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An EFL Writing Teacher's Beliefs about Feedback: A Self-Study

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Abstract

In this self-study, I reported my beliefs and practices in giving comments to students in a semester-long academic writing class at a university in Taiwan. An examination of my reflection journal, learning log, and written comments reveals that my educational, practical, and professional experiences interacted to shape my beliefs about giving feedback. A discernible change is noted—from procedural matters to interpersonal relationships to cultural aspects of commenting. With these changes in belief, I experienced increasing difficulty in putting them into practice. These difficulties are partly due to the complex declarative knowledge inherent in the beliefs and partly due to my lack of corresponding procedural knowledge to implement them. I conclude this study by discussing its ideological, methodological, and pedagogical implications.

Key Words: ESL/EFL writing teacher beliefs, teacher feedback, declarative and procedural knowledge, higher education

INTRODUCTION

The past few decades have witnessed a shift of research interest in second/foreign language (henceforth ESL/EFL) teacher education—from studying ESL/EFL teachers' development and use of teaching approaches to uncovering the complexities of their mental lives (Johnson, 2006). Yet ESL/EFL writing teacher education at the university level seems to lag behind in this regard. Recent scholarly discussions still focus on how to prepare ESL/EFL writing teachers for discrete teaching and assessing techniques (Hirvela & Belcher, 2007), with little reference to writing teacher cognition (Borg, 2006), especially in the area of ESL/EFL writing teachers' beliefs,[1] defined as "statements teachers made about their ideas and thoughts" (Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2004, p. 244), and practices in giving feedback.

Examining ESL/EFL writing teachers' beliefs about giving comments is in consonance with the current thinking that ESL/EFL language (in this case, writing) teachers, are not passive recipients and implementers of dominant first language (L1) writing theories. Instead, they are arbiters of their practices (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008) and active thinkers who have potential for "a personal theory of practice" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 544).

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[1] There have been heated discussions about the meanings of teacher beliefs and knowledge. The attempt to distinguish the two cognitive constructs, albeit important to academics with philosophical leanings, appears less fruitful in practicality due to the complex relationships between these two notions in a teacher's mind. In this study, I adopt a pragmatic position by treating teacher knowledge and beliefs as points on a spectrum of meaning, while recognizing that beliefs are more value-laden and knowledge more proposition-oriented (Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2001).

Practically, examining ESL/EFL writing teachers' beliefs can provide writing researchers and teachers with a lens into the underlying principles of the latter's practices given the close connection between teacher beliefs and practices (Burns, 1992). This insight is important because these beliefs can influence their actual commentary on students' writing, which, in turn, is likely to impact on students' "beliefs about their effectiveness" (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, p. 157) and their revision and writing quality (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Paulus, 1999; Tsui & Ng, 2000). If gained through reflective self-study, this knowledge can also help ESL/EFL writing teachers monitor their own practices, align incongruent beliefs and practices, and finally improve their practices (LaBoskey, 2007).

Given the importance of studying ESL/EFL writing teachers' feedback beliefs as well as a paucity of research in this field, the purpose of this self-study was to add to the extant knowledge base by reporting how my beliefs about giving feedback evolved and changed during a semester-long writing class at a university in Taiwan. This self-study has relevance for professionals who, with minimum formal training in EFL/ESL writing instruction, are required to respond to ESL/EFL students' academic writing, a popular situation at the university level in most Asian countries (Casanave, 2009; Lee & Schallert, 2008; Pennington et al., 1997; Sakui & Gaies, 2003) and some European countries such as Spain (Reichelt, 2009). Like other teacher research studies (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Sakui & Gaies, 2003), it has value for ESL/EFL writing teacher education, especially in the specific domain of teacher feedback, when it is made "public, accessible, and open to review" (Johnson, 2006, p. 243).

BACKGROUND

Research on ESL/EFL Writing Teachers' Feedback

Teacher feedback, a perennial concern among ESL/EFL writing researchers and teachers, has generated a wealth of research for the last two decades. Furneaux, Paran, and Fairfax (2007) identified three distinctive strands in this research field: student reactions to and perceptions of teacher written feedback, its impact on student writing, and its formal features and functions. The first line of research has informed that ESL students at secondary (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Lee, 2008), college (Diab, 2005; Zacharias, 2007) and even graduate (Leki, 2006) levels all desire and value teacher written commentary and error feedback (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996; Lee, 2008). With regard to the impact of teacher error feedback on student writing, the final verdict has not yet been reached. While some researchers (Ferris, 2006) continue to present findings of the long- and short-term effects of teacher error feedback on student writing, others found little empirical evidence in support of such impact in the long-term (Truscott & Hsu, 2008). There, however, appears a consensus regarding the positive impact of teacher written commentary other than error feedback on student revision (Paulus, 1999; Tsui & Ng, 2000) and revision quality (Miao, Badger, & Zhen, 2006). Regarding the formal and functional aspects of ESL writing teachers' written comments, research has shown types of revision requested of students as well as affective factors (Hyland & Hyland, 2001) may influence students' attempts to incorporate teachers' feedback into their subsequent revisions and revision success.

Notwithstanding the valuable insights yielded by previous research, studies on ESL/EFL teacher feedback have been limited in scope in that teachers' responses, with few exceptions (Lee, 2009; Montgomery & Baker, 2007), have been examined without reference to their beliefs. This is strange given the important role of beliefs in relation to instructional practices in ESL/EFL teaching (Borg, 2006) and the claim that teachers' feedback is a revelation of their "beliefs about language, learning, writing, and personal relationships" (Hyland & Hyland, 2006, p. 207).

Research on ESL/EFL Writing Teachers' Feedback Beliefs/ Perceptions

Most research on ESL/EFL writing teachers' beliefs has focused on pedagogy, examining writing teachers' beliefs and practices about second language (L2) writing in general (Casanave, 2009) or implementing innovative instructional approaches at the university (Pennington, et al., 1997; Shi & Cumming, 1995) or secondary (Tsui, 1996) level. Few have examined ESL/EFL writing feedback beliefs and practices. For the few exceptions that have examined this issue, mismatches are often reported and interpreted from a social constructivist perspective, either as an inevitable effect of student demands (Diab, 2005; Montgomery & Baker, 2007) or larger social contexts such as local English panel policy (Lee, 2009).

Following the research strand of L1 teacher socialization that focused on examining how teachers are shaped by the institutions with which they have contact, Lee (2009) reported that institutional constraints might have been a likely factor for 10 noticeable mismatched beliefs and practices among two groups of EFL writing teachers at the secondary level in Hong Kong. These discrepancies manifested in areas such as essential aspects of good writing, appropriate and effective approaches to error feedback, number of revisions required, and responsibility for correction. Most teachers, when interviewed by the researcher, considered local English panel policy demanding them to mark errors as the main reason for the discrepancies in their feedback beliefs and practices. Lee, however, cautioned that teachers' constant blame on local English panel policy might be an expedient excuse to justify the mismatch, which might be a camouflage for more complex factors at play.

Although institutional policies were a possible factor for incongruent beliefs and practices in Lee's study, their effects were comparatively insignificant in Montgomery and Baker's (2007) study. Different from Lee's study which looked at incongruities between EFL writing teachers' beliefs in and practices of general principles of teacher feedback, Montgomery and Baker (2007) focused on contrasting 13 ESL writing teachers' self-report perceptions of and their actual comments on local and global issues in students' writing at an English Language Center at an American university. To their and most of the teachers' surprise, the results revealed considerable discrepancies between what the teachers perceived doing and what they actually did. Most reported in the questionnaire that they gave much more feedback on global issues and far less on local ones. Yet the researchers' textual analyses disclosed a different picture. Only two gave extensive comments on macro issues and the rest (87%) focused on micro issues, even on students' first drafts.

Montgomery and Baker postulated some reasons for the mismatched perceptions and practices, one of which is teachers' catering to students' needs. The decision to comment on local issues indicates that those ESL writing teachers may have experienced "potentially conflictual beliefs" (Basturkmen et al., 2004, p. 268)—conforming to the feedback practice advocated by the Center on the one hand, and addressing student needs for teacher comments on local issues, on the other. They may have decided to subordinate their former belief to the latter.

The existence of conflictual beliefs can also account for the dilemma confronting an ESL writing teacher in Diab's study (2005). Using think-aloud and interview methods, Diab documented the ESL writing teacher's belief about error correction. She believed that she should avoid correcting students' errors because such corrections did not benefit students. Despite this belief, she still corrected students' grammar mistakes. She disclosed in a subsequent interview that her students needed a "security blanket" (p. 34) and she felt it her responsibility to meet their expectations.

Taken together, contextual factors, whether in or outside of the classroom, are the main reason for incongruent feedback beliefs and practices among most ESL/EFL writing teachers. At the secondary school level, institutional and policy standards, along with with student demands, pressured ESL/EFL writing teachers to adopt feedback practice contrary to their beliefs (Lee, 2009). Although institutional constraints are less severe at the university level, ESL/EFL writing teachers still need to cater their feedback practice to student expectations which are sometimes different from their own (Diab, 2005; Montgomery & Baker, 2007).

CRITIQUE

Contextual Constraints or Insufficient Knowledge

As can be seen from the previous literature review, none have noted a less apparent but equally likely reason for ESL/EFL writing teachers' incongruent beliefs and practices: Insufficient knowledge about how to give comments. It is an open secret that many ESL/EFL writing teachers, either at the secondary or the university level, have not taken courses related to ESL/EFL writing instruction (Casanave, 2009; Pennington, et al., 1997; Reichelt, 2009), let alone feedback provision. Even if they have, most probably just possess declarative knowledge (knowledge about facts) about teacher response. It is doubtful they have had ample opportunities to practice incorporating the professional knowledge into their actual comments and receive feedback from instructors to improve their commenting skills. It logically follows that they are unlikely to have developed procedural knowledge (knowledge about how to perform cognitive activities) about how to provide written comments.

In fact, research has shown that some teachers, especially inexperienced ones, are inconsistent in applying their professional knowledge in practice on the grounds that they are unable to proceduralize their declarative knowledge and beliefs (Basturkmen et al., 2004). Given that many of the ESL writing teachers studied by Montgomery and Baker were "recently admitted into the TESOL master's program" (2007, p. 86), one might wonder if they have taken courses related to ESL/EFL writing and knew how to apply their newly-learned principles of teacher response to their written comments. One may also question the ability of those EFL writing teachers who "expressed their concern about the inefficacy of their feedback" but "continued with their existing written feedback practice" studied by Lee (2009, p. 18). It is likely that both groups of ESL/EFL writing teachers may be aware of the dominant trend in L2 feedback practice but lack corresponding procedural knowledge for application. Lee's (2008) finding that inadequate training was one major reason for some EFL writing teachers' continual use of error feedback lends support to this interpretation.

Without procedural knowledge about how to give feedback, commenting on areas other than language is mentally taxing and time-consuming to most ESL/EFL writing teachers, not to mention the added burden of having to perform this skill under different circumstances (i.e., commenting on various kinds of student work). It is thus unsurprising that they tended to focus on language issues when pressed by time and social demands, because commenting on language, albeit laborious, usually requires less of their cognitive effort and time.

Given the previous reasoning, possessing procedural knowledge (knowing how) is important for ESL/EFL writing teachers to align their feedback beliefs and practices. Yet very little is known about how ESL/EFL writing teachers translate their declarative knowledge into production rules that represent procedural knowledge. Even less is known about the different natures of ESL/EFL writing teachers' beliefs (Hosenfeld, 2003)—stable/unstable, unchanging/evolving, simple/complex—that might further complicate the proceduralization process. Implementing a long-held simple belief might be easier, when everything else is equal, than realizing an evolving and complex belief given the writing teachers' depth of knowledge about and time investment in it.

Approaches to Studying Beliefs

The lack of information about the complexity of ESL/EFL writing teachers' feedback beliefs and their corresponding procedural knowledge is mainly due to the research methodology employed by researchers. Previous studies on ESL/EFL writing teachers' feedback beliefs generally treated beliefs as a stable phenomenon which could be objectively examined by researchers. Preconceived beliefs are encoded in questionnaires (Lee, 2009) and interviews (Diab, 2005; Montgomery & Baker, 2007) designed to elicit subjects' opinions at a certain point in time. While this approach provides readers with an overall portrayal of ESL/EFL writing teachers' feedback beliefs and conceptions in respective contexts, important information on the nature of these beliefs and how they emerge, develop, and are practiced at different points in time is missing.

In addition, previous studies on ESL/EFL writing teachers' feedback beliefs and practices generally followed the positivist research tradition in which researchers maintained a certain distance from the researched to ensure objectivity and validity of the research results. Yet this type of research has "a quality of paternalism" (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 34), conveying a disempowering message to ESL/EFL writing teachers that only writing scholars or researchers can understand their beliefs and practices and point out directions for improvement. This is somewhat ironic because most qualitative studies of ESL/EFL writing teachers' beliefs rely to a great extent on the words and actions of ESL/EFL writing teachers to unveil what they know. The researchers merely reword that information in different terms.

We need a research method that can not only help us understand the different natures of beliefs and how they evolve from an emic perspective but also empower ESL/EFL writing teachers. The self-study method used by teachers and teacher educators can satisfy both goals. According to LaBoskey (2007), self-study method is characterized by self-initiation and a focus on self-practice. The ultimate aim is to improve self-practice, and if possible, others' as well. It uses "multiple … mainly qualitative methods and … defines validity as a validation process based in trustworthiness" (p. 817). Despite being an increasingly popular research genre among L1 qualitative teacher educators and researchers, self-study is usually met with strong skepticism due to its lack of objectivity (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). These criticisms raise an epistemological issue, namely, the nature of truth. From the viewpoint of the dominant positivist research paradigm, objective evidence is superior to subjective understanding. From the narrative and emancipatory research paradigms, however, "the essence of 'truth' is how phenomena are connected and interpreted" through the narration of the insider's lived experience (Golombek & Johnson, 2004, p. 308). Given current conceptions of teacher cognition as situated, social, and distributed (Putnam & Borko, 2000) and calls for understanding teachers' beliefs from ecologically sound approaches, I decided to adopt the self-study method that is in sync with this interpretive paradigm.

THE STUDY

Given that no research has examined EFL writing teachers' beliefs about and practices of how to provide written comments in a longitudinal manner and that ESL writing teachers/researchers have examined their own feedback practices and called for writing teachers' critical self-inquiry of their written commentary practices (Ferris, 2007; Goldstein, 2010), the purpose of this study was to respond to their call by documenting my feedback beliefs and practices in a semester-long writing class. The self-study reported here is part of a larger project in which I designed a procedural facilitator to train students to perform peer review. The procedural facilitator mainly functioned as a checklist for the students, requesting them to follow four steps while providing feedback: Clarifying the writer's intentions, identifying potential problems, explaining the nature of the problems, and making specific suggestions. Each step represents the probing, prescriptive, tutoring, and collaborating stance respectively.

Arguably, these procedural steps reflect my beliefs about how to make written commentary. What was unclear was the sources influencing those beliefs and whether those beliefs remained the same throughout the whole semester. The research questions were formulated as follows:

1. What were the initial feedback beliefs established at the beginning of the writing class? What factors were associated with these beliefs?
2. What were the later feedback beliefs established toward the end of the writing class? What factors were associated with these beliefs?

METHOD

Participants

A native speaker of Mandarin Chinese, I pursued further studies in the United States after receiving a B. A. degree in English education in Taiwan. I received an M. A. in Communications, and a Ph D. in Education at a university in the Midwest. Upon completing the doctoral degree, I returned to Taiwan to assume a teaching post at the university level. Like most of my counterparts in Taiwan and perhaps in many other Asian countries such as Japan (Sakui & Gaies, 2003) and South Korea (Lee & Schallert, 2008), I was required to teach writing, despite my minimum formal training in ESL/EFL writing instruction. The only course related to writing that I took was "Writing Studies I," which focused on L1 process writing theory (Flower & Hayes, 1981). I had taught academic writing at the second largest comprehensive university in Taiwan for five years when I decided to reflect on my feedback beliefs and practices.

The students in my writing class were 18 sophomore students (16 females and 2 males) with English as their major. Their age average was 19. All were native speakers of Mandarin Chinese. Moreover, their English proficiency is ranked approximately between 523-550 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam.

The Writing Curriculum

The English writing class that I taught was to students at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature (FLLD). Students of FLLD are required to take three hours of writing each semester for three consecutive years. Upon entering FLLD, they are assigned to one of the four concurrent writing sessions of Writing I, with each class size less than 20 students. At the beginning of their sophomore year, the students can select the instructor they prefer.

Not dissimilar to its counterparts in most Taiwanese universities, FLLD does not have explicit departmental curricular requirements for the writing courses. Nor does it dictate the kinds of feedback that faculty members should provide to their students. Consequently, I designed the course by myself.

The Writing Class

After conducting an informal survey, I decided that the focus of this writing course was to develop students' academic essay writing skills, given the fact that most students desired to continue their studies after graduation. The class met two times a week for 18 weeks. I employed a principled eclectic approach to writing (Min, 2009) because I considered academic writing in English a linguistic, social, cultural, cognitive, and developmental process. While encouraging students to brainstorm, discuss, draft, and revise ideas during the composing process, I also stressed the importance of linguistic accuracy, understanding as well as meeting the academic conventions in an acceptable essay format. The entire writing class, conducted in English, consisted of four one-month "writing cycles" modeled after Tsui and Ng's (2000) study. In each cycle, students underwent a series of stages (shown in Figure 1, see Min (2006, 2008) for more details).

Reading

↓

Brainstorming (ideas for writing)

↓

First draft

↓

Peer review

↓

Second draft

↓

Oral presentation and peer response

↓

Teacher-student conference on the second draft (both oral (in Mandarin Chinese) and written commentary (in English))

↓

Third draft

↓

Teacher comments (only written feedback) on the third draft

↓

Final draft

Figure 1
The Writing Cycle

The four topics written during the four writing cycles were "The Advantages/Disadvantages of _____ (a new technical invention)," "How to Prevent Environmental Pollution," "Factors Contributing to X's Success," and "An Analysis of an Incident of

Cross-Cultural Misunderstanding." Students needed to search for credible information and quote it to substantiate their opinions in their one-page essays. As shown in Figure 1, I provided commentary on students' second and third drafts of each topic after they performed peer review to avoid influencing student reviewers' comments and writers' perceptions of their peers' comments and the subsequent revisions. In addition to the four compositions, I also required the students to turn in at least five journal entries about their reflections on the writing assignments, peer review comments, teacher feedback, and so on. During the second and third writing cycles I trained students to perform peer review by demonstrating the procedure (i.e., clarifying the writer's intentions, identifying potential problems, explaining the nature of problems, and making specific suggestions) in class and scaffolding each peer reviewer after class.

Data Collection Procedure

The primary data source consisted of my reflection journal (RJ) and learning log (LL) entries. I wrote reflections on the writing class in English once a week. I also jotted down my thoughts after reading students' journal entries and conferencing with them in each writing cycle. The reflections revolved around student difficulties in conducting peer review, student responses to the writing assignments, teacher feedback and peer comments, and self-appraisals of my instructional and feedback approaches. The learning log, on the other hand, was replete with notes of and responses to professional journal articles and presentations at domestic and international conferences. The learning log and reflection journal provided a lens to the sources of my feedback beliefs and possible changes, if there were any, during the course of the semester. It should be noted that the learning log and reflection journal were not originally produced for the purpose of this study. They were kept for my records of and reflections on my thoughts about general writing instruction and peer review training. The decision to use them as data for this study was a post hoc act. This decision also avoided "data contamination," which may have resulted if I planned in advance to use the journals for this research (Numrich, 1996). The other set of data consisted of the students' reflection journals and my comments on the students' writing. The former served as a reliability check of student responses recorded in my reflection journal, and the latter as a check of whether I enacted my feedback beliefs accordingly in my comments.

Data Analysis and Coding

The data analysis method is principally a qualitative one. Two trained independent raters, both of whom have taught EFL writing for more than eight years, were blind to the purpose of this study. I first numbered each reflection journal and learning log entry chronologically. Then we perused the entries and attempted to identify feedback beliefs and factors that might have shaped those beliefs. We consulted the three elements of Borg's (2006, p. 283) model of language teacher cognition—schooling (prior educational experience), professional coursework (related to language teacher education), and classroom practice in language teaching—and conducted constant-comparative analyses (Erickson, 1986). We agreed to identify the source(s) of each feedback belief by paying attention to the written clues mentioned in each entry in the reflection journal and learning log such as "my students …," "my teacher …," "some scholars …," treated them as indicators of different sources, and coded them as "practical experience with students," "prior schooling," "professional experience gained from self-study," and so on. Then we subsumed "practical experience with students" and "experience sharing with colleagues" under "practical experience" (Table 1).

We later modified the second element of the Borg's model as professional experience, including attending conferences and workshops as well as self-studying journal papers, because I did not mention anything related to professional coursework. For example, after reading a response in the learning log to an article arguing for teacher feedback on content rather than on language on students' first drafts, ("LL-03 (3/1/05) … I disagree. Feedback on language is also important. My students have trouble finding appropriate language to express their ideas. Hinkel (2003) also challenged this de-emphasis on language instruction in L2 writing…."), we coded this response as a belief in the importance of language feedback. Regarding the possible source of this belief, one rater coded it as "practical experience as a teacher" and the other two coded it as "practical experience" and "professional experience through studying journal papers" because Hinkel's (2003) article had been mentioned. After discussion, the first coder still thought that the main source of this belief was "practical experience." We finally agreed on including these two sources but treated this instance as a disagreement among the three coders. The interrater reliability for the entries was 0.83 (based on percentages of agreement).[2] The qualitative data were triangulated with my comments on the students' writing to cross check the link between my feedback beliefs and practices.

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[2] Of the 82 reflection journal and learning log entries about the author's feedback beliefs, the three raters agreed on 68 of them. The interrater agreement was 68/82 = 0.83.

Table 1
A Breakdown of Journal Entries on Written Commentary—Sources of Beliefs

Category	Frequency
Educational experience	8
Practical experience	
Student	25
Colleagues	6
Professional experience	
Journals	27
Conferences	16
Total	82

RESULTS

A total of 82 entries were related to my beliefs about written commentary. Out of these 82 entries, 39 were from the reflection journals and 43 were from the learning logs. The length of each reflection journal entry ranged from 33 to 193 words. The length of each learning log entry was shorter, ranging from 20 to 127 words. Appendix I summarizes the coding scheme of sources of my feedback beliefs.

Initial Feedback Beliefs and Practice

At the beginning of the writing class, I mainly relied on two feedback beliefs derived from prior educational experience as an EFL writer: Specificity and explication. These two beliefs were further validated by the students' reactions and expert opinions in books, journal articles, and domestic and international conferences.

My personal educational experience as a learner of English played a key role in shaping my beliefs about what feedback students wanted, as revealed in the following excerpt from the reflection journal (RJ-6 (3/22/05)):

> I still vividly remember the comment "Read more" I got on "An Unforgettable Experience" from my junior writing class. I kept wondering what I should read more about and how reading more could help with my writing. I kept thinking that the instructor could've been more precise about the parts of my writing that needed more work. … I don't want them [students] to wonder what to do with their writing after reading my comments. I need to be specific with my suggestions [underlines original].

Another reference to the educational experience occurred while I was recording a response to a study on peer review in the learning log (LL-5 (3/14/05)).

> … The students' [in the study] acting as tutors, explaining why they think the essays need more work is important. I remember I was baffled by Cheryl's comments [the English writing teacher in my senior class], asking me to change "monetary system" to money. I still cannot understand why. Maybe she did not like formal language …. I need to explain [underlines original] to students and remind peer reviewers to do the same.

As an EFL student learning to write in English, I have always anticipated teachers' feedback, explaining why my ideas were unclear, choice of words inappropriate, or use of inter-paragraph transitions illogical. The recollections of dissatisfaction with vague feedback and few explanations prompted me to endeavor to give specific feedback with explanations while making comments.

The following comments on the second paragraph of a student's second draft of the first topic "Nanotechnology in Medicine" exemplified how I enacted the beliefs about specificity and explanation. The letters a, b, c, and d are actual signals to the student for further revision.

Student writing:

> [a]Since medicine's knowledge is limited, with the correct [b]apply of nanotechnology in this field; the horizons for its knowledge will definitely grow much wider. Nanotechnology possesses the potential to radically change the study of basic biological mechanisms as well as to [c]improve the prevention, detection, diagnosis and treatment of diseases. Because they work at the same scale as biological processes, the diseases can be eradicated one by one at the molecular levels. [d]But as those nanorobots contain complex interfaces, the cooperation of teams of physical scientists, engineers, life scientists, and clinicians working closely together have became the key to its success.

Comments:

> a. You need a topic sentence to clearly tell the readers why medical researchers are interested in developing nanotechnology.[3]

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[3] I assumed "medical researchers' interest in developing nanotechnology" to be the student's thesis because of the last sentence in the student's introductory paragraph, "This trend of nanotechnology has also raised medical researchers' interest in developing and envisioning this novel science."

> b. application.
>
> c. How exactly? Compare old & new ways here.
>
> d. This sentence seems a little out of place. The whole paragraph is dealing with why medical researchers are interested in nanotechnology (because of its utility), not the collaboration among scientists from different fields.

The four comments I made in the margins were related to format (a), language (b), content (c and d) respectively. In comment a, I provided a specific suggestion to the student to solve the problem of lacking a topic sentence. Comment b is a direct correction of the erroneous word "apply." Comment c requires the student to elaborate on how nanotechnology helps improve the "prevention, detection, diagnosis of diseases" given that the subsequent sentence touches on the "treatment" situation only. Comment d is an explanation of why the last sentence is irrelevant to the gist of this paragraph. Although I did not make any suggestion, the solution to this problem was quite clear—deletion, which the student did in her revision.

My students welcomed such extensive comments, as disclosed in the following two student's reflection journal entries (grammar errors are kept unchanged):

> "I've never seen a teacher writing more comments on my writing than you do. You must spend a lot of time to come up with so many detailed and helpful comments. I discuss this point with Wan-Ping and we all agree that you help us a lot with your comments and our writing improve a lot …."

> "I appreciate your comments. They help me understand my problems in writing. My writing teacher in South Africa usually give me compliments but did not tell me how to improve my writing. Your comments help me understand my problems."

Fueled by these two and other students' positive reactions, I continued comprehensive and detailed feedback, as illustrated in the following comments on a student's writing about factors contributing to Michelle Kuan's success:

Student Writing:

> Michelle is fond of skating and gets a lot of joy from her interest. [a]She started skating at five after watching her brother skating. As soon as she started skating, she fell in love with this exciting sport. "It's an amazing feeling just to be out there, to feel the wind in your face," Michelle said. Every time[b] when she skates[c], she was like a little angel dancing, flying, and playing on ice, laughing and giggling. Skating can always give her a great deal of joy and relaxing.

Comments:

> a. This paragraph does not explain well why her joy from skating helped her achieve success on the ice rink. Most people enjoy skating but that does not make them a world champion. Elaborate more on how her enjoyment of skating helped her win the championship. Does her enjoyment of skating bring enjoyment to the audience and the judges? What enjoyment can her skating bring to the audience and the judges that other figure skaters can't?

In addition to the educational and practical experiences, ESL/EFL writing experts' opinions on how to make written commentary also helped cement my beliefs about the value of specific feedback. A commentator's oral feedback on my conference presentation ("Did you teach students how to revise after they received comments from peers?") made me realize the inadequacy of merely identifying students' writing problems without instructing them on revision strategies. This realization, in turn, reinforced my long-held belief that writing teachers should provide students with explicit cues and strategies for revision in their comments ("LL-7 (3/20/05) … her question made me think about my comments on Ss writing. I need to give them some tips for revision ….").

With a strong belief in the value of providing specific suggestions, I developed some procedural routines for commenting on language choice and topic sentence. The procedure for correcting word choice was explaining the meaning of the problematic word and providing a more appropriate one. To a student's description of how hard she tried in order to "reach her parents' prospect," I responded, "A particular 'prospect' means something that you expect or know is going to happen. In other words, it means 'possibility,' not expectations. Do you mean 'live up to their expectations' instead?"

While commenting on essay format, I have also developed some procedure to help me enact the belief in specificity. For example, when reading a paragraph without a topic sentence, I would list the key idea(s) of the paragraph and remind students to use the basic components of a topic sentence they had learned in class to make one. A learning log entry detailing the procedure for instructing students on the components of a topic sentence gives a glimpse of how I reminded students (LL-3 (3/07/05)).

> … need to give Ss clear instructions on composing topic sentences … show them that a topic sentence is composed of a topic and a controlling idea … ask them to generate a topic sentence….

The first comment on the second paragraph of a student's writing about "The Disadvantages of Mobile Phones" demonstrated how I applied this procedure to helping him rewrite his topic sentence:

Student writing:

> In "Cell Phone Use-Is It Safe?" the author said that "A number of automobile accidents across the nation have been attributed to the distraction of mobile phones." Mobile phones in the car are truly a distraction like many other items—the radio or the screaming child in the backseat. However, it is proved that mobile phone users have come to be known as often careless, always impatient, rude fellows who are not able to concentrate on only one thing at the same time. In order to decline the rate of car accidents, many countries around the world have already hurried to make laws to prohibit using mobile phones while driving[a].

Comments:

> a. There's no clear topic sentence in this paragraph. The first sentence—a quote from "Cell Phone Use-Is It Safe" is more like support for the argument that using cell phones can distract drivers from the ongoing traffic, causing car accidents. Can you write a clear topic sentence in the active voice to explicitly tell readers the first disadvantage of mobile phones?

Taken together, prior educational experience helped project my ideas and thoughts about feedback onto students while instructional experience reinforced this belief at the beginning of the writing class. These experiences served as an interpretive framework through which professional knowledge gained from perusals of ESL/EFL writing literature and from encounters with academics was filtered. The professional knowledge (mainly procedural) and experience that fit with my understandings were integrated (i.e., providing revision strategy) into my beliefs. Those that did not were closely examined. Some were discarded after scrutiny (e.g., content feedback before language feedback) and others were included (e.g., curb the urge to make comments when reading students' writing the first time).

Subsequent Feedback Beliefs and Practice

During the second and third writing cycles, I started to train students to perform peer review and I thus began to consult literature on peer review training (Berg, 1999; Liu & Hansen, 2002) and reader stance (Lockhart & Ng, 1995). The professional knowledge from the literature helped me understand different reader stances—probing, prescriptive, interpretive, and collaborative—and prompted me to reflect on my own. The following entry showed my realization that I was more like a prescriptive reader (LL-11 (4/05/05)):

> "I seem to fit those descriptions of a prescriptive reader who focused on identifying, explaining, and fixing problems in students' writing. But my job is to help them understand English writing and students look up to me for guidance and suggestions …."

At this point I believed that my responsibility as an EFL writing teacher was to help students learn how to improve their academic essays via comments, so I tried my best to give directive feedback. Despite many students' appreciation of my extensive comments, some felt frustrated because those comments connoted unsatisfactory revision on their part. I did not realize the negative impact of my "red pen" on students' affect until a student disclosed her frustration in her reflection journal. The following entry, written after my reading of that reflection journal (RJ-17 (4/19/05)) showed the realization of my neglect of students' desire for teacher encouragement on their intermediate drafts:

> "Ann [a pseudonym] said that she appreciated my comments but felt FRUSTRATED [capital original] after reading them, because she had spent a lot of time on her second draft, and there were still many places to be revised. I've never meant to discourage her with my comments! They were meant to help her improve her writing …. Perhaps I was too focused on the part that needed more work and neglected the part that was good .... I need to look for signs of student effort and encourage them, on each [underlines original] draft, not just on the last one.

The determination to encourage Ann and other students on intermediate drafts manifested itself in subsequent end comments:

> There are different levels of success. The one you mention in this essay can be classified as the highest one. It is not common for students your age to write about this level of success, which shows that you've given this topic

> some serious thought. Good job. But pay attention to the usage of some of the vocabulary items and the idea flow I mentioned in the margins.

In addition to the previous "educative experience," a teacher-student conference also awakened me to the fact that focusing on student texts may sometimes prevent me from knowing their real intentions. The following excerpt recorded my retrospective thought about that conference where I misunderstood a student's intention (RJ-20 (4/22/05)):

> I felt embarrassed when Siana said she didn't mean that "her mother 'devoted' herself to them but 'doted' to them." I thought she misspelled the word "devote" as "dote" because she wrote "she doted herself to us" in the essay. I instinctively thought the word fitting in this expression was "devoted" and corrected it without a second thought …. Maybe that's the problem—without a second thought! I shouldn't have responded to student writing by instinct, and should've gone beyond the language and tried to understand their intentions [underlies original]…

This critical incident reminded me of a long-held but less frequently enacted belief (perhaps due to my presumption of knowing my students) that I should make inquiries into students' intentions the first priority when responding to their writing. Since then I exercised care to probe students' intentions, as exemplified in the following comments on the second paragraph of a student's writing on "Factors Contributing to Coco Chanel's Success."

Student writing:

"Coco Chanel thought that women should learn to be independent[a]. At the beginning of the 20th century, the clothes of women were with lots of useless decorations and women at that time had to wear corsets which can make their shape of bodies to be look like "s." These clothes were all designed to stress the femininity. However, it was difficult for those women to put on the dresses by themselves. They had to get someone to help them with their dresses. Besides of the difficulty of putting on the dresses, to wear corsets was also torture to women. Chanel said that women were tied by the corsets and clothes with lots of useless decorations so they had to depend on their husbands and servants. She thought that to be independent women needed to earn money by themselves. If women wanted to work outside, they needed clothes what were practical, elegant, comfortable to wear, and with simple designed. Such as pants, box-like collarless jackets with bias edging and brass buttons, and wool jerseys. These clothes satisfied the needs of women so many women went to buy Chanel's clothes. Suddenly, Chanel became popular all over the world.

Comments:

a. Independent from what? From whom? I understand that you wanted to give some background about the kinds of outfit women wore in the early 20th century. But the lengthy introduction to their outer and underwear and their inability to put on corsets alone seemed to distract readers from the idea of financial independence. What are your intentions exactly? Do you want to emphasize the liberating experience that Chanel's design brought to women? Or more women wanted to be financially independent from their husbands so they needed more liberating clothes? If it's the former, you might want to talk about the underlying meanings of women wearing corsets

> and maintaining men-coveted body curves. If it's the latter, then you need to discuss financial independence first and elaborate why Chanel's design suits them.

This feedback belief in probing students' semantic intentions was further expanded to include probing their rhetorical intentions after my reading of critical practice (LL-27 (4/29/05)):

> "What makes this writer adopt this line of thinking? What in his or her social positioning explains the way this argument is made? ... How may your spontaneous/immediate response to this argument display biases that favor your personal interests (or the interests of the dominant groups)?" [Canagarajah, 2002, p. 99] These are very thought-provoking questions. Michael [my American colleague] once said that I was in a better position than he in teaching academic writing because I shared the same language and culture with them and could understand them better. I feel guilty. I was just like him when commenting on students' writing, asking them to follow the academic conventions and all that. I shouldn't have been just a gatekeeper! I should've empathized with students and used my knowledge about their L1 writing strategies to help them ….

With this emergent belief, I began to attend to students' rhetorical intentions and helped them negotiate acceptable discourse strategies, as shown in the following comments on a student's writing about "A cultural misconception" where she talked about American college life:

Student writing:

> Their college life is busy but substantial. Twenty-four hours a day, they are busy in studying hard, some club business[a]. These things help them elevate themselves and gain more life experience. [b]As an old proverb goes, "A running stone gains no moss."

Comments:

> a. How can they be busy with studying and club activities 24 hours a day? I know that you want to emphasize how busy they are, but this exaggeration goes a little overboard unless you can prove it. Try another emphatic expression that is more realistic about their busy lives, e.g., 24-7.
>
> b. This proverb means that one can hardly accumulate wealth if he changes jobs all the time. Is this what you mean? Can you find another proverb that actually expresses a busy and substantial life? If you want to use a proverb to impress readers, maybe you can describe the familiar phenomenon in a unique way. A more effective way to me is to use a proverb as a contrasting device to show the point you want to make rather than use it to describe a familiar phenomenon.

While the student's exaggeration might achieve its emphatic effect under certain circumstances in Chinese writing, it backfired in this piece due to its violation of the principle of integrity. Having understood the student's rhetorical intention, I encouraged her to try another emphatic expression such as 24-7. The second comment was related to the use of proverbs, a common rhetorical strategy Taiwanese writers use to evoke shared knowledge with readers in their L1 writing. Yet many native English-speaking writing teachers see little value in proverbs because they do not offer fresh ideas. Having known that this inappropriately used proverb will not add any strength to the student's ideas while also wanting to validate her L1 discoursal strategy, I suggested that she use a proverb depicting a generally misunderstood stress-free college life as a contrasting device to illustrate how busy American college life is.

Despite this emergent belief, I found it difficult to strike a delicate balance between advocating the Anglo-American academic conventions and validating students' L1 writing strategies because of the complexity involved. I was still in search of ways to balance these two competing beliefs in my feedback (LL-33 (5/31/05)):

> How can I become a cultural broker in my comments? I need to explore and find more ways to make their L1 rhetorical intentions and strategies acceptable to academic readers ….

To sum up, the instructional experience and the professional knowledge obtained through self-study seemed to have shaped my later feedback beliefs. The relatively old beliefs in attending to students' affect and intentions, along with the emergent belief in validating students' L1 rhetorical intentions, however, did not preclude my earlier focus on students' texts. I still made specific suggestions about student writing that needed revision and provided explanations, after ascertaining their intentions and praising their efforts.

DISCUSSION

A myriad of factors contributed to my beliefs about how to make written comments. The reflective style appeared to facilitate my reflections on encounters with professionals (either in person or in text) as well as on personal teaching and learning experiences, which, in turn, provided me with ideas about how to make comments.

Dynamic Interactions of Educational, Practical, Professional Experiences, and Reflective Dispositions

Researchers have long debated the differential impacts of teachers' educational backgrounds, practical experiences as classroom teachers, and formal teacher education on the formation and transformation of their beliefs. Despite varied opinions on the extent to which formal knowledge impacts teacher beliefs, all agreed that the former two can have a lasting impact on the development of teachers' beliefs (Borg, 2006). This self-study, however, found little impact of the writing teacher's educational experience on her feedback beliefs. As revealed in the reflection journal, as an EFL student I received little and mostly vague feedback from teachers. This unhelpful experience made me determined not to become an "apprentice of observation" (Lortie, 1975), modeling after the feedback practices my writing teachers.

My feedback beliefs would have been primarily drawn on my practical experience in the writing class without any empirical validation or theoretical support, had it not been for constant reflection on my teaching, seeking solutions in current literature, and weighing them against student needs. The three stands of input—

reflective style, practical experience, and professional knowledge—interacted with one another in a dialectical process in which continuous reflection allowed me the opportunity to examine personal feedback beliefs against principles advocated in feedback literature and student needs. The practical experience usually functioned as a self-validating filter, which selected the professional knowledge from the feedback literature to confirm my existing beliefs about how to make comments. However, the critical reflection also prompted me to confront and challenge these beliefs with knowledge learned from the literature, especially when they failed to meet student needs (i.e., inappropriate suggestions based on misunderstanding of a student's intentions). With this reflective style, I was able to finally reconceptualize my subsequent beliefs in feedback provision.

Impact of Professional Knowledge

Research has shown that professional knowledge learned from the literature is conducive to crystallizing teachers' previously held assumptions and unanalyzed knowledge, thereby prompting them to renegotiate, reconstruct, and even reframe their old personal beliefs and knowledge (Freeman, 1993). This self-study lends support to this line of argument. Although my beliefs about how to provide feedback are not an amalgamation of unanalyzed assumptions but a distinctive set of beliefs about specificity and explanation, I did not realize that these beliefs are characteristics of a prescriptive reader. It is the professional knowledge from the literature that assisted me in understanding the reader stance I had assumed and the ones I wanted to employ (probing and collaborative). This professional knowledge, along with the critical incident with Siana, prompted me to reorganize my long-held feedback beliefs, with "clarifying students' intentions" as the top priority, followed by "identifying problems," "explaining the nature of problems," and "making specific suggestions."

The other piece of professional knowledge about critical practice helped awaken me to another equally important, if not more important belief, validating students' use of L1 rhetorical strategies. This awakening was "embarrassing" to me because I had forgotten what it was like to struggle like my students, pulling together available L1 writing resources and strategies to perform the unfamiliar English writing task. With single-minded commitment to instructing my students on academic writing and initializing them to the Anglo-American academic discourse community, I gradually became its gatekeeper, denying students' use of L1 writing strategies and failing to negotiate with them ways to use these strategies in a more acceptable way. This awakening also served as a constant reminder that I needed to act as an intermediary between the students' L1 writing practices and the Anglo-American academic conventions in my comments, in addition to being a probing and collaborative reader.

Change in Feedback Beliefs

A noticeable change occurs in my feedback beliefs. The focus moves from students' texts to their affective state and intentions, from the procedural aspect of commenting on local and global issues to the interpersonal and conceptual aspects of commenting. Due to my past experiences as an EFL writer, my feedback belief was primarily concerned with technical matters at the beginning of the writing class, focusing on explaining and making specific suggestions to perceived problematic areas in student writing. It was not until my reading of Ann's reflection journal entry and conference with Siana did I start to attend to the interpersonal aspect of commenting. It suddenly dawned on me that I might be too occupied with assisting students in improving their writing to offer encouraging remarks on intermediate drafts. I also began to realize that as a prescriptive reader, I may have been too certain of my presumed understanding of students' texts. I may have inadvertently offered suggestions based on subjective interpretations rather than students' intentions. These growing reflections alerted me that I should ask clarifying questions to ensure a full understanding.

The reflection journal entries mirrored such awareness, and my subsequent comments corresponded to such a change. Despite the priority of probing students' intentions and attending to students' feelings, my feedback beliefs about explicit explanation and specific suggestions were still standing as these were closely related to ongoing maintenance of quality teacher feedback. Toward the end of the writing class, my feedback belief began to revolve around a more complicated conceptual question: which role I should play while making comments, a gatekeeper or cultural intermediary. I opted for the latter, but was still in search of ways to enact this role well through my comments.

Types of Knowledge Facilitating Enactment Feedback Beliefs

The progression of change in my feedback beliefs from procedural matters to interpersonal relationships to cultural aspects exponentially increases the difficulty in implementing the beliefs owing to the complex declarative knowledge involved. Johnson (1996) pointed out that "declarative knowledge" must be "simple, uncluttered, and concrete" so that it is easier for the user to convert it into 'a plan of action'" (p. 104) for subsequent free production under real operating conditions. Although his argument is for language learning, the same point can be applied to my commenting situation.

My initial feedback beliefs revolved around two simple technical aspects of commenting, explication and specific suggestions. The declarative knowledge for these two beliefs is simple and concrete, any comments that are unlike the vague ones I received as an EFL student writer. Drawing on exemplars from professional textbooks and journals demonstrating components of specificity, it was easy for me to develop a set of procedural routines to implement these two beliefs, as stated in the results section.

My subsequent feedback belief centered on the interpersonal aspect of commenting—focusing on the student first and then the text. Despite the relatively more complicated declarative knowledge about each student's affective state and intention in writing, I was able to enact this belief because of my personal investment in helping each student improve his or her writing through extensive comments. I developed a procedural routine to attend to signs of student progress in language/format and their efforts at presenting interesting issues, and provide on their in-between drafts compliments which I originally planned for their final revision.

But enacting the feedback belief about a cultural intermediary is anything but simple and concrete. It required me to not only possess accurate declarative knowledge about students' L1 writing practices and the Anglo-American academic conventions, but also to develop specific courses of action to negotiate them when they were in conflict. The very complex nature of these two sets of declarative knowledge rendered it difficult for me to develop specific plans for action despite my bilingual and bicultural background. I have yet to develop the corresponding procedural knowledge about ways to reconcile these two beliefs, besides acknowledging students' use of L1 strategies and explaining why those strategies fail to achieve expected intentions.

CONCLUSION

I reported a critical self-examination of the sources of my beliefs about giving comments at the beginning and end of the writing class. The reflection journal and learning log entries show that my educational, instructional, and professional experiences interacted to affect my feedback beliefs: from centering on students' texts to their semantic and rhetorical intentions and from the procedural aspect to the interpersonal and conceptual aspects of commenting. The ultimate aim of this self-study is improvement in my feedback. Reflecting on my beliefs and practices in this writing class, I think I implemented my feedback beliefs, albeit with varying degrees of specificity in procedure.

What is the significance of this self-study? Ideologically, it demonstrates that ESL/EFL (in this case, writing) teachers are not merely followers of others' research. They are intellectuals that can form "a personal theory of practice" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 544). Relying on "personal conceptualization of how teaching leads to desired learning" (Prabhu, 1990, p. 172), I consulted the professional knowledge in the literature, and evaluated and adapted it to my writing class. The integration of the practical and formal (professional) knowledge is an embodiment of what Johnson (2006) called praxis, connecting "teachers' ways of knowing with theory, both emic and etic" (p. 242).

Methodologically, this self-study underscores the importance of a reflective self-method to studying ESL/EFL writing teacher beliefs and practices. The majority of research on ESL/EFL writing teacher beliefs follows the traditional research paradigm of independent researchers examining teachers' beliefs through prefabricated questionnaire and interview questions. Although this line of research can capture ESL/EFL writing teachers' general beliefs and practices, it inadvertently conveys the disempowering message that only writing educators and researchers can objectively study ESL/EFL teachers' beliefs and practices. In fact, through "systematic and intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, pp. 23-24), richer and deeper understandings of the sources of knowledge construction and belief evolution can be revealed, which otherwise would not be easily disclosed in interviews and questionnaires to independent researchers (Borg, 2006).

Pedagogically, this study accentuates the importance of knowing and validating ESL/EFL students' cultural rhetorical strategies and assisting them in adapting these strategies to fit the Anglo-American academic writing conventions. This is more difficult for ESL writing teachers because they may not share the same culture with their students. Yet careful listening to students' explanations can help ESL writing teachers better understand students' culturally-derived ideas and rhetorical strategies (Goldstein, 2006). Rather than dismiss these ideas and strategies as unworkable plans, ESL/EFL writing teachers need to try to experiment with their students to find a possible way to both achieve their original intentions and meet academic readers' expectations.

Another pedagogical implication is that ESL/EFL writing teachers need more than declarative knowledge to enact their feedback beliefs. They need to be informed of procedural routines to master the commenting skills and be given plenty of opportunities to practice these skills with input. Translated into ESL/EFL writing teacher education, it means that simply introducing guiding principles of teacher response is not enough. ESL/EFL writing teacher educators need to model how to translate these guiding principles into feasible plans of actions in their actual commenting practices under different kinds of situations. They need to provide trainees with subskills and subroutines to enact complex teacher feedback beliefs, if necessary (Ferris, 2007). The proceduralized patterns of comments on language and topic sentence reported in this study can serve as a starter to spur pre- and in-service ESL/EFL writing teachers into developing their own individual procedures.

The other pedagogical implication is that we need to mandate what Casanave (2009) recommended "a reflective component in every class and every practicum" in degree-awarding and certificate programs for ESL/EFL writing teachers. In these classes and programs, prospective and in-service ESL/EFL writing teachers should be encouraged to reconceptualize themselves as "reflective practitioners …, who know their beliefs and attitudes well, and who are always on the lookout for ways to adjust their agendas to the realities that they encounter" (p. 273). Through this reconceptualization and teacher training, hopefully, ESL/EFL writing teachers can find ways to practice their beliefs rather than give them up when facing severe contextual constraints.

Although this self-study illuminates the interplay of particular situated sociocultural forces that shape my feedback beliefs, ESL/EFL writing teachers can find similar experiences that ring true to their commenting experiences in terms of the procedural, interpersonal, and cultural aspects. It is these similar struggles that this self-study is relevant to other ESL/EFL writing teachers at the university level in various writing contexts. I hope that the reflections on my feedback beliefs can serve as an instigator, prompting readers to reflect on their own, consider how they might individually apply lessons learned from this study, and eventually embark on their journeys of self-study.

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APPENDIX

Sources of the Author's Feedback Beliefs

Category	Reflection journal/ Learning log	Sample entry
Educational experience	RJ-6 (3/22/05)	I still vividly remember the comment "Read More" on "An Unforgettable Experience" from my junior writing class ….
Practical experience Student	RJ-02(3/9/05)	… Daphne said that it's easy to write on this assignment because I gave them clear guidelines ….
Colleague	RJ-5(3/20/05)	… XXX didn't believe in the effect of multiple drafts and peer feedback because students don't like to write about the same thing over and over again. I didn't agree with him ….
Professional experience Journals	LL-2(2-27-05)	… The teacher refrained from imposing her opinions on the student but challenged his idea about career women. Is this a better way to express her opinion toward the student's essay?
Conferences	LL-10(4-7-05)	… "Using think-aloud to show to students how to "develop expertise in ESL composition" is an interesting method. But what if the students composing process is different from their American teacher….

一個英語寫作教師對其評語信念之自我質性研究

摘要

在此自我質性研究中，我反省檢視自己在某學期教寫作課時，對寫作評語信念之發展與變化。經由事後檢視我所寫之省思手札及學習日誌，並將紀錄之內容與對學生作文所寫之評語加以比較分析，結果顯示：我的教育背景、教學、及專業經驗影響自身對寫作評語的信念。此信念在這三種因素交互作用之下，於學期始末有所變化：從一開始只專注解決學生寫作問題、進而了解幫助學生解決寫作問題時，亦須注意學生寫作意圖與感受；最後意識到我的評語不應只偏重傳授西方論文寫作思維模式，亦須幫助學生了解，在英文寫作時使用慣用之中文寫作策略，可能會產生負面效果。此一信念變化，在實際操作層面上，困難度大增。原因在於：我於學期末對評語的信念，在宣告性知識層次面太過複雜，且個人尚缺乏程序性知識，將複雜的信念以程序化方式來執行。我在論文結尾中並討論此自我研究在理念性、方法性、及教學性等層面之意涵。

關鍵詞：以英語為第二語或外語寫作教師信念　教師評語　宣告性與程序性知識　高等教育