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JOURNAL OF RESPONSE TO WRITING

A Catalytic Event for Response Research? Introducing Our New Journal: Editor's Introduction

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My own interest in launching this journal arose in the spring of 2012 when I taught a new doctoral seminar on response to student writing. I had a very bright and engaged group of students who, for the major assignments in the course, reviewed the existing literature and made research proposals related to their own interests around the broad topic of response. Their topics and ideas were fascinating and on the cutting edge, but there was a problem: In several instances, there was little (or no) recent research for them to review.

While there certainly are scholars out there doing empirical work on response/feedback to writing, much of the activity around this topic appears to have peaked in the 1980s in composition studies and in the 1990s in second language writing studies. Though several practical/scholarly syntheses (authored or edited volumes) appeared in the 2000s (e.g., Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 2003, 2011; Goldstein, 2005; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Liu & Hansen, 2002; Straub, 2006), few of these contributions involved reporting on newly completed empirical research on response to writing. The one notable exception to this generalization is research on written corrective feedback in second language acquisition/writing; work on this specific feedback subtopic has been extensive, mostly published in the *Journal of*

Second Language Writing and in applied linguistics journals. However, many other interesting and important topics—teachers’ written commentary, peer response, teacher-student writing conferences, writing center interactions—have been relatively under-represented in the research literature over the past 10–15 years. Other newer topics, such as the influence of technology on instructor and peer feedback, have barely been touched upon.

Reflecting upon this experience with my graduate students, I couldn’t help but think of the catalytic events that have propelled second language writing scholarship into the highly active phase it entered about 20 years ago—specifically, the launching of the *Journal of Second Language Writing (JSLW)* in 1992 and of the Symposium on Second Language Writing (first biannual, now annual) in 1998. JSLW, under the guidance of its founding editors Tony Silva and Ilona Leki, became a centralized place where second language writing (SLW) scholars could disseminate their work and others could make a first stop in reviewing the literature on various SLW topics. Having watched this journal (and the symposium) from its beginnings, I believe that having these centralized, easy-to-find dissemination outlets has encouraged scholarship in SLW—in the sense both that scholars know they have a place to send their work and that newer scholars read/hear about others’ research and become inspired to pursue their own ideas.

There are so many publication outlets these days, and it can be hard to expeditiously find and obtain everything relevant to one’s interests. It is our hope that a journal focused on response to writing will have a similar catalytic effect over time and inspire more researchers to (re)turn to the important and interesting subtopics surrounding response.

What We’re About

The purpose of this journal is to disseminate researchers’ and teachers’ scholarly work related to responding to writing. We interpret the term “response” broadly, which is why the title of the journal is not more narrowly focused on, say, *student* writing or on *teacher* response or on *written* response. Response can be about all of those things, but it can cover other ground as well. For example, one of my students in that 2012 doctoral seminar proposed a research project to examine the interactions of both students and their teaching assistants (TAs) on an online discussion board

for a large university lecture course. In this forum, peers and TAs are giving each other feedback about their online contributions and, indirectly, about their understanding of course content, but this is not the same as a teacher writing comments or corrections on a piece of assigned student writing. Another of my students proposed a study of how the “feedback” young writers receive on social networking platforms (e.g., through “Likes” or comments attached to Facebook status updates) influences how they process and use feedback in more formal academic settings. These are merely two examples of how the topic of “response” can be interpreted more broadly than simply what the teacher says to a student in the specific context of a writing course.

Possible Topics for Further Exploration

With the above discussion in mind, we envision both research- and teaching-focused articles that might focus on any of the following response subtopics:

- Descriptions of teachers’ written feedback approaches (and their effects on student writers)
- Specific discussions of written error correction (also known in the literature as *written corrective feedback*, or “written CF”)
- Explorations of peer review (descriptions, effects, student reactions)
- Studies of guided self-feedback (in which students are led through reflective and/or analytic activities to critically assess their own writing)
- Investigations of student/consultant interactions within writing/learning center contexts
- Teacher-student writing conferences (one-on-one oral interactions, online interactions, pair or small group conferences)
- How the affordances of technology influence response dynamics (including the above-mentioned contexts of online course discussion boards and social media sites)
- Feedback in academic settings other than the undergraduate writing course (courses in the disciplines, thesis/dissertation students’ interactions with their supervisors)

- How new teachers learn about response and how in-service teachers develop/improve their responding strategies
- How teachers interact with each other about response
- How response interacts with approaches to writing assessment (for example, how feedback is different in a portfolio course compared to a traditional assessment scheme in which every assignment is separately graded)
- How students process and apply teacher and peer feedback, and how student desires and preferences are/are not considered and accommodated
- How students and teachers interact about response (for example, students giving teachers feedback about their feedback, or how teachers prepare students for response interactions)

The above list is just for starters, however. We hope that readers and prospective authors may consider and submit articles that cover other ground (for example, response in the workplace) beyond academic settings as well.

Article Genres

We anticipate publishing articles in at least four distinct subgenres:

1. *Featured articles*: These are full-length articles (around 8000 words, excluding abstract and references) reporting on new empirical research on response.
2. *Teaching articles*: These are shorter articles (around 3000 words, excluding references) in which authors describe their own or their program's teaching practices around response. While these articles should still be grounded in appropriate theory/previous research, we would expect a much shorter review of the literature than in featured articles and that most of the text would be of a practical nature.
3. *Review articles*: Our primary focus in this journal is to publish new empirical work and teaching-oriented work. However, we may occasionally publish articles that review the relevant literature on a particular response subtopic, arriving at a concluding synthesis/summary about the state-of-the-research on that particular issue and where researchers can and should go next in their explorations.

4. *Book reviews:* As/if new books appear that focus on response, we hope to publish reviews of those books in a timely manner. (We are not especially interested in publishing book reviews unless the book is primarily focused on response.)

It is also possible that we will publish articles that cross subgenres (e.g., a primarily teaching-focused article that also reports on a small amount of data) if crossing the genre boundaries seems appropriate in that particular instance. We hope to publish 3–4 articles in each issue, which will appear twice per calendar year.

Audience(s)

Much of the empirical research on response has been published in journals and books representing two distinct disciplinary traditions: composition studies and applied linguistics/SLW studies. Another way of putting this is that one audience for publications on response has been teachers/researchers focused on first language (L1) students and another focused on second language (L2) students. We do not intend to make this distinction in this journal. While the characteristics and backgrounds of student writers receiving feedback are certainly relevant and should be accounted for in individual articles, the broader issues surrounding response (teachers' written/oral feedback strategies, peer response, corrective feedback on language matters, technology, teacher preparation, etc.) are common to both audiences. Further, of course, in many present pedagogical contexts, instructors are working with both L1 and L2 students in the same classes, so artificial divides between scholarship on response issues seem rather passé. Thus, you will notice that our inaugural editorial board includes scholars from both L1 and L2 settings and that our first issue includes articles that should appeal to both audiences.

Beyond the L1/L2 issue, it is worth reiterating as an “audience” point that our journal's interests extend well beyond the undergraduate composition or SLW classroom—to classes across the disciplines, to graduate student/supervisor interactions, to the types of feedback authors receive from journal reviewers or editors, to nonacademic settings (workplace, online interactions, etc.), and to K–12 (primary and secondary school) settings as

well. In other words, the “audience” for *response to writing* can be broadly interpreted as anyone who receives feedback on something they wrote.

Research Paradigms and Methodology

One of the characteristics we appreciate most about the *Journal of Second Language Writing* is its “big tent” approach to acceptable research designs. Whereas some publications in various (sub)disciplines clearly privilege either quantitative or qualitative inquiry, we hope and intend to publish articles representing either paradigm as well as mixed-methods approaches. Indeed, our two empirical articles in this issue illustrate this intent, as we have one quantitative piece that utilizes inferential statistics and one qualitative case study research article. Further, we support and will carefully consider replication studies if they bring new insights to a relevant conversation.

Journal Value Statements

To summarize everything I’ve said already and to add a bit further to it, I’d like to share the “value statements” to which our editorial board has agreed. We may add to or adapt these as we go along, but these are our starting points:

1. Publications in *JRW* should appeal to L1, L2, and/or foreign language (FL) writing professionals but be written in a way that the findings and conclusions are accessible and interesting to audience members in all domains.
2. *JRW* will publish research following any methodological approach as long as the methodology suits the inquiry appropriately and is sufficiently explained so that readers can understand and appreciate it. In other words, we are open to quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods designs.
3. Replication studies are welcomed *if* they bring new insights to a relevant conversation or have strong potential to encourage further empirical research.
4. Research articles, whether primary or secondary, should be well-grounded

in appropriate and relevant practice, prior research, and/or theory. (The definition of “well-grounded” can and should vary according to the research questions and design.)

5. The journal editorship should help the journal succeed in metrics relevant to academic publishing through high levels of reviewer and editorial rigor, strategic management of resources, and effective communication.

Two points are made in this list that I haven't already covered above. First, many journals insist that all empirical research articles include a rehearsal of the “theoretical foundations” of the study. While all research should clearly be grounded in appropriate and relevant theory, we do not necessarily agree that every single paper we publish must absolutely include such a theoretical foundations section. Rather, we have chosen our wording in value statement #4 to incorporate a more flexible approach to this principle of theoretical grounding. Finally (point #5), it is in everyone's best interest (authors, editors, readers) that we keep rigor and excellence as high values. So although we are a new, small, online journal, it should not be assumed that there is a “low bar” for publication acceptance.

Special Thanks

The organizational energy behind this journal has come from Grant Eckstein, Norman Evans, and James Hartshorn. As managing editor, Grant (who just completed his Ph.D. in Linguistics at UC Davis) has done most of the legwork to keep the details straight and the development process moving forward. In the earliest formative stages, it was he who corralled several busy academics to discuss ideas and vision behind the journal and keep us on track. Special thanks are also due to Professor Norman Evans and James Hartshorn of Brigham Young University, who not only were part of the earliest meetings about the journal, but also arranged for its online publication through BYU. They also investigated the need for and interest in a new journal focused on response to writing, and their report/findings can be seen in “A new scholarly journal as a response to a professional need,” included in this first issue.

Finally, thanks are also due to all of the members of our editorial board for their support and assistance in reviewing the initial round of manuscripts.

Introduction to This Issue

We are very pleased that our introductory issue includes interesting and well-written articles that cross a range of topics, research paradigms, and genres. Following this editor's introduction and the Hartshorn/Evans short report on their survey about the need for this journal, we present two featured articles that report upon new empirical research. Rahimi's article, "The role of individual differences in L2 learners' retention of written corrective feedback," employs quantitative methods to examine the relationship between students' learning styles and motivation and their retention of written corrective feedback from their teachers. Eun Young Julia Kim's paper, "I don't understand what you're saying! Lessons from three case studies," examines the interactions of three L2 writers interacting with native-English-speaking tutors in a campus writing center. Andrea Scott's teaching issues article, "Commenting across the disciplines: Partnering with writing centers to train faculty to respond effectively to student writing," describes how her institution transitioned into a collaborative model in which writing center consultants and faculty in the disciplines worked together to help faculty develop more effective feedback practices. Finally, Lauren Kelly reviews Nancy Sommers's 2013 publication, *Responding to writing* (Bedford St. Martin's). We are grateful to these authors and others who submitted manuscripts for taking a chance on a new publication and for their patience as we worked through editorial and submission glitches.

We hope you enjoy this first issue and look forward to your feedback—and hope that you will send us your work! Thanks for reading.

Dana Ferris , Editor-in-Chief
Davis, California
October, 2014

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