td>Allocate a significant amount of time to WCF provision</td>
<td>Dedicated extensive effort and time providing feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity of WCF</td>
<td>Were unsure of how to approach the task of WCF provision and what to expect</td>
<td>Learned that many factors impact the effectiveness of feedback provision, including learner differences, contextual factors, task type, and WCF training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

Both the project we undertook in the pedagogical grammar seminar and our collaboration with the teacher-educator allowed us to reflect on and critically examine our understanding of and practice with WCF. Most importantly, this project made us aware of the attitudes we brought to the task and identified factors that affected our practice. Relying on our past experiences as language learners, we thought feedback was important, but we struggled to supply it in a manner that would balance our tutees’ expectations and needs with the WCF theoretical and empirical evidence we learned about. We also became keenly aware that feedback is a complex phenomenon and there is no one answer on how to apply it in practice. Task design, instructional setting, and learner differences impact teachers’ decisions on what errors to correct, how many of them to address, and what techniques to use. Even after implementing these decisions in practice, there is no guarantee that learners will revise their initial drafts since a myriad of factors, including lack of understanding and emotional predisposition or response to CF, may affect the actions they choose to take. To understand and possibly predict learner behavior with feedback, oral conferences with the teacher might be useful, as was the case here, since such interactions can help teachers interpret the reason(s) for an error and help learners recognize the need to incorporate the supplied correction (Nassaji, 2017). Such sessions can also help teachers fine-tune their feedback to the needs and proficiencies of individual learners or groups (Nassaji, 2011). Although oral conferences can add to a teacher’s already extensive time commitment, the information these conferences yield may lessen the occurrence of misunderstood or inaccurate teacher feedback and help teachers provide assistance in line with learners’ evolving needs. Trained peers could also engage in feedback provision, a process that may not only help teachers manage their time and effort but also increase learners’ attention to form and further their L2 development (e.g., Sato & Lyster, 2012).
This project represents a form of teacher training that combines theory with an experiential component of providing L2 learners with WCF. While academic articles made us aware of the theoretical and practical aspects involved in feedback provision, working with tutees helped us experience these aspects and identify other issues involved. Reading alone would not have yielded the same results (e.g., Kamiya & Loewen, 2014) since developing expertise requires topic-targeted and extensive training that also includes reflection on performance (Tsui, 2005). The few studies that have engaged preservice teachers in learning opportunities that combined theory and practice have helped these teachers to appreciate the importance of errors and understand when and how to supply feedback (Busch, 2010), diminish their concerns about its negative effects (Vásquez & Harvey, 2010), and realize the role of timing in CF provision (Kartchava et al., 2020).

Using duoethnography to explore our understanding of the topic has guided our evolving interpretations and discussions of WCF while promoting open reflection and allowing us to equally consider the various elements that participants reported as important at various stages in the process. Still, because duoethnographies are highly context and individual specific, their results cannot be generalized; they can, however, offer insights on similar experiences to be undertaken by interested others. This study has detailed a way to involve preservice teachers in learning about, engaging with, and reflecting on WCF provision, ensuring that such opportunities yield introspective and autonomous future L2 teachers.
References


Bitchener, J. (2017). Why some L2 learners fail to benefit from written corrective feedback. In H. Nassaji & E. Kartchava (Eds.), Corrective


Understanding Written Corrective Feedback and Its Effects • 107


