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Nicole I. Caswell  
*East Carolina University*

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# Affective Tensions in Response

**Nicole I. Caswell**

*East Carolina University*

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This article reports on a study focused on understanding the relationship between teachers' emotional responses and the larger contextual factors that shape response practices. Drawing from response and emotion scholarship, this article proposes affective tensions as a way for understanding the tug and pull that teachers experience between what they *feel* they should do (mostly driven from a pedagogical perspective) and what they are *expected* to do (mostly driven by an institutional perspective) in a contextual moment. The case study of Kim, a community college instructor, offers an analysis of two affective tensions that emerged from her think-aloud protocol (TAP): responding to grammar/sentence errors over content and responding critically to students she likes. Kim's case reveals the underlying affective tensions between individual emotions, cultural constructions, and institutional contexts that are negotiated while she responds to student writing. This article concludes with suggestions for identifying emotions and affective tensions that both influence and paralyze writing teachers' response practices.

*Keywords:* response, emotion, affect, community college, reflective practice

Writing teachers navigate a host of situational factors that influence how they read and respond to student writing: assignment guidelines, relationships with students, classroom dynamics, teaching experience, previously taught courses, pedagogical theories, and the list goes on. When research mentions what might affect how teachers read and respond to student writing, emotion rarely emerges as a factor. At the same time, however, few would argue that teachers are *not* moved when reading student writing. Teachers can be emotionally moved when students' narratives provide a glimpse into their personal lives. Teachers can also be emotionally affected by the reality of the colloquial narrative of an overburdened composition teacher locked away frantically responding to 100+ papers in one sitting. Edgington (2016) has argued for teachers' response practices to move away from the overburdened, labor-intensive narrative and instead consider response as an intellectual endeavor. While response will always be labor-intensive for writing teachers, focusing on response as an intellectual endeavor "acknowledges that the exertion and effort needed to respond to student papers is a purposeful activity with a tangible and important end goal" (p. 87). I, too, would like to push for scholarly conversations about response to move away from expedient, efficient labor practices to the emotional and intellectual work wrapped up in our response practices. As Murphy (2000) has reminded us, teachers are thinking and feeling individuals working within sociocultural contexts. We need to understand more fully how emotions mediate teachers' behaviors when teachers respond to student writing.

Response research has tangentially considered how emotions influence teachers' response practices. Edgington's (2005) study of teachers' reading of student writing reveals how the reading experience was a valued, emotional activity and that teachers experience emotions that could influence written comments. Tobin (2004) questioned how he might police his unconscious emotions so as not to interfere with his "objectivity and self-control" (p. 50). Robillard (2007) considered how plagiarism evokes the emotion of anger in writing teachers, arguing that if writing teachers ignore their anger, they risk becoming "dehumanized, disembodied readers of student work" (p. 28). While Edgington's, Tobin's, and Robillard's studies provide insight into the emotional work of responding

to student writing in two very specific exigencies, there is limited research on the complex role that emotions always play when teachers respond to student writing. However, embedded in our scholarly conversations on response, we find nods to emotion, such as Phelps's (1998) work on being surprised by student writing or Sperling's (1994) study revealing a cognitive/emotive orientation. These studies, in addition to emotion scholarship within writing studies (Chandler, 2007; Micciche, 2007), help construct the act of reading and responding to student writing as a rich site for emotions to emerge. Babb and Corbett (2016) considered student failure as a circumstance in which teachers might have emotional responses. Babb and Corbett used the same emotional responses in their survey as Caswell (2014) to begin engaging in cross-comparison emotion research in writing studies.

Elsewhere I have argued that teachers express dynamic, recursive emotional episodes while reading and responding to student writing, and these emotional episodes are not only induced by teachers' writing values but also shape teachers' identities (Caswell, 2014, 2016). The emotions teachers experience are not simply individual, personal moments separate from their teaching lives. Instead, emotions are persuasive forces that direct teachers' attention in particular ways when they are responding to student writing. In other articles, I have reported on the discrete emotions that the emotional episodes reveal; however, in this present study, I take a holistic approach to understanding the emotional episodes in the experiences of one teacher, Kim (a pseudonym). When viewed holistically, Kim's series of emotional episodes reveal the underlying affective tensions between individual emotions, cultural constructions, and institutional contexts that she is negotiating while responding to student writing.

Affective tensions refer to the (un)conscious negotiation teachers experience between what they *feel* they should do (mostly driven from a pedagogical perspective) and what they are *expected* to do (mostly driven by an institutional perspective) when responding. Affective tensions direct Kim's attention to specific textual elements, and, in turn, direct her pedagogical approach to response. By focusing on affective tensions that lend themselves to individual emotional episodes instead of focusing on the individual emotion episodes themselves, we can begin to move beyond a definition of emotion that tries to privilege either the individual/

biological definition or the cultural/social definition. Instead, attention to affective tensions allows us to recognize how the innate biological aspect of emotion is incorporated into larger cultural and social frameworks; therefore, this focus provides a more robust understanding of how emotions play a mediating role when teachers respond to student writing.

This article begins by reviewing research on teacher response and how emotions have been discussed in response scholarship thus far in order to emphasize the role of the student-teacher relationship. Then, in the methods section, I discuss the TAP method used to research teachers' emotions and describe affective tensions as an analytic frame. Following a discussion of the methods, the case study of Kim is presented with a focus on the two affective tensions that emerged from her TAP: responding to grammar/sentence errors over content and balancing student relationships and critical responses. I conclude with suggestions for how writing teachers can identify their own emotions and affective tensions, which both influence and paralyze their response practices. Because emotions and affective tensions affect our response practices, this article pushes for an emotional agenda to emerge as a viable research site within response studies.

## Literature Review

### Student-Teacher Relationships and Response Research

Since the 1980s, response research has focused on textual comments (Connor & Lundsford, 1993), reader perspectives (Edgington, 2005), student perspectives (Straub, 1997), and the social and contextual understandings of response (Carini, 1994; Fife & O'Neill, 2001; Sperling, 1994). Underlying the various avenues that response research has taken, two claims seem to remain true from Sommers's (1982) article "Responding to Student Writing": Teachers should (a) demonstrate the presence of a reader and (b) understand how students use feedback to improve their writing. Both of these claims nod toward teacher-student relationships, which are emphasized in later response research. Sommers (2006) revisited claims in her 1982 article when, almost 25 years later, she conducted a longitudinal study on response that reaffirms the importance of response to students' abilities to improve as writers. Additionally, Sommers

highlighted that feedback plays a role in undergraduates' writing development "when, but only when, students and teachers create a partnership through feedback—a transaction in which teachers engage with their students by treating them as apprentice scholars, offering honest critique paired with instruction" (p. 250). Together then, these sources highlight the relationship, or partnership, teachers and students build on the page as a crucial facet of responding to student writing.

Murphy (2000) also argued that response research should emphasize teacher-student relationships, since students are active learners who construct meaning through social encounters. For Murphy, response is "an ongoing exchange with the student writing, and both teacher and student have roles in the interactive process of knowledge construction" (p. 81). Drawing from Sommers (2006), Murphy described the emphasis as residing in the student-teacher transaction that is built within the classroom context. Fife and O'Neill (2001) extended Murphy's focus on the social act of response by arguing that "the texts that teachers write in response to student writing are influenced and informed by the contexts in which they function; consequently, any interpretation of these teacher-written texts needs to consider the texts' particular contexts, not just a generic one" (p. 307). Pushing for more contextual research on response that also incorporates students' voices, Fife and O'Neill called for research that addresses how response creates roles for teachers and students and that looks at larger conversational moves within the classroom.

Edgington (2005) answered Fife and O'Neill's (2001) call by considering how eight teachers read student writing. Edgington used a TAP method to analyze the reading strategies that teachers use to respond to writing, and he concluded that reading and responding to student writing is a contextual act and that teachers draw on different reading strategies to understand students' work. Though Edgington did not explicitly code for emotion, he referred to his participants being emotionally moved by students, students' language, and students' topics. Edgington appears to have been the first to discuss the emergence of teachers' emotions during think-aloud protocols. Kynard (2006) also responded to Fife and O'Neill's call by using her experience of reading and responding to student writing as insight into a contextual argument that her practice is meeting her

students where they are at with their own language, thoughts, and writing. Kynard contended that while most teachers lament grading because of the poor writing of students, her problem is how to respond well to students who “really take this writing thang [*sic*] to heart and start writing!” (p. 363). Kynard provided her students with honest reader-based comments: “If I want to know more, I say that and why. If I am confused, I explain why. . . . If something makes me sad, I tell them why. If I was cracking up at their wit and humor, I say that too” (p. 366). Kynard demonstrated that when teachers know and understand their students, reader-based responses engage students and can help them in ways that evaluative, standard-based comments cannot. Kynard did not explicitly discuss emotion as a motivating factor, but she considered emotion to be a component of reader-based feedback.

Writing teachers’ interest in response research has spanned from describing and naming the response practices of teachers (Connors & Lundsford, 1993; Sommers, 1982; Straub, 2000) to the more theoretical concepts behind those practices (Edgington, 2005; Fife & O’Neill, 2001; Phelps, 1998) and to the contextual aspect of response (Edgington, 2005; Fife & O’Neill, 2001; Kynard, 2006; Murphy, 2000). Missing from all of these approaches is a complex, contextual understanding of the role that emotion plays in our response practices; however, embedded in the contextual approaches to response is a nod toward the role of emotion in student-teacher relationships. Richmond (2002) specifically called on the field to examine our emotions in terms of relationships, arguing that “a teacher’s beliefs or feelings about students could influence students’ writing in ways that we are only beginning to understand” (p. 76). Tobin (2004) considered the student/teacher relationship and might have been the first to consider the implications of emotion for pedagogical improvement. Through a personal reflection of his own classroom, Tobin turned to bell hooks’s questioning of the social and political nature of emotions. Which emotions are encouraged and allowed in the classroom? Assuming emotions are something to be dealt with, Tobin argued that if teachers do not admit to experiencing emotions when reading student writing, then teachers refuse “to figure out how to deal with them” (p. 104). Before writing teachers can investigate what feedback might be best for their students

at a particular moment or what emotions are welcomed and valued in the classroom, teachers need to understand where their feedback comes from and the role that emotions play in the feedback they give.

### Emotions in the Writing Classroom

Just as response practices are a rich site for the emotional dynamics of teachers, writing in general is rich with emotions. Writing studies could trace its fascination with emotion to Aristotle's rhetorical proof of *pathos*. As an available means of persuasion, emotion initially was conceived as an equal to *logos* and *ethos*; however, as Western thought developed, emotion was demoted in favor of rational, logical thought. Emotions came to be seen as irrational and too touchy-feely to be scholarly (Micciche, 2007); emotion lost prominence as a valuable means of persuasion in the composition classroom, as evidenced in Moon's (2003) analysis of composition handbooks.

Though *pathos* might not be the first rhetorical proof that academics turn to in composing arguments, emotions have maintained the sustained interest of writing scholars. Brand (1987, 1989) was an early proponent arguing for more attention to the psychological aspect of writing, specifically the affective experience. Brand (1987) analyzed how emotions function within the writing process and cognition by linking emotion/cognition and writing to intention and interpretation—referring to both what the writer wants to accomplish and what the readers take from writing. Brand argued that teachers and students should be viewed as rational *and* emotional beings who have conscious awareness of the persuasive role of emotions within their lives.

Whereas Brand advocated for research on the role of emotion in writing, Chandler (2007) was prompted to research students' emotions after noticing an increase of clichés in her students' final reflective essays. Chandler's study of students' emotions in the composition classroom revealed the persuasive sway that emotions have over students. The anxiety and fear students felt regarding their service-learning experiences pushed them to write more clichés, generalizations, and pat conclusions, as well as a more conversational narrative instead of an analysis essay. She argued



that students struggle to develop their writing in a new academic discourse when they are experiencing anxiety or fear.

Though we recognize the influence of emotion on students' writing and on teachers' response, we lack an understanding of the complexity of emotion in the writing classroom for both teachers and students. This study focuses on the teacher and moves beyond the individualistic nature of emotions. Specifically, when looking at the role of emotion holistically we see the larger influence of affect in shaping the feedback context and pushing teachers into specific types of responses. As Kim's case highlights below, institutional and classroom contexts and the student-teacher relationship reveal some affective tensions that teachers must navigate when reading and responding to writing.

### Research Questions

This research study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do the individual emotional episodes that teachers experience while they read and respond interact with each other?
2. What do teachers' emotional responses reveal about the larger contextual factors that shape response practices?

### Study Design

Following Edgington's (2005) methods to study teacher response in situ, this study used a TAP to study the emotional responses of a teacher, Kim, while she was reading and responding to student writing. Smagorinsky (1994) refers to TAPs as a human methodology that "elicit[s] a sample of the thoughts that go through writers' minds" (p. 16). Since TAPs capture the thoughts that individuals experience when engaged in an activity, this study used TAPs to capture the hidden process of the emotional thoughts and expressions of a teacher. As part of the context-rich TAP (Edgington, 2005), Kim responded to assignments that students were currently writing in a class she was teaching. She wrote her responses in a campus office where she felt comfortable; she did not use her personal office because of

noise concerns.<sup>1</sup> Kim also participated in a preinterview 1 and directions/practice for the TAP), and immediately following the TAP (Appendix A) she completed a retrospective interview (asking reflective questions about emotions experienced). The preinterview provided context for the protocol, while the retrospective interview provided a triangulation point with the emotions expressed during the protocol. Both interviews and the TAP were audio and video recorded. Prior to recruiting Kim to participate in the study, IRB approval was granted. Kim signed informed consent forms before starting the preinterview. Kim's TAP was first coded and analyzed for emotional episodes and then for affective tensions. Both analytic frameworks are shared below, followed by Kim's case study, which details two affective tensions.

### Analytic Frameworks

**Emotional episodes.** Kim's initial and retrospective interviews and protocol session were transcribed verbatim, including fillers (*um, uh, er, etc.*) and paralinguistic features (sighing, laughing, etc.). The quotes included in the discussion below are also verbatim, with some punctuation added for clarity. Transcripts were read through and coded multiple times before solidifying three coding schemes: emotion, trigger, and action (Appendix B). Initial emotion codes were derived from Plutchik (1991), and initial trigger codes were derived from Huot (1988). Action codes emerged from the behaviors of the participant. These three coding schemes work together to compose the emotional episodes (Figure 1) that teachers experience when they respond to student writing.



Figure 1. The process of emotional episodes

<sup>1</sup> The audio/video recorder was placed on the corner of the desk in order to capture all of Kim's movements but was not in her direct line of sight, so it was not a constant reminder that she was being recorded. See Ericsson and Simon (1980) for more information on the TAP method.

The emotional episodes teachers express while responding to student writing include a momentary interrelated episode pattern of values, triggers, emotions, and actions. Each episode reflects one particular emotional moment, and the emotional episode frames how teachers move from triggers to actions while also trying to capture what counts as an emotional trigger for teachers when responding to student writing. Of the 55 expressed emotional episodes during the TAP, Kim expressed the emotions of anger (30%) most frequently, followed by concern (20%) and confusion (16%). Kim's emotional triggers ranged from sentence level (18%) to content (55%). Kim's actions were mostly (a) spoken comments not shared with the writer and (b) written comments shared with the writer. For example, as Kim is reading a student's paper, she comes across content that does not align with the assignment guidelines. The content serves as the emotional trigger in this example. Since one of Kim's goals/values in writing instruction is for writers to follow assignment guidelines, when Kim encounters text that does not align with the assignment, she has an emotional trigger. This prompts the emotion of anger for Kim; Kim is upset that the student has not met the assignment guidelines. The action in this example is a written comment on the student's paper. However, even though following assignment guidelines remains a stable value and triggers emotional responses throughout Kim's protocol, the emotions and actions shift, including emotions such as concern and confusion and actions such as spoken comments and written comments.

Thus, while the emotional episode appears to be a linear process, it reflects complex theoretical models of emotion that reject a one-size-fits-all emotion experience for individuals. The emotional episode of response reflects emotion scholarship (Damasio, 1994; Milton, 2005) by considering emotions as cultural, social, and biological occurrences. The concept of emotional episode developed from an understanding that teachers have innate biological/chemical reactions to emotion (Damasio, 1994), but what counts as an emotion for teachers and how teachers acknowledge or respond to their emotions are driven by culturally and socially accepted patterns (Milton, 2005).

**Affective tensions.** Scholarly conversations about differences between emotion and affect have achieved little consensus. Since writing studies

have routinely engaged in interdisciplinary research to understand social phenomena and since an interdisciplinary approach constitutes the theoretical foundation of the emotional episode, I turned to Wetherell's (2012) work to begin drawing hazy boundaries around what might be considered emotion and affect. Wetherell approached affect from a psychobiology, sociology, and cultural studies perspective to advocate a social science research agenda regarding emotion and affect. Drawing from scholars (Ahmed, Berlant, and Probyn) working in cultural studies frequently cited in writing research, Wetherell's interdisciplinary approach to affect functions as the theoretical foundation for my move toward emotion as a facet of affect. I do not consider emotion and affect as two distinct phenomena. Instead, I approach emotion and affect as social components that work in tandem, neither belonging to the individual self but both working as embodied, material practices that reflect engagement with the world. However, for the analytical purposes of this research, *emotion* refers to single, time-bound moments (e.g., the emotional episodes writing teachers express) or bodily states that are induced by cognitive thoughts, objects, or events (called the "trigger" in the emotional episode). *Affect*, on the other hand, refers to an ongoing flow and movement that can flare up in bursts or remain subdued beneath a level of consciousness. Because of the continuous movement, Wetherell proposed the term *affective practices*, which she defined as practices that are "continually dynamic with the potential to move in multiple and divergent directions" (p. 13). Affective practices focus on patterns, order, and movement to see what participants do with emotion in everyday life.

Building on teachers' emotional episodes, affect, and affective practices, I analyzed Kim's case holistically to understand how the emotional episodes worked comprehensively. A holistic approach allowed me to understand Kim's affective practices rather than single, emotional episodes. To this end, I listed every emotional episode Kim expressed during her TAP. Once all 55 emotional episodes were listed and time-stamped, I looked at what was inducing the emotional episodes, with the goal of beginning to understand the patterns of the emotional episodes (Table 1).

Table 1  
*Sample of Kim's Reoccurring Emotional Episodes*

Reoccurring emotional episodes induced by similar writing concerns	Emotion component of the emotional episode
10 emotional episodes in 5 minutes	Anger
• Kim is trying not to write condescending comments.	Concern
• Kim is caught up in spelling and punctuation errors.	Anger
	Anger
	Disgust
	Concern
	Anger
	Anger
	Disgust
	Concern
16 emotional episodes in 4 minutes	Concern
• Kim is struggling to decide whether the overall goal of the assignment is for the students to accurately represent the text they have to reference in the paper.	Confusion
	Confusion
	Confusion
• Kim is trying not to “correct” vernacular language.	Confusion
	Anger
	Concern
	Anger
	Anticipation
	Anger
	Concern
	Anger
	Confusion
	Anger
	Surprise
	Anger

Single emotional episodes had an identifiable trigger and emotion, and when multiple emotional episodes had the same trigger and emotion, I considered them to be recurrent and grouped them together; I was less concerned with the action or value at this stage. I was concerned with patterns of occurrence. How frequently did content trigger anger? How often did spelling trigger concern?

Kim's emotional episodes were categorized into five reoccurring groups. The first group had 10 emotional episodes occurring in 10 minutes and reflected Kim's efforts to get into reading the paper and to meet her initial goal of reading the draft before commenting. The second group had seven emotional episodes occurring in 2 minutes, which were triggered by Kim trying to understand the paper itself. The third had 10 emotional episodes occurring in 5 minutes, in which Kim tried to refrain from writing condescending comments or correcting all the errors. In the fourth grouping, Kim expressed 16 emotional episodes in 4 minutes, during which she reconciled what the student did in the assignment with her goals for the assignment. The last group had 13 emotional episodes in occurring in 5 minutes, during which Kim realized her own confusion regarding the assignment and tried to develop a strategy for helping the student.

Once recurring emotional episodes were grouped (on average 12.6 emotional episodes per 5-minute period), I returned to Kim's TAP and postinterview to identify contextual information that could comprise outside forces shaping Kim's experience. Each grouping was induced by similar concerns: trying to understand the assignment, trying to avoid responding to every spelling error or consistently correcting vernacular language, trying to understand the overall goal of the assignment, and trying to decide how to best help the student. From here, I analyzed Kim's TAP and interview transcripts alongside my analysis of Kim's values and emotional episodes, with the goal of capturing a comprehensive perspective of how affect flowed through Kim's practices. Through this analysis, I identified what I am calling *affective tensions* that guided Kim's experiences.

Although these individual emotional episodes present Kim as a concerned reader who is frustrated with a particular assignment, when we consider the TAP in conjunction with the broader context, Kim emerges as a reader caught between her institutional context and her pedagogical

understandings. Affective tensions capture the tug and pull experience teachers negotiate between personal pedagogical values and institutional expectations. Affective tensions are both personal and contextual. Whereas teachers' emotional episodes are discrete, individual moments that recur throughout the response session, affective tensions are broader frames that contextualize the entire session. Affective tensions take the individual, innate, biological aspect of emotion (emotional episodes) and place it within the cultural and social frameworks that govern and shape teachers' emotions and emotional reactions. As Ahmed (2004), Micciche (2007), and Wetherell (2012) argued, emotions do something. When responding to student writing, emotions mediate teachers' reading and responding practices. Affective tensions, on the other hand, regard how the interplay of contextual factors additionally shape teachers' response practices. Affective tensions move from individual emotional episodes to capture a holistic view of teachers' entire experience during TAPs. It might be hypothesized that affective tensions can carry between different classes at the same institution, but this study focuses on only one classroom.

### **Kim's Context**

Kim is a white female community college instructor in the Midwest with 10 years of teaching experience. During the semester that she participated in a TAP, she was teaching a language fundamentals (level 1) basic writing course. The course focuses on helping students learn about academic discourse and, as Kim describes, the "conventions of standard English grammar and punctuation." While the course objectives focus clearly on standard English conventions, Kim comments at the beginning of her TAP that she focuses on higher-order concerns and opens the course with a unit on language to help bridge students' discourses with an academic discourse. Kim's educational background includes a master's degree in teaching with a focus on language arts for grades 7–12, and she is currently pursuing a PhD in rhetoric and composition. In addition to teaching the first level of basic writing, Kim has taught the second-level language fundamentals course, College Composition 1 and 2, and worked as a writing tutor at the community college.

She completed the TAP about three-fourths of the way through the fall semester in her first-level fundamentals course, when students were

working on a narrative essay in which they were to write about an experience regarding rudeness. In conjunction with their personal narrative, students needed to use concepts and quotes from the text they were reading in class. Kim mentions that class discussions had focused on how “rudeness is contextual and varies by situation and interpretation.” Kim was reading first drafts of the rudeness narrative, and one of Kim’s main goals for this essay was for students to understand how to provide context for their writing. When reading the essays, Kim was hoping to see students set up enough of a story’s context for any reader to understand what was happening in the story. Continuing with the issue of context, Kim was also hoping that students would use contextual cues when they referenced the outside text. She wants to see that the students provided enough context for the quotes so that they are integrated well within the students’ narratives. Kim mentions that another goal for the narrative was for the students to explain how a rude situation affected them. However, since Kim has taught this assignment in past semesters, she was aware that students tend to leave out this aspect of the prompt. Kim comments that at this stage of the students’ development, one larger goal is making sure that for the students understand what the assignment involves and address all parts of the prompt.

Just as individuals can perceive and feel the environment when they walk into a room, Kim was able to “feel the paper” when she began to read. Kim expressed an ebb and flow of confusion and concern for a single paper that she spent her entire 45-minute allotment responding to it. Kim reflected that she normally does not spend 45-minutes per paper. Kim’s individual 55 emotional episodes flowed throughout the response session. The combination of her goals for the assignment, classroom context, institutional curriculum, and individual student intersected to reveal two major affective tensions Kim had to negotiate as she reads and responds to the student’s writing:

1. Responding to grammar/sentence errors over content
2. Balancing student relationships and critical responses

These two affective tensions swirl as invisible, persuasive, and, eventually, recognized forces that function as the operationalized, named aspect of emotion that shapes Kim’s decisions.



## Discussion

### Tension 1: Responding to Grammar/Sentence Errors Over Content

I felt tension between what I kind of try to downplay, like surface errors and grammar, and then also a sense of duty where I feel like if I don't point it out, someone may not or someone will in the future. And the student will feel like. "Why didn't she ever tell me this or help me with this?" (Retrospective Interview)

At the beginning of the TAP, Kim states that she likes to read papers all the way through before commenting on students' work. However, almost immediately after starting to read a paper, within the introduction, Kim realizes she is not going to be able to just read the work because there are too many surface errors that interfere with her ability to read through. While Kim is reading the essay and commenting on both surface-level and content-based issues, she expresses multiple moments of concern—concern for the student and concern for herself regarding whether she is making the right pedagogical decisions. Kim's emotional moments of concern reveal an affective tension influencing how she is reading and responding to the student's narrative essay.

The first instance of concern occurs about 5 minutes into the TAP, when Kim pauses to question why she is continuing to comment on surface errors:

Again I feel weird pointing out surface errors, um, but I'm also really highly aware that they are trying to learn some of the conventions of academic writing, such as underlining a title, so I feel like I kinda need to point these things out.

As one of Kim's emotional episodes, Kim's concern is triggered by surface errors, specifically the addition of the word "author" and the title of the book in quotation marks and not underlined. While Kim stated in her preinterview that she was more interested in the content, as she engages in responding to the student's writing she becomes more invested in the sentence-level features of the writing.

About 15 minutes later, Kim finds herself again commenting on the surface-level features of the writing:

Wrong spelling of weather um [sigh]. I hate to point that stuff out, but obviously spell check didn't get it and at this stage I do feel like these are honest mistakes and that nobody points them out and if no one ever does, they will just keep going on. I don't know if this will help for sure; it'll just happen again, but I'll be remiss if I didn't point it out.

In this instance, Kim is concerned that if she does not point out the errors to the student, the student is not going to recognize that she is making these errors. Part of the concern Kim feels is due to a prior class discussion she and her students had on language and power. "I'm in this really weird position where we had this fantastic discussion on language and privilege and power and um we read all these wonderful pieces and had these discussions where we ran out of class time." Kim is concerned that by commenting on the surface-level issues in this student's text, she is inadvertently undermining the discussions of language and power that she and the students had in the classroom. Yet, at the same time, Kim is cognizant of the fact that for these students to succeed in the academy, they need to be able to write in an academic voice.

The academic voice Kim seeks for her students includes standard academic English (SAE) at the sentence level; however, for Kim and other 2-year-college faculty, emphasizing SAE conflicts with their professional identity. Kim reflects out loud in her TAP that she emphasizes spelling and grammar and that she "want[s] [students] to have an honest understanding of how a certain type of reader will see their work and how a certain type of reader like me will notice those things." For Kim, this tug-of-war between her values of higher-order features of writing and the institutional values of correct SAE centralizes itself as an affective tension that mediates how she chooses to respond to this piece of writing. Kim's manifestation of this affective tension in her response practices reflects professional identity research on 2-year-college faculty. Toth, Griffiths, and Thirolf (2013) studied 2-year-college faculty's professional identities and considered the tensions these faculty experience between pedagogy and the institutional context. These researchers write that "national and institutional policies that emphasize educational attainment and workforce readiness can position two-year college English faculty as a cross-purpose with the goals of the administrators, thereby limiting their autonomy as

writing pedagogy experts” (p. 91). Toth et al. found in their study that instructors experienced pressures and tension within their pedagogy: “They had practical obligations to meet institutional completion goals, even as they sought to remain true to their own notions of good teaching” (p. 103). While Toth et al. did not consider the role of emotion in this tension, for Kim this particular tension between responding to sentence-level issues (a goal of the curriculum and expectation of future instructors) and responding to content (a goal of her pedagogical approach to writing) becomes visible through her emotions and emotional episodes. Kim’s decision to comment or not is mediated by her emotions, and her emotions direct her attention to this particular affective tension. Kim has to decide how to navigate feedback on grammar and content based on what is best for this student and her piece of writing in this moment.

## **Tension 2: Balancing Student Relationships and Critical Responses**

I do remember that when I discussed this assignment and she knew this was going to be another narrative and she felt like ‘oh here we go again,’ and um I think I remember her mentioning something about like um, ya know, I feel like she did say something, well she didn’t want this one to be as personal, and I think I encouraged her that it was okay to be personal, ya know, whatever she is comfortable with. Um I feel like this one isn’t coming off as well as the other one. (Think Aloud Protocol)

While Kim was negotiating whether to respond to form and content, she also was negotiating a second tension: responding critically to a student she likes and has encouraged to take risks in her writing. This particular affective tension is littered with emotional episodes of concern throughout the last half of the TAP, and Kim becomes aware of how powerful student narratives can be for teachers. As Kim is processing her concern out loud during the protocol, she says:

I’ll grade the one that’s not narrative, and I’ll be much more, ya know, authoritative in terms of how things are organized, and then I get to the narrative and I’m like, aww, if I had only known what you have been through I wouldn’t have been so hard on the nonnarrative, so that’s actually created a little bit of some extra tension this semester.

The more Kim learns about her students, the more she struggles to shift from a teacher-centered authority figure to a reader-centered, writer-focused responder. Kim already has a working relationship with this student and has met with her prior to reading this draft, both of which have shaped part of the tension Kim had to navigate to provide this student with constructive, useful feedback that would help the writer at this particular moment.

Kim is initially concerned about the student based on the student's content. "So, I can see that this is really upsetting to her." The narrative the student wrote on rudeness seems to be about the student, but as Kim continues to read the draft she is confused about whether the rudeness was directed at the student or whether the student observed it happening. As Kim begins to write feedback to the student, she becomes concerned about the tone of her feedback and how her comments are going to be interpreted by the student. Below, Kim's comment to the student is in quotes and is followed by Kim's voiced expression of her concern:

I can see there are a couple of issues here. One the new deacon may have um stepped on the pastor's toes." I'm, I hope that this isn't condescending. I try to use phrases like "stepped on the pastor's toes" rather than "the new deacon may have asserted his authority." I always feel like if I make a comment like that not that somebody wouldn't understand it but just that it sounds too professor-like.

Kim's concern about not sounding "too professor-like" stems from her positionality; from the class discussions on power, language, and authority discussions; and from her relationship with the student and her desire to use language with which the student is familiar. Kim's concern for the student's feelings appears again at the end of the think-aloud session as Kim decides how much feedback and what feedback will best help the student improve her text. Kim says out loud: "I'm just trying to weigh how much needs to be written on the paper. I don't want it to be depressing and overwhelming."

During her retrospective interview, Kim continues the theme of concern about the student and concern about the choices Kim is making as an instructor. She first discusses her feelings of sympathy for the student, who is struggling to grasp the material and conventions of academic

English. Kim mentions, “I truly feel bad that it must be this difficult” for the student. Additionally, Kim expresses concern for the student because of Kim’s relationship with the student. Kim knows that when she meets with the student, she will need to give the student positive feedback so that the student will continue to work on her essay and not be discouraged by the current quality of the writing.

Kim continues to feel concerned for the writer when she says, “Because I’ve worked with students for a while and because I’ve worked in the writing center, I feel like I know they can take this stuff personally. I would.” Kim’s action, based on this feeling of concern, is to take it easy on the student and put a positive spin on the comments in the margin. Kim also mentions that she has moved toward oral conferences with the students because she is able to convey her thoughts more clearly to the student when they have a conversation about the writing. Kim values academic written conventions as a teacher, but she also values the students’ rights to their language, and when those two values intersect, Kim experiences an affective tension regarding how to respond.

The negotiation of this affective tension is similar to Kynard’s reflection on providing honest, reader-based comments to her students. Kynard wants her students to know her thoughts and her feelings and to maintain her students’ desires to just write. Kim, on the other hand, is trying to couch her feedback to further students’ learning in a particular way. The “just write to write” approach does not hold up because Kim is still encouraging a particular academic literacy task. Thus, Kim is left to navigate “contextual student-centered information” to decide what feedback best supports a writer’s learning in this moment (Murphy, 2000). Kim’s relationship with the student, in addition to classroom history, helps to shape Kim’s actions to this affective tension during the TAP. Whereas the first affective tension directs Kim’s attention to *what* to respond to, this affective tension directs Kim’s attention to *how* to respond to the student.

### Conclusion

Analysis of Kim’s two affective tensions reveals the way in which emotions mediate the behaviors of teachers when responding to student writing. In particular, the affective tensions make visible the persuasive nature

of emotional episodes that nudge teachers toward particular pedagogical choices. For Kim, her affective tensions help shape what she responds to and how she responds. This study demonstrates how individual emotions cluster around specific tensions that a writing teacher navigates and how some of those tensions are beyond the control of the writing teacher. Kim eventually became aware of her tensions through the TAP and our retrospective interview. The tension between content, form, and structure became so powerful for her that she could not let it go. She said:

I feel strong about it. Because I know this will continue to be an issue in academic writing and so I just can't play nice. I can't just always say, "Ya know, it's just about the content and you really do have a great anecdote here and that's really all that matters," because that's not all that's going to matter. . . . I can't, I just can't let the tension cripple me from being about to convey that somehow.

Kim eventually decided that she was going to discuss this tension with her class and decide together how she might proceed with feedback on future assignments. Kim's emotions and her affective tensions are not just about her or the feelings she happens to have that day. Her emotions mediate her relationships with her students, the institution, and herself. The institutional rules establish a certain expected outcome for students who enroll in her class, but Kim's emotions draw her attention to an affective tension when that expectation conflicts with her pedagogical beliefs. The conflict between the institutional expectations and Kim's pedagogical beliefs paralyzes her response practices, to an extent. After 10 years of teaching, Kim is unable to decide exactly how to respond to and how to proceed with a single paper that she spends 45 minutes reading and responding to. Kim's reflection on the tension leads her back into the classroom, but what happens to teachers who encounter paralyzing tensions and do not think to look at emotions or affective tensions?

Although looking just at Kim's emotional episodes provides us with an understanding of how her individual emotions mediate her responses, affective tensions allow us to recognize larger persuasive forces that shape her decisions. For Kim, these affective tensions helped to operationalize and name the *what* of her emotions that moved beyond just the individual

experience. Kim's first affective tension created a space in which, even though she was responding to just one student, she was navigating her accountability to the entire class and the institution. Kim's comments reflected both what she wanted to say to the individual student and her perceived responsibility to the entire class. Kim's second affective tension positioned Kim and her student's relationship as a situational factor. Kim's comments were motivated by maintaining the relationship so the student could grow as a writer. Over time, Kim may have become aware of these tensions on her own, but her participation in this study brought them to her attention sooner. Through our retrospective interview, Kim became better situated to recognize these tensions when responding to future assignments and to preempt some of her tensions by creating new pedagogical tools to interface with the tensions in the classroom. While Kim cannot anticipate what relationships she might build with students in the classroom, she can anticipate the nagging concern between form and content and create additional space in the classroom to have more conversations with students—or change her response practices if necessary. Additional research is needed to know how long teachers navigate individual affective tensions and whether these tensions continue to shift, intensify, or deintensify based on a teacher's experience, education, or institution. Would further graduate coursework position Kim to negotiate her affective tensions differently? Would Kim act differently after teaching in the same institution for another 10 years? Future research might also focus on how affective tensions transfer between classrooms. Will Kim experience these same tensions in another section of Language Fundamentals or in a Composition 1 or 2 course?

Additionally, as higher education institutions wield more power and continue to move toward rigid measures of accountability and outcomes, affective tensions might become more complex. Returning to Brand's (1987) emotion research, we must continue to humanize writing teachers if we hope to push against rigidity in our classrooms and reestablish the value of the teacher in the writing classroom. Brand (1999) stated in her keynote to the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning at CCCC:

Whether we like it or not, the mind-body relationship is so powerful that it is humanly impossible to dissociate the two without grave consequences. We make a serious mistake by not helping students address their psychological lives, to continually humanize themselves.

Similarly, we are doing ourselves a disservice by looking for shortcuts in our response practices instead of advocating for the complexity of emotion in our response practices. We could turn to Straub's (2000) best practices of response (conversation based, student focused, and content driven), which highlight the relationship between teachers and students, in which emotion is at the core. These best practices should not be replaced by institutional mandates, standardized tests, or rigid scoring guides. As Neal (2011) has reminded us, machine scoring was "a cheap, mechanized solution to a problem that we have not had opportunity to help define" (p. 74). We need to humanize ourselves as writing teachers so our responses remain firmly rooted in pedagogically sound practices and so new solutions to unidentified problems arise.

We might begin by humanizing ourselves. Reflecting on Kim's experiences suggests that her affective tensions might ring true to other writing teachers. To that end, writing teachers should create a reflective space in which to recognize their own affective tensions in their institutions and their educational backgrounds. As teachers are reading and responding to student writing, they can pay attention to when they continue to pause, get frustrated, become concerned, and stop and think about what factors are interacting at that moment. Emotional reflection can become another way for teachers to engage in reflective practice. Teachers can consider how their emotions draw their attention by thinking about the following questions: What has happened in class the last few weeks? Do certain assignments prompt more or different emotions than others? What scholarship have they read recently? What has been shared on social media about teaching, learning, and students that might shape how the teachers are reading student writing? Once teachers are aware of their emotions and affective tensions, they might consider how to include students in conversations about those tensions or how they could use emotions and affective tensions to build relationships with students through



feedback. Through emotional reflection, teachers can begin to build toward response as an intellectual and emotional endeavor (Edgington, 2016).

Response researchers need to spend as much time researching emotions and affective tensions as they do the technology tools and best practices we use to respond to student writing. Our emotions and affective tensions influence our response practices in ways our research has not yet valued. Paying attention to emotions and affective tensions allows writing teachers to ignore the pull to become machinelike responders efficiently cranking through feedback and instead provide reader-centered feedback that aligns affective tensions with the teachers' pedagogical approaches.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### Preinterview Questions

1. What are your goals for response?
2. What type of assignment are you responding to?
3. How long have you been teaching?
4. What is your professional background/training?
5. What course is this?
6. What other courses have you recently taught?

### Retrospective Interview Questions

1. How many papers did you respond to?
2. What emotions did you notice while you were responding?
3. Are those emotions typical when you respond to writing?
4. Do you think your emotions influenced how you responded and how so?
5. Which emotions were the most intensely experienced at the beginning of the session?
6. Which emotions dissipated by the end of the session?
7. Which emotions resisted change?
8. Which emotions intensified and deintensified?

## Appendix B: Emotional Episode Coding Scheme

Trigger coding	Emotion coding	Action coding
<b>Content:</b> Something about the content of the paper triggers an emotion for the teacher.	<b>Joy:</b> The teacher expresses a positive feeling such as a liking or love for something within or in relation to the text.	<b>Spoken:</b> The teacher did nothing in addition to verbalizing the emotional utterance. The teacher mentioned or expressed the emotions in their verbalized thoughts and it did not interfere with the teacher's task at hand.
<b>Organization:</b> Something about the organization of the paper triggers an emotion for the teacher.	<b>Anger:</b> The teacher expresses that a certain point or word in relation to the text has upset her and her inability to achieve something is upsetting her.	<b>Written comments:</b> The teacher would speak the emotional utterance and immediately write a comment on the student's paper.
<b>Tone:</b> Something about the tone of the paper triggers an emotion for the teacher.	<b>Trust:</b> The teacher expresses satisfaction or gratification with something in or in relation to the text.	<b>Grading:</b> The teacher would speak the emotional utterance and immediately place a grade on the student's paper. In addition to writing the grade, the teachers would also vocalize the grade separating it from the written comment category.
<b>Style:</b> Something about the style of writing in the paper triggers an emotion for the teacher.	<b>Surprise:</b> The teacher expresses that something unexpected has affected her while reading student texts.	<b>Returning to the paper:</b> The teacher would speak the emotional utterance and return to either what they had just read in the paper, repeating it vocally, or returning to an earlier part of the paper looking for another example or reference in the student's paper.
<b>Sentence-level:</b> A sentence-level issue in the students' text triggers an emotion for the teacher.	<b>Confusion:</b> The teacher expresses uncertainty toward something within or in relation to the text.	<b>Pausing:</b> The teacher would speak the emotional utterance and then have silence for three seconds or longer. In addition to the silence, the teacher would not be looking directly at the paper but instead would experience an observable moment of thinking, reflecting, or just pausing.

<p><b>Appearance:</b> Something about the appearance or assignment triggers an emotion for the teacher.</p>	<p><b>Disgust:</b> The teacher expresses disapproval or aversion toward something within or around the text.</p>	
<p><b>Personal Connection:</b> An outside yet related classroom or student factor triggers an emotion for the teacher.</p>	<p><b>Anticipation:</b> The teacher expresses emotion such as hope or looking toward something good happening within or in relation to the text.</p>	
<p><b>Self:</b> A personal issue or self-reflection triggers an emotion for the teacher.</p>	<p><b>Concern:</b> The teacher expresses that uncertainty about the future of the student and/or text is negatively affecting them.</p>	
<p><b>Grade:</b> Something relating to the assignments or students' grades triggers an emotion for the teacher.</p>	<p><b>Disappointment:</b> The teacher expresses a negative reaction or let down due to something within or in relation to the text.</p>	
	<p><b>Sadness:</b> The teacher expresses that something within or in relation to the text is making her unhappy.</p>	

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