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Teachers' (Formative) Feedback Practices in EFL Writing Classes in Norway

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This qualitative study reports on teachers' (formative) feedback practices in writing instruction. Observations and interviews were used to collect data from 10 upper-secondary school teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing classes in Norway. The findings indicate that while the teachers attempt to comply with the requirements of the national curriculum regarding formative assessment, and acknowledge the pivotal role of feedback in that pedagogy, the dominant tendency is still to deliver feedback to a finished text. As such, there is limited use of feedback for that text and no resubmission of the text for new assessment, while feedforward is reduced to the correction of language mistakes, which does not foster writing development except for language accuracy. The limited use of formative feedback suggests the need for more systematic professional development of the teachers.

Keywords: feedback, formative assessment, feedforward/follow-up, revision, process writing

Feedback is recognized as one of the driving forces in writing development and as an essential pedagogical tool in writing instruction. Its pivotal role emanates from process-oriented writing approach in the 1980s, and in the 1990s feedback became recognized as one of the main principles of formative assessment (FA). Black and Wiliam (1998) claim that “for assessment to be formative, the feedback information has to be used” (p. 16). In this regard, Sadler (1989) argues that “the information about the gap between actual and reference level is considered as feedback *only when it is used to alter the gap*” (p. 121; italics in original). This is known as *formative feedback*, and is the focus of this article.

Because of the effectiveness of formative feedback in the learning progress, feedback-enhanced instruction has been introduced in all subject areas and at all educational levels (Sadler, 1998), including writing instruction. Teaching writing is demanding, and formative feedback has become a prime concern of any writing teacher, be it in a first language (L1) or second language¹ (L2) context. However, feedback that aims to improve writing needs to conform to FA pedagogy (Parr & Timperley, 2010), which involves being more prospective rather than retrospective (Wiliam, 2010) and, quite importantly, being “actionable” by the students (Alvarez, Ananda, Walqui, Sato, & Rabinowitz, 2014, p. 4).

In Europe FA was first introduced in the 1990s by the Assessment Reform Group in the United Kingdom (e.g., Black & Wiliam, 1998), and soon reached Norway. After the Ministry of Education and Research in Norway introduced new assessment regulations in 2009 (Kunnskapsdepartementet [KD], 2009), which had a clear emphasis on FA, it became a national goal for the teachers to learn and use FA. An FA project for 2010–2014 was launched (Utdanningsdirektoratet [UDIR], 2010), with a number of courses and workshops being offered to teachers (e.g., Burner, 2015b). In spite of these efforts studies and reports give evidence of poor FA literacy among teachers and call for more training (Smith, 2011), especially with regard to providing feedback (Organisation

1 A second language (L2) normally refers to the language learned after the mother tongue, which in this case is English. The abbreviations L2, ESL (English as a second language), and EFL (English as a foreign language) are used synonymously in this paper except for the context when they refer to one specifically.

for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2011, review). To that end, this study is to investigate the status of (formative) feedback in writing in the subject of English in Norwegian upper secondary school classes.

Literature Review

Formative Feedback in the Writing Classroom

The process approach to writing introduced writing as a “recursive process,” with the emphasis on feedback on drafts in progress to stimulate revision. In Norway, the breakthrough for process writing came in 1985, when writing pedagogy was discussed explicitly for the first time and used by L1 writing teachers (Ongstad, 2002). Process writing soon became well known among English teachers as well.

In writing instruction there has been extensive debate on types of feedback, in particular whether the feedback should focus on form or on content. A large number of studies (e.g., Connors & Lunsford, 1993; F. Hyland, 2003; Lee, 2004) criticize writing teachers for paying a great deal of attention to language issues. One explanation for this is that L2 teachers need to teach writing conventions while also working to develop the target language. Thus, the challenge is to decide how to balance these two. After long debates on this issue, the situation continues to favor form (e.g., Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Lee, 2007a, 2008; Lee & Coniam, 2013). In Norway, the situation in the EFL context is mixed, some studies show form-orientation (Burner, 2016), while other studies indicate that the focus has shifted from correcting language mistakes to more global issues (Horverak, 2015).

As to how feedback should be delivered, the influence of many student-centered theories, such as process theories and FA, have led to teachers' written feedback being supplemented with peer feedback, teacher–student conferencing, and self-generated feedback (e.g., K. Hyland, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 1998). This requires students to be trained to self-assess their own texts, and to provide feedback to their peers (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This focus on student involvement rests on the expectation that formative feedback triggers reflection with regard to what the students are aiming to learn (Alvarez et al., 2014).

To meet the demanding nature of feedback, many experts have suggested universally accepted feedback practices (e.g., Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Ferris, 2014; Shute, 2008). For example, Ferris (2014) presents a list of “best feedback practices” (p. 8). It comprises a broad range of focus (e.g., content, organization, language, mechanics, and style) in both written and oral feedback; prioritized feedback focusing on global- and then local-level concerns; selective and indirect error correction for long-term benefits; feedback on multiple drafts; multiple sourced feedback; teacher–student conferencing; and so on. In fact, most of these best feedback practices reflect the basic principles of feedback in FA (McGarrel & Verbeem, 2007).

A final issue is the need to assure that students can use the feedback to improve the text (e.g., Huot & Perry, 2009; Shute, 2008; Sadler, 1998) by being allowed to resubmit the text for new assessment (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Indeed, Lee (2007b) stresses the need to make resubmission possible since “writing assessment still tends to draw teachers’ and learners’ attention to summative functions more than its formative potential” (p. 203). That assessment rarely requires the use of feedback has also been found in L1 context in Norway (Bueie, 2015).

The recognition of feedback in writing instruction has led to greater interest for research in this field (e.g., Ferris & Roberts, 2001; F. Hyland, 2003; Sommers, 2006; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Jonsson, 2013; Ferris, 2014). However, studies of feedback in L2 writing that draw on FA theory are still scarce. Icy Lee and colleagues have done such studies in an Asian context (e.g., Lee, 2007a, 2008; Lee & Coniam, 2013) and found that assessment and feedback still occur in single-draft writing and serve mainly summative purposes. Another study, by Lee and Coniam (2013), points to writing teachers’ need to get professional support and collaboration for successful implementation of FA. In Norway, however, there have been only a few studies of feedback and FA pedagogy in EFL writing (Horverak, 2015; Burner, 2016, 2015; Saliu-Abdulah, forthcoming). Some show positive signs of changing assessment and feedback practices in line with FA (Horverak, 2015), and an intervention study by Burner (2015) shows improvement with regard to self- and peer-assessment and the centrality of revision. However, another study by Burner (2016) shows a lack of proper implementation of FA principles and a poor understanding of some elements by the students.

Similar results were found in other multidisciplinary studies in Norway (Havnes, Smith, Dysthe, & Ludvigsen, 2012; Gamlem & Munthe, 2014). In other words, there is a clear need to investigate further the implementation of formative feedback in Norwegian EFL writing instruction, which is the aim of this study.

More specifically, the present study is to investigate feedback practices in EFL writing instruction in the first year of upper secondary school—in the eleventh and final year of compulsory English in Norwegian schools, which means the first year of upper secondary schools. Toward that end, we address the following two research questions:

1. What are the classroom feedback practices of English subject teachers in writing instruction?
2. To what extent is feedback in writing instruction used for learning purposes?

Methods

This qualitative study uses classroom observations and semistructured interviews to investigate feedback practices and utilization from English subject teachers' perspectives.

Context and Participants

English in Norway has traditionally been considered a foreign language, but in reality it is perceived more as a “second language” due to the high levels of competence and the familiarity with the language among the general population. There is extensive language input through the media, and proficiency levels are also quite high. As stated by Simensen (2010), “English is Scandinavia’s second language and is almost spoken fluently throughout” (p. 474).

Participants in the present study are teachers who teach in the first-year upper secondary school, general (academic) study program (year 11, 16-year-olds). This is the final year of English, which is an obligatory subject from grade 1, and students' achievement at this level, especially in writing skills, is very important for their future academic education.² In

² The syllabus is common for students in both the academic and vocational strands, with the difference being that the vocational students take the course over two years instead of one.

the recent Knowledge Promotion curricula (KD, 2006/2013), the English subject area has clear and fairly explicit aims for written communication. These require students to be able to write different types of texts with proper structure and coherence, and to adapt the language to purpose and situation. They are also expected to understand and use an extensive vocabulary, use patterns for orthography and word inflection, and use sources critically (KD, 2006/2013). Furthermore, at the end of each school year a number of students are selected for national examinations in either oral or written English. This written examination is fairly demanding and has a clear washback³ effect in the teaching of writing at this level. As preparation for this exam, students spend a whole day to take the so-called mock examinations, often using recent examination papers.

The sample of the present study comprises 10 teachers from eight different schools in Oslo and in neighboring Akershus county. These are fairly representative for the region, being a good mix regarding instructor profile, admission standards, and students' background. Table 1 provides an overview of the teacher sample.

Table 1

Profile of the Informants in the Study

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Number of teachers: | 10 upper secondary school teachers (2 males and 8 females), identified as T1 to T10 |
| Teaching experience: | 1.5 to more than 20 years of teaching experience (7 out of 10 had more than 10 years of teaching experience) |
| Teachers' L1: | 7 teachers had Norwegian as L1, 3 teachers had English as L1 |
| Qualifications: | 4 with BA (two of them had further qualification), 5 with MA, and one with PhD |

These teachers were first observed and then interviewed. The following section will describe the instruments and procedure of data collection.

³ Washback is the possible influence of an important test (e.g., a national exam) on teaching and learning processes, which can be either positive or negative (Alderson & Wall, 1993).

Instruments and Procedure

During the spring term of 2014, different teachers were first observed teaching 13 English writing lessons; the lesson observations were followed up with interviews. Observations were event driven, meaning we went to observe when teachers notified us that they had a feedback-related lesson. Table 2 below gives an overview of the observation data that was used for analysing with regard to research question 1.

Table 2

Overview of the Observation Data

| Teacher | School | Number of observations | Feedback to finished text | Feedback between drafts |
|----------------|---------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Teacher 1 | School 1 | 1 | x | |
| Teacher 2 | School 2* | 1 | x | |
| Teacher 3 | School 3 | 2 | | x |
| Teacher 4 | School 4* | 1 | x | |
| Teacher 5 | School 4 | 1 | x | |
| Teacher 6 | School 5 | 1 | x | |
| Teacher 7 | School 2 | 1 | x | |
| Teacher 8 | School 6 | 1 | x | |
| Teacher 9 | School 7 | 2 | | x |
| Teacher 10 | School 8 | 2 | | x |
| Total | 8 | 13 | 7 (teachers) | 3 (teachers) |

* This school was visited twice to observe two different teachers.

As can be seen from the table, three teachers in three different schools were observed two times because they were working with multiple drafting, which meant there was a second observation of their follow-up with students on the same text. However, each of them used a different form of between-draft feedback. Table 3 below summarizes the work of these teachers.

Table 3

Forms of Between-Draft Feedback Delivery

| Teacher | Mode of delivery | Subject-involved |
|---------|------------------|------------------|
| T3 | Written | Teacher |
| T9 | Oral | Peers/teacher |
| T10 | Oral | Teacher |

During the observations field notes were taken and observation forms with predesigned tasks and categories (e.g., feedback sources, mode of delivery, revision, etc.) were filled in. It was also possible to get a glimpse on the commented texts of the students who were sitting just in front of us (be it hard copies or digital texts on their computer screens).

The interviews took place after the observations, lasted about an hour, and were based upon an interview guide that was developed from the existing literature relevant to this study, our teaching experience, and observations during the piloting⁴ of the instruments. We did not follow the guide slavishly and rephrased the questions when necessary (Johnson & Turner, 2003). The semistructured interview focused on: feedback form, time, and focus; grading and feedback; follow-up stages; and so on. During the interviews some teachers accessed the electronic platform used in the schools for educational purposes (e.g., Fronter, ITS Learning) to show how they gave comments there. While not primary data, this and the comments on texts seen during observations helped us visualize the appearance of feedback in the text.

Analysis

For the analysis we used thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Based on a careful and repeated reading of the interview transcriptions, meaningful patterns were identified, and we used structured coding to reduce and simplify the data (Dörnyei, 2007). The resulting salient themes were later grouped with illustrative and representative quotes for

⁴ Interviews and observations were piloted in three schools and that helped make adjustments for later data collection with the observation form and interview guides. Copies of observation and interview guides are available upon request from the first author.

each category. Finally, an assistant researcher was asked to peer-check the reliability and validity of the categories by testing one third of the material, with a satisfactory 70% agreement rate.

The analyses resulted in two main categories. The first, *feedback nature*, had the following subcategories: (1) feedback source (teacher, student self, peers); (2) feedback form (written and oral); and (3) feedback focus (local vs. global). This category sheds light on the first research question of this study, What feedback practices do the teachers use? The second main category, *feedback function*, comprised (1) feedback follow-up (revise sentence/error correction, revise content/structure and read only) and (2) time of feedback delivery (during the process of text creation and after the text is produced and graded). This category was intended to answer the second research question, To what extent is feedback used for learning purposes? Last, there was a third category with themes identified as closely related to feedback, namely assessment criteria, grading, and checklists.

Findings

In this section we present the analyses of the observations and interviews, starting with the first research question regarding teachers' feedback practices and continuing with the second question regarding the use of feedback for learning.

Research Question 1: Teachers' Feedback Practices

With regard to feedback practices, while a few teachers in the present study use all recommended forms and types of feedback, the majority do not.

The dominant pattern of feedback is teacher-written feedback on single-draft writing, and the cursory examinations of the commented texts of students, in the interviews and during observations, illustrate the dominance of this type. Written comments are given as interlinear and/or in the margin (for local-level issues) and as endnotes (for global-level issues). Normally these are supplemented with overall comments on the electronic platform, a summary of what the students have achieved, and two or three important points they need to work on in the future. Usually these are written in the L1 so that students can understand the feedback better.

As for oral feedback, such as teacher-student conferencing, this was little used. In our sample, the majority of the teachers, when asked what the most successful feedback was, agreed that a combination of teacher's written and oral feedback was best. They said this was because "you look students in their eyes," "you can cover different aspects at once," and so on. However, in spite of this unanimity, only two teachers (T9, T10) use it in an organized and systematic way. Teacher 10, who does this regularly, uses a checklist to guide students in this process and says, "What I get to communicate orally would be very hard to communicate in a written mode." The other teachers said they did so less systematically, which was confirmed in the observations. Often they would do it upon the students' request, or more in general for the entire class. One teacher (T6) reported using this approach in exceptional situations—for example, with a dyslectic student or when a text has too many errors in order "not to overkill with many comments everywhere"—and added that this was not a very effective way because "many things can be forgotten."

A number of teachers who believed in the efficacy of individual oral feedback but still did not use it, or did so infrequently, blamed this on workload and time constraints. They explained that they would have given more oral feedback if the overall demand for documentation was lower and they had more time (e.g., T7 and T5).

The other form of oral feedback was the whole class feedback, which frequently took place when teachers returned commented and graded texts to students (e.g., T6, T7, T8) and asked them to work with corrections. In this whole class feedback, teachers briefly addressed more general issues of writing (common assessment criteria of language, content, and structure) and recurrent issues, such as level of language formality, thesis sentence, paragraph development, answering the task, and so on. Student follow-up work, however, tended to focus only on sentence correction.

Self-assessment, a recommended form of feedback in formative pedagogy, was also prevalent, and several teachers reported that this resulted in students becoming more involved in the feedback process (T9, T6, T7). They introduced this in slightly different ways, for instance, by asking students to self-evaluate their text based on the learning objectives before handing it in to the teacher, and/or to self-evaluate using the

assessment criteria before seeing the grade given by the teacher. However, none of the teachers stated that they would check the self-evaluations at any point. These criteria for self-assessment have been developed by the Directorate of Education and Training. In addition to using these criteria for the students' self-assessment, almost all the teachers referred to using the criteria in other situations: to explain expectations at the beginning of the school year (T7), before a task is to be written to let students know what will be evaluated (T5), and before papers are returned to the students (T1, T3). For those who use the criteria when returning the papers with grades, they serve as a tool to support the grade. Indeed, the need to support and explain grades is why almost all teachers see feedback as having a dual function: as a means to helping students improve their writing on the one hand, and to provide "hard evidence for the grades" on the other (T1, T2, T5). In line with this, Teacher 9 says, "When the kids start understanding why they get the grade that they get, they can start doing something to improve."

Regarding *peer feedback*, the prevailing situation in this study is that majority of the teachers do not see much value in it because they think students are not able to provide good feedback. Still, they often include it in their teaching "just to lighten up the teaching and vary" (T7). Some teachers will do this with smaller writing tasks, and some would ask students to give feedback on anonymous texts instead. Teacher 9, who is among those who are more enthusiastic about this form of feedback, argues that if peer reviewing is done in an organized way with some aids, such as checklists for guidance, it can make students more involved and contribute to learning.

As for the *focus of feedback*, this ranged from local- (e.g., grammar, mechanics, punctuation) to global-level concerns (e.g., content, organization, structure), and varied in emphasis depending on students' level. This is what the teachers said in the interviews, but the same could be seen during the interviews when some teachers accessed their feedback on student texts from electronic platforms to demonstrate particular comments. This, together with the occasional glimpse of comments on students' texts during classroom observations, helped us understand the focus of their written feedback.

All in all, the interviews and classroom observations show that the predominant practice was teacher written feedback covering both local and global issues in a single-draft writing approach. The other forms of feedback, such as peer feedback and teacher-student conferencing, were used unevenly to the point of being neglected. Nevertheless, there was a tendency to work more regularly and in many ways with self-assessment.

Research Question 2: Use of Feedback for Learning

As mentioned in connection with the use of assessment criteria, one of the main findings in this study is that feedback has more a summative than formative function, primarily being used to explain a grade that is delivered simultaneously with the teachers' comments. Indeed, the summative function tends to dominate, and teachers are quite aware that this is problematic, even counterproductive. They admit that the students tend to be interested in the grade only. As Teacher 2 says, "They want to get reasons . . . I feel I have to make it clear when I correct the papers what's been in that grade." Teachers 4 and 5 feel that students do not take the feedback task seriously if there is no grade, because "the grade is what they look for first." Hence, Teacher 9 is critical of this and suggests trying a new practice, such as portfolios, where students' writing assignment will be returned without grade because

I think often the feedback becomes your reason to give your grade and it should be trying to teach the kids how to do better next time, not the reason for the grade, and if you take away the grade then it's easier to look at it as feedback and what to do in order to improve, whereas when you give a grade, often you have to support why you are giving a 3 or 4 or 5 or 6.⁵

In our observations, the *follow-up* stage was often reduced to reading the comments and acting on local-level concerns, that is, error correction. Students were often required to correct the language errors in a limited number (8–10) of sentences, or, more infrequently, revise the thesis statement and paragraph structure (T4, T5). This could be assigned as classwork either before or after giving the grades. Instead, the overall

⁵ The grading system at this level is from 1 to 6, with 6 being the best grade.

comments could serve to improve future writings (especially for end-of-year exams) instead of revising the current text. This situation was observed in the classes when teachers returned the whole-day test (e.g., T6, T7, T8) as well as in other writing sessions. Furthermore, the interviews confirmed that this was the predominant routine of feedback for all the writings done throughout the year. Only 3 out of 10 teachers (see Table 3, T3, T9, and T10) did not follow this practice; they gave students the opportunity to hand in a second draft after revision, and then awarded the grade.

When asked if the students would be motivated to work on these corrections when there is no influence on their grade, the teachers who followed-up with error correction only responded that revision is something that they need to think about more. However, only two of the teachers expressed doubt about this approach. One was Teacher 4, who was against the approach of revising the text and resubmitting for a new grade because

It's kind of cheating because you tell me what's wrong and then I correct it and then you give me a better grade that I wouldn't have it if I did it on my own.

Similar views are held by Teacher 8, who claimed that this would help the students to

do better [based on teacher's feedback] and get a new grade for the same paper. . . . I would not do this, because then this is my work, I did this, I improved the grading here . . . I'm gonna end up grading my own work.

These quotes seem to convey the opposite of the goals for formative feedback because the teacher's role is seen as separate from the process of development. This is reflected in one of the teacher's (T10) arguments:

I think it is perfectly correct to allow pupils to have a certain kind of a guidance while they are still there producing a piece of writing, . . . if nothing else I know what I contributed, I know what kind of guidance I gave every pupil, so if I need to some sort of factor out my help, it is not really a problem.

The same teacher also notes:

I don't think the feedback I give them leads to significant improvements without them thinking and working really actively with what I'm saying, I don't think that I give in any sense kind of a finished [text], I'm generally not formulating sentences for them. I think that the students have to be active and creative in their response to the feedback.

This teacher acknowledges the cognitive role of feedback in helping learning, and adds, "It seems to me to be much better to have a stage in the middle of the writing where I can actually give them *usable* feedback."

For this process-writing oriented teacher, the reason why it is important to build in feedback in the middle of the task is because these are first-year students who are being asked to write in a new genre (argumentative essay) for the first time. This makes guidance during the process particularly relevant. Giving "usable" or "actionable" feedback for immediate use with demanding new tasks is a feedback strategy supported by Shute (2008) and Alvarez et al. (2014).

Interestingly, most of the teachers see the feedforward process more as an awareness-raising process with regard to mistakes. It seems that the main concern of these teachers is how to ensure that the students read their comments. Teacher 1 puts this as follows:

I have to write the comment on ITS Learning [electronic platform] and if it's gonna have some value they have to read it. . . . but having the grade there, it makes them at least go in and they're exposed to comments. Whether or not they read it, I don't know, but they are actually exposed to it to get the grade.

On the other hand, some teachers (T3, T7, T8) admit that not much is done in terms of revising and rewriting. This shows that they are aware of the feedforward potential of the comments, but for some reason do not put this into practice. Indeed, some mention that some schools do "portfolio writing" and are better in this respect, which indicates their awareness of the need for better follow-up strategies. Teacher 3, who does multiple-draft writing occasionally, shows her awareness by adding, "It's partly our fault,

we need to make them, to teach them, and we don't and this is probably because of time constraints." For Teachers 6 and 8, who would give a chance for a "second draft," their feedback is not substantial because on the first draft their comments will be only "approved" or "not approved" (T8) and "average," "below average," and "above average" (T6), which means that there is no proper guidance for improving the second draft and there is no feedback content that can actually scaffold the students in the process of rewriting (Jonsson, 2013; Shute, 2008). Furthermore, these same teachers admit that the average students who are not interested in improving do not put much effort into this if they get an "approved" or "average" comment.

Discussion

This study set out to investigate feedback practices in EFL writing instruction and their utilization for learning from the perspective of the teachers. It found that feedback all too often focuses on explaining the grades given and not on formative purposes. Indeed, the informants are quite aware that receiving a grade often leads to a loss of student interest in making use of the feedback, and that the teachers' need to use their feedback to justify the grades is counterproductive. Next, when there is follow-up, it tends to focus on error correction. It also seems that most of the teachers in this study do not require the students to act on global issues by revising the text in question. Instead they expect and hope that the students will use comments for future writings. Finally, only 3 of the 10 teachers allowed students to hand in revised texts for grading. In other words, there seems to be a clear gap between the formative feedback practices we observed and official FA policy in Norway as well as FA pedagogy in general.

Teacher Feedback Practices

To begin with, while these teachers seem quite confident in giving written comments on content, structure, and language, perhaps because they can draw upon assessment guidelines when doing so, there is still a clear imbalance between local and global issues. In fact, it is language that these teachers seem most focused on; it would seem that error feedback remains "a ubiquitous pedagogical practice" (Ferris, 2010, p. 198). This reflects the findings from other studies in other contexts (e.g., Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Lee, 2007a, 2008; Lee & Coniam, 2013). It also risks creating

the wrong notion of writing development in favor of form among the students (e.g., Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Saliu-Abdulahi, forthcoming).

Next, according to the principles of formative pedagogy and process writing, not only the teacher, but the students themselves need to contribute to and be responsible for their learning (e.g., Sadler, 1998; Black & Wiliam, 1998; 2009; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). However, our study reveals a rather uneven follow up of this. Few of the teachers believed in the efficacy of peer feedback and did not set tasks accordingly. On the other hand, they were more enthusiastic about self-assessment and involved students in this practice on a regular basis, usually with the aid of assessment criteria. This shows at least some familiarity with FA principles and linking feedback to learning goals, as suggested by many experts in the field (e.g., Shute, 2008; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Sadler, 1998). However, considering the fact that this is a less demanding feedback form for the teachers, and yet very complex for the students, the lack of follow-up on self-assessment questions its real benefit in this context.

Furthermore, teacher–student conferencing was rarely used in the classrooms observed in our study. This strategy of teaching and learning tries to act in accordance with process writing and FA (e.g., K. Hyland, 2003; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) by creating a dialogic conceptualization of feedback. In this study, only 2 out of 10 (T9, T10) systematically used this practice. These two teachers did teacher-student conferencing in an organized and structured way by involving all students in turn, while other teachers would do conferences only when a student requested it. This reflects the findings of a number of other studies in the Norwegian context (see Gamlem & Munthe, 2014; Havnes et al., 2012).

Yet another point of interest is feedback-grade relation. As shown in many other studies (e.g., Havnes et al., 2012; Lee, 2008), this study shows that feedback and grading are often interrelated. Hence, instead of looking at feedback as a learning opportunity, students often stop paying attention to feedback when they see the grades, resulting in limited feedforward benefits (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Jonsson, 2013; Burner, 2016; Saliu-Abdulahi, forthcoming). To avoid this, one of the teachers (T9, above) says: “[. . .] feedback [. . .] should be trying to teach the kids how to do better next time, not the reason for the grade” and suggests trying a new practice,

such as portfolio assessment, where students' writing assignments can be returned without grade. This practice proved positive in a Norwegian portfolio intervention study (Burner, 2015).

In sum, we can see a considerable gap between the (formative) feedback practices recommended by experts (e.g., Ferris, 2014; Shute, 2008; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hyland & Hyland, 2006) and what these otherwise experienced and reasonably well-informed teachers do in the classroom. Perhaps this is due to the fact that bringing formative assessment changes into secondary schools is "neither speedy nor straightforward" (Hill, 2011, p. 359). Nevertheless, these upper-secondary school teachers acknowledge the pivotal role of formative feedback in the learning progress (like in Burner, 2016), and express awareness of a need for more engagement with feedback.

Use of feedback for learning.

Regarding the use of feedback for learning purposes, our findings align with Smith (2011) and a recent OECD (2011) report that show lagging implementation of FA, especially in providing feedback to students. The same situation is confirmed in other multidisciplinary studies (Havnes et al., 2012; Gamlem & Munthe, 2014), and they call for more knowledge on quality formative feedback, as does Burner (2016) in his study in EFL writing.

Indeed, our interviews and observations show clear weaknesses in systematic follow-up with regard to helping students to "notice the gap" (Sadler, 1989) and "close the gap" (Black & Wiliam, 1998). It would seem that the teachers' feedback is focused on "noticing the gap." However, "clos[ing] the gap" in the current text is less focused and acted upon, to the point of being neglected entirely. Instead, most of the advice is directed toward future writing instead of the current assignment. This corresponds with what Jonsson (2013) suggests about the expectation of formative feedback being applied in comparable or future assignments. For this to happen, it requires that the comments are more generic and used "as bridges to future writing assignments" (Sommers, 2006, p. 254), which is at the expense of the text-specific and concrete comments that are so highly valued by students (see, for example, Saliu-Abdulahi, forthcoming).

These teachers care about making students use the feedback, but, paradoxically, do not invite them to act beyond sentence level, that is, simple error correction. Undoubtedly, as Ferris (2010) notes, error feedback can facilitate L2 development and language accuracy, but only “under the right conditions” (Ferris, 2010, p. 186). However, as the majority of the teachers do single draft writing, it is doubtful whether these situations exemplify “the right conditions.”

At this point, it is relevant to ask which factors can explain this less-than-optimal situation. On the one hand, the EFL teachers in this study acknowledge the importance of formative feedback for learning, and yet, on the other hand, their practices are largely limited to single-draft writing with limited follow-up and few or no opportunities to hand in revised texts. This feedback delivery to a finished and graded text is against the recommended feedback timing in the literature (e.g., Black & Wiliam, 2009; Shute, 2008; Alvarez et al., 2014). One explanation is that this is a traditional practice in Norwegian schools. Another could be that teachers are insufficiently familiar with the principles for FA and how these principles should be integrated in writing instruction. In addition, as indicated by the teachers’ tendency to focus on local errors, the reason may well be weaknesses in their English teacher education. A recent study of novice English teachers in Norway indicates that too few teachers get a proper grounding in text linguistics or in writing pedagogy (Rødnes, Hellekjær, & Vold, 2014), and are often quite at loss as to how to teach writing—apart from error correction. Finally, some of the teachers in this study mention that their workloads, teaching plans, and schedules do not allow sufficient time for multiple-draft writing, a point that is also echoed in Burner (2016).

A final question is how typical, or transferable, these findings are from a fairly small qualitative study with 10 respondents from eight different schools to other contexts. One argument in favor of transferability is that our findings are echoed in other studies both internationally (e.g., Ferris, 2014; Lee, 2004, 2007a, 2008; Lee & Coniam, 2013) and nationally (e.g., Havnes et al., 2012; Burner, 2016, 2015; Bueie, 2015). Another is that our findings are supported by the data from the student interviews from these classrooms (see Saliu-Abdulah, forthcoming). Further, what was seen

during the observations has been in accordance with what the teachers said they do, although in the interviews they articulate more explicit understanding of the role of feedback learning. In other words, despite the limited sample in this qualitative study, there is reason to argue that our findings are transferable to similar contexts in Norway and perhaps elsewhere.

Conclusions and Implications

The main findings in this study are that the observed feedback practices in Norwegian EFL instruction with single-draft writing, a counterproductive combination of summative and formative feedback, a focus on error correction, and the neglect of global errors combined with a lack of focus on handing in revised texts, do not align with official FA policy in Norway or with FA pedagogy in general. Indeed, it would seem that the principle in the quote used at the beginning of this paper—“for assessment to be formative, the feedback information has to be used” (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 16)—remains a practical challenge for Norwegian EFL teachers of today.

One possible explanation is that the teachers observed and interviewed in this study are insufficiently familiar with FA writing instruction. Another may be that they lack the subject matter knowledge needed to identify and teach students to work with global errors. In addition, perhaps quite an important issue is whether and to what extent teachers are hindered by their workloads from engaging in multiple-draft writing. Consequently, further studies of these issues are needed, preferably with a larger sample of teachers.

To conclude, teachers need time, support, and knowledge to effectively bring FA into their classrooms. We would contend, however, that more knowledge about teachers' educations and workloads as possible constraining factors is needed before the poor implementation of FA pedagogy in Norwegian EFL instruction can be addressed.

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