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THE EFFICACY OF PEER REVIEW IN IMPROVING E.S.L. STUDENTS' ONLINE
WRITING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Curriculum and Instruction

by

Kathryn Fiddler Butcher
B.A. Smith College, 1970
M.A. New York University, 1974

May 2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my excellent committee for helping me with this dissertation: Dr. Patricia Austin, Dr. John Barnitz, Dr. Renee Casbergue, and Dr. John Cooke. I must express special gratitude to Dr. Richard Speaker, who guided me through the process with unflagging energy and good humor.

My family and friends have provided me with support and encouragement. In particular, Kristen Butcher has exhibited extraordinary patience and understanding. Without the help of so many people, I could never have brought this project to fruition.

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ABSTRACT

This mixed method study investigated the development of E.S.L. writers' skills in revision when scaffolded by peer reviewers, with Lev Vygotsky's social-interactionist theory as the framework. Repeated-measures ANCOVA analyzed scores of four essay projects (first drafts and revisions) evaluated by blind holistic readings with a pretest score as covariant. Participants came from existing sections at a state university in the South in which the instruction was the same. The experimental group wrote revisions based on peer feedback; the control group received instructor feedback. Qualitative data came from semi-structured interviews with participants. Neither group showed significant improvement (at .05) in revising. Interviews revealed participants' perception that they had improved and also their preference for instructor feedback.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This ecologically robust study investigates the development of writing skills among university-level students in an English-as-a-Second-Language (E.S.L.) composition course. In particular, the revision phase of the writing process and the efficacy of peer review and collaboration have been investigated through the application of quantitative tests, semi-structured interviews, and a questionnaire. Participants come from pre-existing classes of advanced E.S.L. composition at a public university in a large, multicultural city in the South. The approach aims to reflect actual practice.

Collaborative and cooperative learning have become part of most curricula at all levels of education in the United States. Teachers routinely assign students small-group tasks that involve giving and taking feedback and working together to accomplish a common purpose. The difference between collaboration and cooperation for the purposes of this study has little importance; in fact, as is common practice, the peer group work in the course in which my research was conducted contains elements of both and has, therefore, become hybrid in form. Like both collaborative and cooperative learning, the model here is social, with students working together. As in cooperative learning, building of community becomes a focus (Gaillet, 1992). However, the participants involved in this project could have accomplished their tasks individually, a feature of collaboration rather than cooperation. Another element that points to collaboration rather than cooperation is the way that the instructor evaluates the work product of students. In this model, students receive individual rather than group grades.

Although peer group work has many proponents, whether or not it is the most effective way to teach writing is a question that has been raised in the literature of both composition and second language writing (Spear, 1988; Spigelman, 1998; Zhang, 1995). Furthermore, with the widespread use of technology in the teaching of writing, much of the collaboration and cooperation involved in peer response groups can be accomplished online. The effects of collaboration in an online environment on the processes of teaching and learning writing are not fully understood at this time. Although the environment in which this study is conducted has been enriched with online technology, computer experience has not been considered as a factor in proficiency in online writing. In fact, familiarity with and skill in using computers has become commonplace and is expected for all students entering North American universities.

The social-interactionist theory of Vygotsky (1985) provides the framework; the study focuses on instruction that has as its goal the creation of conditions for collaborative group work that place participants in the “zone of proximal development” (zpd), or state of maximal potential development. According to Vygotsky, the social context of the group, containing both more and less able members, provides those with less expertise the opportunity to learn with the assistance of those with greater ability. If this theory is correct, the performance on the computer-mediated essay should demonstrate greater improvement from the first to the second-draft versions of the papers. In addition, the members with less ability should benefit more from the experience than the stronger students because the scaffolding provides them a chance to develop in areas where they could not perform independently. The “experts,” on the other hand, may not be operating in this zone because their knowledge is more likely fossilized, or already developed.

Certain tenets of Vygotsky are brought to bear in this study. First of all, the activity involved is based on collaboration and interaction, set in a meaningful context, designed to draw on the use of language as a whole and social negotiation, and related to everyday, not just academic experience. Because the concepts concretized in the study come from the idiosyncratic language of Vygotsky, definition of key terms is in order. Zone of proximal development refers to the gap between the actual and potential stage in development of learners (Vygotsky, 1978). Scaffolding is the assistance provided to learners on tasks that they could not perform tasks independently. Because Vygotsky opposes making a distinction between thinking and behavior (Minick, 1987; Bakhurst, 1986), he places all learning in a social context; thus, collaboration is the environment for development.

Other principles of Vygotsky that serve to frame this study are the concept of the tool and the difference between the everyday and scientific, or academic, aspects of learning. For purposes of education, the teacher presents students with a task that challenges their capabilities at that time. The problem-solving may be made easier with the use of a tool, which may be inside the mind, as in the case of language, or external to the self, as in the case of some object. Clearly, the student writers participating in this research use the intrapsychological tool of language to complete their assignments; in addition, they utilize an external tool to complete their tasks: the computer. Because students use the computer in everyday as well as in school situations, this tool brings in an element of the real world and, as a result connects the school environment with the larger culture, an important idea in the theory of Vygotsky. He also makes a distinction between the everyday and the scientific, which means that which is learned in schools. Whereas traditional writing relates more to the scientific, writing on a computer, which has become a hybrid form of communication, with qualities of both speech and writing, seems to

belong to the everyday. Therefore, using computer-mediated tools makes this task authentic and socially meaningful, and the fact that students are writing on topics of their own choosing speaks to this issue as well. In other words, the students direct their writing to a specific audience and adopt a point of view that positions them with respect to their readers.

Advantages of computer-mediated communication have been pointed out and can be summarized as follows. First, participants become immersed in writing and tend to focus on the concrete and vivid use of words to communicate while improving their writing. Second, working with text both written and read in the electronic milieu causes students to practice both of these skills. Also, the peer audience in the electronic conference becomes real, and engagement may intensify due to the removal of the leader element of face-to-face interaction. Finally, community and common interest tend to develop because of the social nature of the arrangement.

Drawbacks appear to be less compelling: “flaming,” or emotionally-charged language, is more common in synchronous conferencing than asynchronous activity, which is the particular medium of this project. Furthermore, anxiety about computers and communication becomes less of a factor as more students gain early exposure to computers. Finally, instruction can be ineffective online as well as face-to-face, but in neither case can this fact be mitigated. Both instructors and students must focus on the key issue of whether or not the electronic conferencing can help them to achieve their goals.

Essentially, I compared the effectiveness of peer scaffolding in E.S.L. computer-based writing to instructor-given feedback. To do this, I created a semester-long project involving two sections of a course whose curriculum instructor, materials, and overall format were the same. The intervention involved the creation in the experimental section of small groups of students who gave feedback to first drafts of essays online in lieu of the instructor feedback given in the

other (control) section. I created small groups in the control section, too, even though group members did not review each others' writing formally. In this way, both sections had access to peers' essays, and providing this resource created another means of scaffolding in the revision process. To run quantitative tests, I gathered scores through blind holistic scoring on both the first drafts and revisions of four essay projects conducted throughout the course of the semester. I collected demographic information through the use of a questionnaire (Appendix 8). Finally, I gathered qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with a number of the participants, in order to learn about and report their perceptions of the experience.

Research Questions

1. Does directed revision result in significantly better written product as measured by expert holistic scoring?
2. Is peer feedback as effective in improving student writing as instructor feedback?
3. Does peer feedback result in development as measured by change in score from revision to first draft of the next essay project?
4. Does instructor feedback result in development as measured by change in score from revision to first draft of the next essay project?
5. How do students view the essay revision processes? (oral)

I investigated these questions in a study involving mixed methodologies; that is, I used both quantitative and qualitative techniques to gather and analyze data. I used the work of McMillan and Schumacher (1997) as the quantitative resource. I collected numerical values for writing samples and ran the repeated measures ANCOVA on SPSS. In addition, I gathered information about participants on a questionnaire administered by the classroom instructor; some

of the items became additional variables that were investigated for possible interactions in the quantitative tests. For the qualitative section, I generated transcripts from participants from the two sections of the writing course by conducting the semi-structured interviews. Then, I analyzed the data according to the method recommended by Glesne (1999).

For the quantitative section, I collected first drafts and revisions for four essay projects conducted in a three-hour E.S.L. composition course. These essays and the revisions were written during the course of a fifteen-week semester and posted online using the Blackboard software program provided by the university. Essays were scored holistically by two faculty members who gave blind readings to anonymous papers. Resulting scores were averaged; in the case of a disagreement, a third instructor read and scored the essay.

The qualitative section consisted of semi-structured interviews in which I asked participants six questions. The resulting dialogue was transcribed, and then I analyzed it, first by question and then by theme. Part of my investigation involved looking into what participants volunteered without being asked; in other words, I scrutinized the data to see what they wanted to tell me, not just how they answered the questions I had posed. Finally, I returned to the literature to draw some preliminary conclusions.

Definitions

In this quasi-experimental study with qualitative components, the treatments were as follows:

Control group: section of E.S.L. composition course in which the instructor gave feedback for revision

Experimental group: section of E.S.L. composition course in which the peer group gave feedback for revision

Intervention: peer feedback, whose effectiveness was measured by the revisions generated in this way, as the independent variable

Summary and Chapter-by-Chapter Plan

The study consists of five chapters. In chapter one, I introduce the study and give an overview, my research questions, my research stance, the general methodology, and this summary and plan. In chapter two, I review the literature, which I have organized into sections as follows: Vygotsky and education, social-interactionist principles in composition studies, social-interactionist principles in E.S.L., social-interaction and technology, and conclusion. In chapter three, I present the methodology, following the format: introduction, population for the quantitative tests, data-gathering, quantitative analysis techniques, qualitative methods, participants in semi-structured interviews, and semi-structured interview questions. In chapter four, I present the findings, including quantitative tables, analysis of tables, qualitative responses to the interview questions, and emerging themes. In chapter five, I conclude with the research questions and discussion with respect to the review of literature.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Because this study is positioned at the intersection of several different fields, I have reviewed the literature of the various disciplines separately. First, to provide the framework of the study, I establish the theories of Lev Vygotsky as the cornerstone of my research. Since I am focusing on writing, the research of composition in higher education is my general area to review. However, the field of composition consists of a number of sub-specialties, several of which come into play in my study. Therefore, I review key studies that show how educators have applied social-interactionist principles in their sub-specialties and to what degree of success.

The literature review consists of the following sections: Vygotsky and Education; Social-Interactionist Theory and Composition Studies; Social-Interactionist Theory and English as a Second Language; Technology and Composition Studies.

Vygotsky's Impact on Education

How learning occurs must be the concern of every educator; certainly, awareness of the theories concerning the acquisition of knowledge makes teachers more aware and able in the classroom. Some of the predominant theories include Piaget and Inhelder's (1969) notion of developmental stages, B.F. Skinner's (1957) learning model of behaviorism and conditioning, Howard Gardner's (1983, 1993) concept of difference in learning styles (intelligences) as the most significant factor in education, and Lev Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) social-interactional approach. Despite his early death and decades of suppression of his work in Soviet Russia, Vygotsky's writings have had a powerful influence on education in North America. His work comes out of the field of psychology but resonates for other disciplines as well; linguistics and

sociology have been profoundly affected by Vygotskian ideas. Bruner (1990) points to Vygotsky's theory of development presented in *Thought and Language* (1986) as a theory of education as well. In a Vygotskian sense, education is not only the key to cognitive development; it is also the optimal form of social and/or cultural behavior.

The context in which life skills and abilities are developed and practiced is critically important. No intelligence exists apart from its cultural surroundings. In fact, Vygotsky (1978) investigated practices in cultures themselves rather than focusing on individuals. The all-important field consists of the people, the institutions, the methods of reinforcing behavior, and other elements. The emphasis on tools as an extension of intelligence is also common ground. Spoken language is the basic tool with which this extension is accomplished, but written language and computers fall into this category as well.

An extreme example of the important role played by the society in which the individual learns is the Suzuki method of musical education. This highly structured program involves the investment of significant resources, both monetary and interpersonal, to the achievement of the goals, and the resulting success is legendary. The well-known instances cited by Gardner (1993) of keen intelligences of various types that have been shaped by culture are the young male Puluwat in the Caroline Islands chosen to be a master navigator, the Iranian youth who has memorized the Koran and, in doing so, mastered the Arabic language, and the French adolescent who is composing works of music on a computer. Each of the three has learned in different types of schools and has, therefore, mastered knowledge that is valued by the particular culture in which he has come of age.

The work of Gardner dovetails with that of Vygotsky; learning occurs when conditions are correct, and having learners that are less able and those that are more able is necessary to the

process. The view of scaffolded learning in and out of schools provides the model of the novice, assisted by more able peers, passing through the intermediate phases of an area of study, to the final stage of mastery. Though the concept of the zone of proximal development does not appear as such in Gardner, the debt to Vygotsky is apparent. The model provides for the uneven, back and forth, pattern of development that provides a sharp contrast to the view of Piaget and Inhelder (1969), which posits the existence of more discrete steps. Another similarity is that both Vygotsky and Gardner view all learning as being embedded in culture. As a result, environmental factors must be considered carefully by all educators. Scaffolding occurs not only in the schools, but also in the larger community, which can exert great influence in its implicit values. While Vygotsky's theory centers on socially and culturally organized behaviors, other influential researchers conceptually isolate the individual. It is in this area that Vygotsky makes one of his most important contributions. In *Mind in Society* (1978), he outlines the way psychological development occurs; it always takes place within the context, or environment, in which the individual has matured.

His model differs in other important ways. Whereas Piaget and Inhelder (1969) and Skinner (1957) concern themselves with the question of how an individual has arrived psychologically at a certain point, Vygotsky's (1978) work points to the future, to the potential development of an individual. Vygotsky says that he is concerned with the buds or flowers of development, while other researchers are concerned with the fruit. Furthermore, Vygotsky makes no distinction between psychological development occurring in a natural (or home) context and that taking place in the school. He does, however, differentiate the types of concepts generally learned in each environment. He calls the concepts learned at home the everyday, and those learned in school the scientific.

When Vygotsky's work was rediscovered, a flurry of interest followed in the fields of psychology and education. Many translations of his work appeared. Also, a spate of research studies was conducted to apply his revolutionary ideas. In his writings, Vygotsky presented new concepts that fascinated educators. Among these are the zone of proximal development, the holistic nature of language, the notion that anyone can be a teacher (although teaching as a profession requires skill and knowledge, for example, knowing where students are and how to place them in the zone of proximal development), and the need for learning to occur in a context that is meaningful to the students and relevant to their lives. Collaboration is also identified as the type of interaction that results in, first, aided performance, and, later, mastery. Vygotsky (1978) says, "What the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow" (p. 211). Gallimore and Tharp (1990) break down the process into stages, including the following: performance is supported by others who are more capable; performance is carried out partially through the individual's newly-found skills and abilities without being automatic; performance is mastered through the zone of proximal development and new capabilities are reached.

Most studies place adults in the role of socializing children and teaching them, and the zpd is seen as being in front of the learners. As Tudge (1990) points out, however, regression may occur in addition to progress, so a more realistic view might be that the zpd is around the learner. According to Tudge, even where peer collaboration is not formally arranged, the potential exists for this activity's occurring with good results in situations not structured specifically for it to take place. Many studies (p. 159) indicate that social interaction between peers who bring different perspectives is extremely effective in promoting cognitive

development; this idea has great implications for the E.S.L. classroom, in which a variety of nationalities and language backgrounds can be present.

Tudge's research investigated the specific relationship between partners, the more and the less able. He conducted a study involving 154 elementary children in New York who were involved in a collaborative project, with abilities carefully mixed in order to approximate the zpd. In this study, no feedback was provided after the collaborative experience, and the result was that, in most cases, the more competent partners not only did not benefit from the encounter; they regressed. Only the partners with lower levels of skill were seen as having benefited from the scaffolded experience. The explanation offered is that ability is not the only factor that comes into play in collaborative learning; personal factors such as degree of confidence and ability to reason emerge as critically important. In another study (Tudge & Rogoff, 1989), feedback was provided, and the more competent partners did better as a result. Interestingly, the feedback need not be from a person; it is just as effective when it is given by the materials, as, for example, an answer key. Tudge concluded that educators should not casually assign a more able and a less able peer to work together but must, rather, focus on the specific processes of interaction. He points to motivation, engagement in the task, and degree of involvement between partners as key components. However, Tudge concedes that some factors are more a function of age than inherent to the process of interaction. An example of such a factor would be the age of participants; as people get older, they become more skilled at verbal interaction. Also, older students tend to have reached a stage developmentally where lack of confidence is less of a hindrance in interpersonal interactions.

The Vygotskian view of language as the sign through which instruction is mediated and the concept of that language as holistic and rooted in meaning can be seen in the work of

Goodman and Goodman (1990). Their whole language framework presents reading and literacy as authentic socially meaningful activities. In order for these activities to be real, topics should be chosen by the students whenever possible. In addition, teachers are seen as capable professionals with the knowledge and capacity to empower their students. According to Goodman and Goodman, empathy is the quality in a teacher necessary for intuiting what the students need, parallel to the Vygotskian view of the teacher as responsible for placing a student in the zpd and starting where each is. The Goodmans describe the whole language classroom as a place where risk taking is “not simply tolerated; it is celebrated” (p. 239). Miscues are seen as evidence of readers’ using schemas, or pre-existing knowledge and experience, to understand texts. This phenomenon occurred in the oral reading of the student Peggy, who was the subject of a study conducted by Goodman and Goodman (1977). Peggy was able to work through problems in a transaction with the text that drew on her personal schema. Texts become mediators as the readers seize control of the reading process. “Support for mistake making and hypothesis testing is one way teachers can mediate the balancing of invention and convention” (p. 242). This back and forth development is another indication that the zpd can be around the learner, and not just in front.

Although the role of the teacher in the Vygotskian model differs significantly from that in the traditional classroom, specialized abilities and training are necessary. After all, as Vygotsky (1978) says, until internalization occurs, performance has to be assisted. Wertsch and Stone (1985) describe the teacher role as follows: Teaching is good only when it stimulates or activates specific abilities that are in the process of maturing. In other words, teaching means offering support when needed while a learner is passing through the zpd. Gallimore and Tharp (1990)

point to six means by which performance is scaffolded: modeling, contingency, managing, feeding back, instructing, questioning, and cognitive structuring.

Teaching in the Vygotskian model differs from the traditional notion, but care must be given to ensure that it meets criteria necessary for its efficacy. As Bandura (1977) points out, the many aspects of this complex process are interactive: gender and age of modeler and imitator; method of reinforcement for the desired behavior; the modeling's being live or demonstrated; relationships among those involved, the repertory of imitation methods, and many others. In effective teaching, however, contingency management, or providing rewards and punishment, focuses on positive reinforcement. These two concepts are critically important in the scaffolded learning model. Feedback, particularly positive, is essential to both correction of performance and maintenance of new skills. Along with positive feedback, modeling shapes and directs behavior (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990).

Because this study is framed theoretically by the work of Vygotsky and his model of learning, the body of research that deals with the application of Vygotskian ideas to education is extremely relevant. I aim to create conditions for scaffolding of less-able by more-able peers in order to investigate the relevance of these ideas to E.S.L. composition students in higher education.

Social-Interactionist Theory and Composition Studies

The field of composition has followed an unusual and somewhat uneven path. Before the 1960s, it was more or less tied to literary studies and then emerged as a discrete field in the 1970s, when it incorporated many of the principles of cognitive psychology. Composition has gone through many stages since then and has seen a number of methodologies and teaching styles. At present, theorists and practitioners are still working out the relationship between

cognition, culture, and writing, which have become the cornerstones of the field as a whole (Jackson, 2000).

The question central to the field is how to make composition studies produce good writers and thinkers. How to judge what is good, however, is a problem unto itself. Universal standards (or even national ones) for what constitutes good writing are seemingly impossible to set, in part because composition teachers work within a large social structure with many stakeholders who demand standards as well as accountability (White, 1996).

With respect to the history of composition studies as a field, the larger social and political environment of higher education has shaped theory and methodology. In the '60s and '70s, compositionists in their gate-keeping capacity were challenged to find ways to help students, often underprepared for university work, to succeed because so much was at risk. Students who failed could be drafted into the military service, for instance. It was in this spirit that Coles (1978), Elbow (1981,1985), and Macrorie (1970) developed ways of teaching writing that led into the movement that became known as the "process" approach (Bushman, 2000). In general, the process approach mirrors the way individuals actually write rather than project an ideal academic discourse; process teachers begin where the students actually are and aim to help them discover their own voices in writing about their true concerns.

In the 1980s, interest in cognition was leading practitioners to classroom-based, or action, research. Composition researchers began to look at how writers behaved and solved problems. It was during this period that Sondra Perl (1980) and Mina Shaughnessy (1977) conducted research on writers as people, with Perl looking into the composing strategies of a basic writer and Shaughnessy asking different kinds of questions about error and literacy in general. Others extended the relationship between writing and cognition (Jackson, 2000).

But in the '90s, the attention turned to the relationship between literature and composition faculty. At the same time, the focus became the political ramifications of academic writing, and cultural studies emerged as a powerful force. Rose (1984, 1985) and Heath (1983) pointed out various ways that marginalized students were disserved by the privileging of the mainstream academic tradition. Following the literary theories of Bakhtin (1981) and Derrida (1978), to name two, those who recommended a return to texts, particularly cultural texts, decried adherence to a center and insisted that previously silenced voices should be heard and valued. Tensions between those who saw writing as a political document and the university as representing institutional oppression on one hand, and others who argue that the 'mainstream' is what students will encounter in the workforce have still not been resolved. However, in the 21st century, a post-process phase is developing. This phase represents either a rejection, but more often an extension, of the process school of thought.

The contributions of the process movement and its influence cannot be overstated. The term "process" to refer to the multi-staged approach to teaching composition comes from the well-known article of Murray (1984) in which he pleaded with fellow practitioners to "teach writing as a process and not a product"(p. 91). New concepts contributed by this revolutionary way of viewing writing instruction included the use of students' own writing as the text and the rejection of mode-centered texts that had forced students to write using models. Rather, instructors started to follow ways that people actually write, with the professional writer rather than the academic as the model (Bushman, 2000). Often used as a synonym for "expressivism," writers were encouraged to find their own voices, or inner speech through a number of strategies of invention such as brainstorming, clustering, freewriting, and journal-writing. Then, reconciling or addressing the various ideas available within themselves, the

students created a text which they subsequently reexamined and revised using feedback from peers as the audience (McComiskey, 2000).

The fundamental principle on which the process movement was based was clearly stated by Macrorie (1970): “There is all the difference in the world between having something to say and having to say something”(p. 118). Macrorie proposed his “Third Way” as the best method of teaching writing, the “First Way” being placing the emphasis on testing the students, and the “Second Way” being the absence of clear direction. In his approach, Macrorie asserts that writing can begin with the students’ own experiences and focus on real communication rather than “themewriting.” In this way he echoes Vygotsky with respect to the importance of the language used by educators to be authentic. Bushman (2000) suggests that the process approach is more humane and student-centered, with the teacher as less an authority figure and agent of the institution and more of an interested communicator on the same level as students. These ideals form a connection to the work of not only Vygotsky, but also John Dewey (1938); Dewey wrote that language frees us from the stress of events and allows us to find a place in the world by creating meaning and connecting with readers. Also, according to Elbow (1981), writing is such a complex process that it cannot be effectively approached in an orderly, hierarchical way.

Process proponents insist on the important role of discovery or inquiry, which is inherent in the expressivist philosophy. William Coles (1978) wrote that the questioning attitude is essential; we should mistrust any composition teacher who claims to have the answers. Dewey (1938) defined knowledge as making sure through inquiry that what is acknowledged as truth is actually true (Bushman, 2000). Furthermore, the social nature of writing is underscored by the universal use in process instruction of the small group of peers as audience. Maxine Hairston

(1982) argued that students benefit far more from peer groups than from either conferences or whole-class discussions. The emphasis on collaboration and the social basis of learning suggests that a link to the theories of Vygotsky exists.

Critics of the process movement fall loosely into two camps: those who espouse the importance of cultural studies and those who feel that process-oriented writing either doesn't work or fails to address the needs of composition students. In the 1990s, cultural study theorists asserted that academic writing should be seen as part of the larger social world of discourse with its own genres and traditions and that students must learn to position themselves within that world (Trimbur, 1994). In their insistence that education occurs within the larger culture, they reveal a debt to Vygotskian principles of always acknowledging the importance of the environment within which a student has matured. Reintroduction of cultural texts into the composition classroom served many purposes. These texts became objects of critique and representations of social values; in addition, they generated ideas about the larger society. The focus of social-process rhetorical inquiry became discovering competing discourses that exist in any community and, in doing so, enabling students to have fresh insights and develop their critical abilities.

Following the post-structuralists, for instance Eagleton (1985) and Foucault (1980), composition instructors endeavored to place student writing in a broad cultural context and to consider what is absent as well as what is present in data or in a text. McCormick (1994) underscored this fact when she wrote, "Writing is learned in rich social contexts" (p. 195). As a result, many cultural assumptions and expectations become embedded, at least implicitly, in student texts. Making students aware of their lenses is viewed by this group as of paramount importance. Flower, Stein, Ackerman, Kantz, McCormick, and Peck's 1990 study investigating

the think-aloud protocols of students while composing represents a shift in interest from the earlier advocacy of process methods to later attention to the complex cognitive and social phenomena involved in producing a text.

This movement toward social epistemic rhetoric which posited that students had to know discourse conventions clearly valued principles that were inconsistent with the expressivist notion of the process school. Expressivism was dismissed as non-academic or even non-truth because of the focus on the self as a completely personal construct (Bartholomae, 1996). In addition, cultural theorists questioned expressivism on the basis of theoretical consistency; the newly academic field was to be held to the same rigorous standards as were other disciplines (Berlin 1987).

The other group seen as opposing the process movement did so for pragmatic reasons rather than theoretical or political ones. Some theorists and practitioners expressed the view that process teaching simply doesn't work as well as other methods of teaching writing. Kent (1989), for example, objects to the codified procedure of moving through the steps of writing. Sidle and Morris (1998) also oppose the fixed divisions of invention and post-invention, interpretation and composing, or brainstorming and organizing (p. 278). Some feel that how students write is far more important than who they are as people, an idea counter to the emphasis on voice in the process model (MacDonald, 1998). Belcher (2000) conducted a study investigating instructors' feelings about peer groups. Most of the respondents indicated on surveys that the results from peer review were poor: quality of the feedback from peers was inconsistent, and implementing and reviewing the peer review process was extremely time-consuming. In addition, too often the peer editing is employed in the production of traditional academic papers rather than essays that require students to explore issues of personal growth and

change (Bushman, 2000). Harris's (1992) writings indicate that peer response groups have had mixed results and that writing center tutorials are more effective. Others agree that peer groups do not serve the interests of improving student writing (Holt, 1992; Spear, 1988; Spigelman, 1998).

The participants in this study have matriculated at a North American university and are engaged in the process of obtaining an undergraduate (or, in some cases, graduate) degree at this institution. The great majority, all but the few graduate students in the two sections of this course, must complete the two-sequence program of composition that is required of all entering freshman who are not exempted. Therefore, because the course in which I conducted my study (English 188) constitutes part of the Freshman Writing program, the research on composition studies had to be included and considered when the data were analyzed. Often, the findings of investigations into collaboration and cooperation among native-speaker writing students dovetail with those of investigations into the same issues among E.S.L. writing students.

Implications for the Teaching of Second Language Writing

The debate about the value of revising from feedback and the effectiveness of peer feedback in particular in helping student writers to revise successfully has been extended into the field of English as a Second Language. However, a gap between the fields of composition and English as a Second Language exists in the sense that first language composition teachers tend to be unaware of developments in second language writing research. Great diversity in language, cultural background, gender, age, education, language training, and English language proficiency makes the E.S.L. population more difficult to examine, and generalizations must be carefully qualified as a result (Matsuda, 1999). Following Elbow (1981) and Bruffee (1984), practitioners in the field of L2 writing have generally adopted principles of the process school related to

collaboration as the basis for all learning. The social-interactionist model clearly harkens back to the work of Vygotsky. Collaboration has as its goal a product arrived at through negotiation and consensus within a group and shifts the power in the classroom from the teacher to the students (Zhang, 1995). More specifically, the concept of scaffolding found in the work of Vygotsky serves as the basis for peer response groups in the English as a Second Language writing classroom. Because of the diversity present in most E.S.L. writing classrooms, the procedure of peer review and the dynamics of the small peer group become extraordinarily complex (DeGuerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Nelson & Murphy, 1992). Even in L1 classrooms, a wide variety of behavior patterns and types of interaction have been identified (Freedman, 1995).

The cross-cultural differences involved in group work are manifold. What is valued in the process school and assumed to be universally admired, features such as voice as an expression of a strong sense of self, critical thinking, peer review, and textual ownership, are not always valued in other cultures. Most significantly, the Confucian societies' emphasis on group harmony at the expense of individual identity may cause students from collectivist cultures to view peers offering feedback as hostile or offensive. The instinct on the part of students from countries such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, to name a few, could be to accommodate and seek social support from others rather than to critique (Carson & Nelson, 1994; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999).

Another aspect of peer response group work that may be affected by cross-cultural expectations is the amount and type of peer feedback. Many Chinese students, for instance, are reluctant to initiate comments (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). A study conducted with L1 and L2 student writers at private and public higher education U.S. institutions indicates that, whereas

L1 students prefer peer feedback to that from teachers, L2 students would rather receive teacher feedback. The E.S.L. students participating in this study did not share the view of native-speaker writers that teachers are insensitive and unhelpful (Zhang, 1995). A research study conducted in Hong Kong (Pennington, Brock, & Yue, 1996) indicates that the process method can have a mixed reception in other countries when the home culture's tradition, in this case the transmission of knowledge, is quite different from that of the U.S. The collaborative stance seen in the interaction of Puerto Rican students may result from the influence of Spanish (sic) culture (Villamil & DeGuerrero, 1996).

Several studies have addressed the question of how peer feedback compared with teacher feedback in assisting student writers to revise their texts. Paulus' (1999) investigation of students' verbal reports during revision indicates that teacher feedback is followed more frequently than is peer feedback. E.S.L. students either prefer instructor feedback (Nelson & Carson, 1998; Zhang, 1995), or want peer response only as a supplement to teacher feedback (Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, & Huang, 1998).

With respect to the feedback itself, E.S.L. writers in Nelson and Carson's 1998 study preferred suggestions about global issues of their texts to comments on grammatical correctness or syntax. Iranian doctoral E.S.L. candidates in Education (Riazi, 1997) report that substantive comments are more useful than those that address issues of form. However, most of the feedback from E.S.L. students tends to be on form rather than content (Cumming & So, 1996; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992).

E.S.L. university students participating in Hyland's (1995) New Zealand study wanted feedback of all kinds as long as it was critical; these students expressed mistrust of positive comments, which they saw as insincere and even manipulative. Explicitness of comments

results in higher quality revision and is identified as a key factor. In addition, inconsistency is a common problem for reviewers, even exemplary teachers giving feedback (Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997).

Other researchers have investigated related issues concerning peer feedback. For example, Paulus (1999) found that, regardless of what kind of feedback works better, it appears that feedback of both kinds can often result in revisions that are better than first drafts. Also, peer feedback is particularly effective with experienced student writers (Berg, 1999), perhaps due to the fact that skilled E.S.L. writers tend to deal with more global issues than do the less skilled (Zamel, 1983). Sometimes peer response plays a minimal role, however (Allaei & Connor, 1990). Finally, coaching peers may improve the quality of the feedback (Stanley, 1992).

Cross-cultural differences also must be considered when investigating how E.S.L. students produce a text; their attitudes about how to write and what constitutes good writing have been deeply shaped by their original cultural literacy training. Although conducting research in contrastive rhetoric and cross-cultural genre studies is daunting, much more is needed to allow teachers of E.S.L. writing to make informed decisions about how to provide their students with the most effective instruction. Second language writers have been shaped by a variety of individual and cultural factors that cannot be easily identified. As in the field of reading, E.S.L. composition theory acknowledges the key role of schemata both in the comprehension and production of text, but this factor becomes extremely complicated with writing.

Writing as an activity embedded in culture has spawned research on the mental programs learned by ESL writers as children that are culturally enforced. Kaplan (1966) represents different organizational patterns in his famous “doodles article” in which he drew various

diagrams to represent different cultures' preferred writing forms. Although the representations are certainly valid to a point, this research illustrates the caution that must be used in studies of contrastive rhetoric. Ethnocentrism and oversimplification can result. For example, the linear quality supposed to be typical of American English writing is not always perceived by speakers of other languages. Conversely, the pattern of writing in their own language seems linear to them. Therefore, concepts such as linearity themselves appear to be embedded in culture (Connor, 1996).

Furthermore, the diagram showing linearity in the Kaplan (1966) article intending to represent deductive or inductive writing holds true in American English principally among writers who are quite limited or only beginning. Accomplished writers in English practice indirection, use figurative language, and depend on readers' background information for the construction of meaning. These features have been identified in Kaplan's (1966) work as typical of Oriental (sic) rather than English rhetorical patterns.

Another key consideration in studying second language writing is the role of genre. According to Hillocks (1995), a genre is a form of writing that has been shaped by the immediate situation and wider environment. Genres can be identified in all arenas: business, academe, politics, and literature, to name a few. The concept of genre dates back to the age of Aristotle (1984), who defines "epic" and "tragedy", for example. John Swales (1998) discusses variations in the genres of graduate student writing. International Graduate Assistants (IGAs) position themselves in their writing tasks quite differently when compared with the stance taken by native speaker Graduate Assistants; typically, the Asian IGA will adopt an overly humble, uncertain role as a junior member of the field. As Swales indicates, these students must be retrained in the genre as practiced in the American university, where a confident voice is expected, with the

purpose of displaying knowledge. Such a stance would be rejected in many Asian countries as presumptuous or arrogant (Swales, 1990).

Genres, however, are not at all static; instead, they are flexible and dynamic. Also, sub-genres develop for specific communicative purposes: for example, the Elizabethan and Petrarchan versions of sonnets express significantly different world views, from contrasting stances. A further complication in genre study lies in the fact that gifted or even accomplished writers in a language often take liberties with genres and alter them in subtle, idiosyncratic ways. The sensitivity to alterations in angle, approach, or attitude must develop with literacy in L1 and deepen and intensify over time with extensive reading experience. Gifted writers also create new or hybrid genres; among these are Lawrence Sterne, Laura Esquivel, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Devitt, 2000). F. Scott Fitzgerald also altered an established literary genre in *The Great Gatsby*, which might be read as an ironic casting of the pastoral elegy.

Also, because writing is post-biological, or learned rather than acquired, school environment and instruction play a central role in the development of all writing. More than prior experience in English composition affects L2 writing performance in English; composition experience in the first language influences ESL writing as well. Although students generally prove to have no clear idea of curriculum and methodology and cannot be reliable sources of information about how they are taught or learn either their first or second language (Liebman, 1992), some principles of education and methodology can be identified. But these issues related to school environment are complex, subtle, and not easily studied.

In the U.S., composition is widely taught as part of the core curriculum. The value placed on formal writing instruction can be confirmed by the great number of rhetoric texts published in the U.S. every year. The U.S. seems to be unique in taking this approach, however.

Liebman, who concentrates his research in Japan and Saudi Arabia, finds no composition texts in other countries; in neither country does composition instruction appear to exist. Only grammar and correctness are seen as the focus of language studies. Both Japanese and Saudi respondents reported, however, being taught overall organization similar to that which they are instructed to follow in their ESL classes in the U.S. That is, most in both groups believe their own cultural rhetorical pattern to be linear, with the model essay type showing division into the parts introduction, body, and conclusion held up as the ideal. Not one student acknowledged awareness of the non-linear organizational pattern identified by Kaplan (1966) as valued by his language community. Methodology and curriculum differ greatly, though, as reported by these two groups of students. In Saudi and Japanese schools, writing as a product constitutes the focus of language study, and students do not report revising writing above the sentence level.

According to Liebman (1992), what forms the core of language curriculum is the classical literature of the culture, which becomes the model for study. So rhetoric, cultural values, and ideas about what is good writing come from literature study. What appears to be valued in Japanese literature is the expression of the self and the emotional component of text. In contrast, the Arab students Liebman includes in his research tend to see writing as largely transactional, without the expressive function. The effect of these two values in writing can be seen by the response of the two groups to writing assignments. The Japanese students tend to enjoy and excel at personalized writing tasks, such as journals, whereas the Arabic speakers may prefer argumentative discourse as modeled in the Qu'uran (Liebman, 1992). Knowledge of contrasting textual products and differing rhetorical backgrounds enables teachers to make more flexible assignments and teaching plans, tailored to a diverse student population.

Some recent studies suggest reexamination of widely accepted practices in E.S.L. classrooms is in order, especially since the school context clearly has great impact on L2 writers. Subtle and surprising differences in the area of school culture reported by Harklau (1994), who conducted research on the experiences of high school ESL students of roughly equivalent proficiency in English, affect L2 acquisition rates. Some of the students with E.S.L. characteristics insisted upon being mainstreamed into native-speaker classes, while others were placed into special ESL groups where different methodology was used. The study indicates that, despite the fact that the ESL class was conducted with currently valued principles at work, such as student-centered learning, small cooperative groups, the teacher-as-facilitator, these students made less progress in English and reported general dissatisfaction with their instruction. The accelerated acquisition rate of mainstreamed students must be related to what Krashen (1981) calls good input in the form of largely teacher-led discussion and contact with native speaker speech and writing from classmates. Apparently this exposure, coupled perhaps with the absence of the stigma of remedial, contributes to greater achievement in English language proficiency. In the ESL class, the facilitator-teacher provides much less good input, and students do not receive it from classmates, either (Harklau, 1994). What comes to mind is the English language experience of the first wave of European immigrants, who were mainstreamed because the field of E.S.L. did not exist, and total immersion was the method. Harklau (1994) failed to analyze the superior proficiency of the mainstreamed students, however; if fluency outweighs accuracy, his subjects may fall into the category of “E.S.L. basic writer.” Harklau’s research has great importance for the E.S.L. practitioner. Instead of teacher-as-facilitator as the basis of collaborative learning, more effective language classroom instruction might reincorporate traditional methods of teacher-led discussion or even lecture.

Another area in which school culture influences L2 writing is in the expectations and cultural roles students in E.S.L. classes bring to group dynamics. Sociolinguistic rules concerning rules of interacting, whether in speech or writing, are culture-specific. Differences in these rules prove to be a cause of dissonance in an L2 writing group, where students might have different cross-cultural expectations concerning not only what good writing is, but also the amount of talk needed, the roles of speaker and listener, and politeness strategies. Misunderstanding in these areas may make the work of the peer writing group difficult and cause conflicts to arise. Students from China and Japan, for example, tend to see the needs of the group as paramount. They may not accept the purpose of the writing group, which is to benefit individual writers. So East Asian group members may see their role as supportive and be offended by the more critical approach that Spanish speakers tend to adopt (Nelson & Murphy, 1992). The implication for teachers is that careful training in not only ground rules for group dynamics, but also in cross-cultural expectations, is needed. Making multi-cultural and global studies standard in the training of E.S.L. teachers would help teachers to guide collaborative groups with greater insight and sensitivity, and, in fact to manage their classrooms with cross-cultural awareness.

The diversity of L2 students in the U.S. creates still further challenges for the E.S.L. professional. Not only do students come from different language groups and cultures, but, even in one level of schooling, such as higher education, great variation exists in many areas. Age, motivation, second language aptitude, L1 writing proficiency, and L1 and L2 instruction can vary widely within the same class. Since other skills besides writing, namely, listening, reading, and speaking, are often used for tracking purposes, levels of writing proficiency are often vastly different. Also, usual methods of tracking do not work in the case of foreign- or second-

language instruction. A study done by Sasayaki (1993) on 160 E.F.L. students in Japan indicates that second language proficiency is unrelated to intelligence or other cognitive abilities.

In spite of this finding, however, the single most important factor for success in L2 writing seems to be the educational background in the native language. Uninterrupted L1 academic training, particularly completion of high school in the home country, is the best predictor of academic achievement for higher education E.S.L. students in the U.S. Also, for E.F.L., studies in the home country aid these students greatly because of the focus on grammar and reading. E.S.L. students who graduate from U.S. high schools have more communicative training and less experience with text, regardless of whether they have been mainstreamed early or taught in discrete E.S.L. classes. As a result, their literacy in English tends to be weaker despite greater communicative ability and spoken fluency (Cummins, Swain, Nakajima, Handscombe, Greene, & Tran, 1984). The implications for E.S.L. programs and secondary language studies in the U.S. are that greater emphasis must be placed on reading and writing, without sacrificing the communicative aspect.

Contrastive rhetoric principles may result in lack of understanding and effective communication even by insider practitioners of a genre. Descriptions of research articles written by international graduate students in the U.S. show varying expectations of the genre, including a much more humble stance and a great deal more reader-responsibility (Swales, 1998). Cross-cultural differences in these aspects of research articles cause confusion in the population in Korea investigated by Ilona Leki. Korean academics at a university who studied in the U.S. demonstrated significantly greater comprehension of the work in their field done by U.S. counterparts than those who had not studied in the U.S., even when the English language proficiency of the latter group was comparable or even superior. Living in the academic and

general culture of the U.S. enabled the first group to enter the world of the text without the interference of the first language, here Korean, expectations (Leki, 1992). Variation can occur within a genre in the same writing community, as demonstrated by research conducted in a U.S. university's freshman writing program. At a particular university (U.C.P.), a different genre for the expository essay existed in special sections for non-native speakers than the one of mainstream sections. In the E.S.L. sections of freshman composition, more formulaic, linear essays were valued and poetic language discouraged. In native speaker sections of the same course, however, formulaity was devalued, individuality rewarded, and figurative language greatly admired (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995).

Much more research is required for E.S.L. practitioners to discover how to meet the needs of the diverse group known as L2 writers. The observable data come from the text, but much more is at work in the case of all writers, E.S.L. writers in particular: the background and experience of the writer, L1 level of proficiency, second language proficiency, motivation, purpose, rhetorical framework, and genre. Now that E.S.L. writing theory has followed the shift from product to process which has occurred in composition theory in general, a journey Raimes (1991) compares with going "into the woods," as many aspects as possible should be considered if E.S.L. writing is to be taught and evaluated effectively.

For purposes of this study, all participants' being non-native speakers of English who are enrolled in a composition course for E.S.L. students means that the body of research dealing with issues pertinent to second language writing must be included. Indeed, the picture of these students' development becomes complex when all of the components of their position with respect to English composition are considered. In some cases, the findings of key studies contradict the findings of studies that focus on native-speaker composition issues.

The Role of Technology in Composition Studies

A further complication to the teaching of writing involves the role that technology should play. As part of the “cultural revolution” of the ‘80s, to use Jerome Bruner’s (1986) term, computers and the Web became significant forces in the fields of education and composition as well as the larger culture. Postmodern information channels, including video, film, music, television, and radio, became viable substitutes for traditional print media and were seen as more effective tools to use in some writing programs (Giroux, 1996; Lunsford, 1996). Transforming text from the traditional, printed paper-based medium to an electronic one represents a fundamental change in the concepts of writing and teaching, not to mention conducting research.

Since the 1990s, the course of computer-mediated communication in schools has developed along the same lines as the process paradigm of composition instruction and also the social-constructivist school of composition, which has held sway in the field in the same period of time. Also, it is not inconsistent with the post-modern emphasis on writing through a particular lens, which results in an idiosyncratic narrative. Computer conferencing, both synchronous and asynchronous, have become a fact of life in the university composition curriculum. Electronic innovations have had a profound impact on practice in the field of composition studies.

As Hawisher (1991) points out, social approaches to writing and recognition of the value of collaboration of peers have become commonplace (Berlin, 1996; Lefevre, 1987; Bruffee, 1986), yet very little research has been conducted in reflection of this reality. The cause of this dearth might be the interdisciplinary nature of electronic conferencing in composition, a factor often found discouraging by potential researchers. But the multidisciplinary reality of this new field is completely consistent with the current emphasis on knowledge as made, not found. Also,

the value placed on multiple points of view in the post-modern academy makes studies in this area quite natural.

The social-constructivist notion of intertextuality can be observed in the electronic conference, where students interact in both a give and take fashion, providing feedback and support for peers at the same time that they use ideas from those peers in their own work. Thus, texts become community-generated (Bruffee, 1984) rather than products of isolated authors. Also, the teacher becomes one learner of many: no single person dominates the interaction, and, as a result, the power of the group becomes decentralized.

To what extent print conventions should be used to evaluate writing on electronic media has been a much-debated topic (Kaplan, 1991). A study conducted by Hawisher and Moran (1997) suggests that college teachers' comments using computer technology do not elicit the same reaction that traditional comments might.

The early expectations for computers' positive effects on writing instruction were perhaps overly optimistic. Many great developments were predicted. For one thing, the process of revising was to be made much easier with the availability of electronic tools in word-processing programs. Rewriting an electronic text was much easier than a handwritten one. As a result, using electronic media was heralded as a great boon to process writing. Interestingly, however, early research indicated that computer experience was a greater factor in revision success than writing proficiency (Phinney & Khouri, 1993). As another predicted benefit, the new technology would free the writing teacher and student and make the traditional classroom space seem restrictive (Hawisher & Leblanc, 1992). Another great advantage to computer use in writing instruction was the potential for collaboration offered by the technology. Small groups could work together on-line with software such as Blackboard.

However, the optimism of the '80s with respect to computers' contributions to the field of composition decreased dramatically in the '90s. Problems of unequal access and marginalization of students without computers or having inferior equipment became widespread concerns (Curtis & Klem, 1992). Furthermore, the humanist tradition of English and composition has put instructors in opposition to technology, and many English teachers have resisted using computers in their courses in spite of the growing link between literacy and technology. Cynthia Selfe (1999) sees technological literacy as the responsibility of composition and English instructors, but she warns about the advantage afforded privileged, middle-class students in this area.

With respect to the benefit to revision, some research has raised questions about whether or not changes to a text using electronic media tend to be superficial rather than substantial (Phinney & Khouri, 1993). And Myers-Breslin (2000) points out that networking writing on-line does not automatically create collaboration, which implies extended conversation and concerted effort to create a joint product. Lowe (2000) recommends a more pragmatic approach to electronic media; rather than using computers as tools for socio-cultural critiques, instructors should teach students the specific computer skills they will need in their profession. One study conducted among basic writers in freshman composition showed no more improvement in the writing of experimental groups using electronic media than in the writing of control groups following traditional formats (Hawisher & Fortune, 1988). In another study, conducted among business students posting and evaluating online reports, the overall quality of the writing was poor (Myers & Elwin, 2002).

Other studies have investigated more specific aspects of electronic writing and computer technology. For instance, the possibility that gender-related aspects of communication make

women's use of the new communication technologies different from that of men has been suggested (Hawisher, 2000). Also, the need for innovative assessment methods such as electronic portfolio evaluation has been pointed out (Whithaus, 2002).

Even though this study does not address the issue of technology directly, the research in this field must be considered in view of the fact that the essays and the feedback, both from the peer reviewers and the instructor, occurred online. Although the jury is still out about the relative benefits of computer technology with respect to student writing and writing instruction, it seems safe to say that the computer as a factor in the fields of composition and second language writing will continue to have a significant impact. Furthermore, two participants in the interview section of the study mentioned the role technology had played in the development of their writing skills in English.

This study occurs at the intersection of these three academic sub-disciplines (Composition, English as a Second Language, and Technology), and in that fact it is unique and unprecedented. Little quantitative research has been carried out in composition classes, moreover, and research in composition up to this point has not been characterized by rigor. Furthermore, the fact that participants are E.S.L. students makes this research needed, since studies in this sub-specialty have been relatively rare.

Research Questions

1. Does directed revision result in significantly better written product as measured by expert holistic scoring?
2. Is peer feedback as effective in improving student writing as instructor feedback?
3. Does peer feedback result in development as measured by change in score

from revision to first draft of the next essay project?

4. Does instructor feedback result in development as measured by change in score from revision to first draft of the next essay project?
5. How do students view the essay revision processes? (oral)

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction

This study has a mixed method design; I employed both quantitative tests and qualitative procedures to answer the research questions. The population for each section of the study appears in tables at the beginning of that portion. I describe in detail how I gathered and analyzed the data for each section in turn.

I applied various procedures to the data to answer the research questions. For the quantitative part of the study, I gathered data on an EXCEL spreadsheet, which I then transferred to SPSS (version 12) in order to run the repeated measures ANCOVA test; resulting tables show the mean squares and standard deviations of the different levels and variables. The first and second (revised) drafts of the four essay projects appear as different levels. The covariate was the pre-test, or essay score with which each student was placed in English 188 prior to the semester in which I conducted the research. In addition, I gathered information about the participants in a questionnaire; these points (gender, length of time in the U.S., major, geographic region of origin) became additional variables that I considered as having possible interaction in the quantitative test.

For the qualitative portion of the study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with volunteering participants in order to hear the students' views of their semester-long experience in their writing classroom. I wanted to hear their perceptions of the peer review, in the case of the experimental group, and the thoughts of students in both sections about the efficacy of peer review. I also wanted to investigate the possibility that students in both groups had taken advantage of the scaffolding potential of the posted essays of all other group members.

Furthermore, I felt the need to find out how the students had viewed the topics they chose from to write their essays because the specific topics and the reactions to them might have represented a confounding variable that I could not address in the quantitative portion of the study.

The audiotapes were transcribed by a legal secretary, and I analyzed the resulting data using the method that I describe in some detail in a subsequent section of this chapter.

The Population

The participants came from both international and immigrant groups and ranged from 18 to 44 years of age. The students come from 23 different countries. Both sections were heterogeneous with respect to race, social class, and major. The number of participants was determined by these two factors: willingness to take part in the study and composition score. In other words, qualified participants volunteered to become part of the research study. The total numbers of students in the sections were 19 (section 1) and 12 (section 2).

Subjects

Demographic information came from a questionnaire I created and had the classroom teacher administer in the second half of the semester. The following tables summarize the population information for the students who agreed to have their essays become part of the study from the two sections together. Twenty-nine students responded to the questionnaire.

Table 1 presents the breakdown of the age groups of the twenty-nine students in both the control and experimental sections.

Table 1
Ages of Subjects

18-20 years	11 students
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21-23 years	9 students
24-27 years	4 students
30+ years	5 students

Table 2 presents the geographic region of the twenty-nine students in both the control and experimental sections.

Table 2
Region of Origin

Latin America	14 students
Asia	6 students
Middle East	5 students
Europe	3 students
Africa	1 student

Table 3 presents the length of time the twenty-nine students in both the control and experimental sections had lived in the United States.

Table 3
Length of Time in the U.S.

0-12 months	12 students
1-2 years	6 students
3-6 years	10 students
8+ years	1 student

Table 4 presents the major fields of study of the twenty-nine students in both the control and experimental sections.

Table 4
Major Field of Study

Business	11 students
Liberal Arts	9 students
Science	6 students
Engineering	3 students

Table 5 summarizes the gender breakdown of the twenty-nine students in both the control and experimental sections.

Table 5
Gender

male	15 students
female	14 students

Table 6 shows how many of the twenty-nine students in both the control and experimental sections had graduated from a U.S. high school.

Table 6
Location of High School

home country	21 students
U.S.	8 students

Table 7 presents the socio-economic level of the twenty-nine students who were the subjects of the study.

Table 7
Socio-Economic Background (as determined by parents' vocations)

working	6 students
middle	12 students
professional or upper	10 students
no information	1 student

Procedures

I carried out this study during a 15-week semester at a public, urban university in a large multi-cultural city of the southern U.S. It involved two existing sections of an advanced E.S.L. composition course meeting three hours per week, both of which were taught by the same instructor. The focus consisted of the first drafts and revisions of four essay projects undertaken in the two sections, using the same texts and assignments. (For sample student essays, see Appendix A.)

The classroom instructor had been teaching off and on since her graduate school days in the late '80s. Originally from a middle southern state, she had been on the faculty of English for several years at this university since moving to the area with her family. She demonstrated consistent knowledge of her subject and, in addition, intense concern for her students. Married and with two young children, she had an active, busy life but managed to juggle her family and

professional roles well. In addition to E.S.L. writing, she taught composition for native speakers of English and also introductory literature courses. This young instructor was respected and liked by her colleagues, and she expressed a passion for teaching, a profession she considers to be a family tradition.

In the following paragraph, the classroom instructor states her position with respect to the approach to writing instruction I adopted for this study.

I have often used groups in peer review sessions for out-of-class essays by having students read each other's papers and offer comments and suggestions for improvement. Although I recognize that many students often do not feel comfortable criticizing their peers' work because they lack confidence in their own abilities, I still use this method because I believe that students need a broader audience than just the instructor, and they do indeed benefit from seeing how other students in the class have responded to the assignment. Furthermore, requiring peer reviews forces students to take their assignment in stages and to go back to revise (re-see) their paper from a new perspective. I liked the implementation of technology and was pleased to see that many students commented that they felt their introduction to Blackboard was one of the most beneficial aspects of the class. As for the students that semester, a few were quite strong in their abilities and more importantly, in their ambitions, and the students overall were fairly typical of the English 188 students, with a few exceptions of particularly weak students. While I believe in the power of individualism in student work, I also recognize the benefit of collaborating on ideas and of "publishing" one's work to create a broader audience, even if that "publication" just takes the form of reading a classmate's draft of an essay.

In general, the instructor employed the process approach to writing (see Appendix B for a statement of her teaching philosophy), with elements of cultural studies. That is, readings in the textbook on topics relevant to students' lives and subsequent discussions on those readings formed a context within which student writers could discover their own lenses. Students wrote several drafts of the same essay, using feedback from an audience in revising a first draft. The topics related thematically to readings assigned and discussed in both sections. Although the researcher created the topics (Appendix C), some element of choice existed in there being several possible for each project.

Furthermore, because each topic identified an audience and a real purpose, the writing done by the students can be characterized as meaningful communication rather than "themewriting." What differed in the two sections was the condition of, in the experimental group, peers offering the feedback rather than the instructor. On one initial essay project, the instructor modeled the process online for both groups. Then, the next four essay projects became the focus of this study. Feedback posted online, either by peers or the instructor, constituted the scaffolding for all student writers, and students wrote revisions based on the comments received in this manner. In the control group, I placed the students in small online groups also, so they could see essays, instructor feedback, and revisions of other students. Therefore, they were provided with the opportunity for a less direct way of receiving peer scaffolding, although their direct feedback came from the instructor online rather than from other students.

Participants posted and reviewed all drafts of the four essay projects in both sections online in an asynchronous but interactive manner through the software program Blackboard; more specifically, peer groups posted first drafts, responses in the case of the experimental section, and revisions through the "Discussion," or bulletin board, function of the software

program. For both sections, the classroom instructor modeled the procedure of giving feedback to a first draft. In each essay project in both sections, the same feedback format was used, whether by the instructor or by peer reviewers (see Appendix D).

In order for the scaffolding required in the Vygotskian model of learning to be present, students of mixed abilities must work together. To achieve this end, early in the semester, I scrutinized the essay scores of participating students in both sections that were used for placement; by using the scores, I identified “weak” and “strong” writers and created mixed peer groups accordingly. In this course (ENGL 188), the entrance composition scores range from 77-84. I identified writers with scores from 76 to 78 as weaker, and those with scores from 82 to 84 as stronger. Students with middle-ranging scores (79-81) were distributed as evenly as possible throughout the groups. I did not include their essays as data in the aspect of the study that concerned whether strong or weak students benefited more from this activity.

The essay grading system used in the freshman program of this university dovetails with the Vygotskian notion that language is holistic. It consists of blind holistic readings (numerical evaluations) by two faculty members. In the case of a wide discrepancy between the two scores, a third “blind” reading is done and averaged with the closer of the two initial scores. This method was used to evaluate essays produced in the course of this research project. Every semester, calibration sessions are conducted at every level of composition, including E.S.L., to ensure consistency. (For the delineation of levels by score in the E.S.L. program, see Appendix E.) In addition, the faculty members involved in scoring for purposes of this research and for placement are experienced instructors and professors with a range of from five to thirty-eight years of teaching E.S.L. writing at the university level. The subjects of this study took an essay exam before the semester began which was used for placement into this course, ENGL 188. The

placement essay was scored in the manner described above, and by the same faculty. This score became the “pretest” covariant for ANCOVA in the quantitative section.

The study’s context was the program of English as a Second Language, housed in the Department of English. The program consists of four levels of English as a Second Language instruction, including a twelve-hour intensive course at the lowest level of English language proficiency and a six-hour semi-intensive course. The course in which this study was conducted was the lower level of two three-hour composition courses, advanced courses whose goal is to prepare students for freshman composition (English 1157). Students in English 188 typically write from four to six essays over the course of a semester, each involving several drafts, as can be seen on the syllabus (Appendix F). Instructors routinely direct students to perform prewriting as an invention step before turning in a first draft. In addition, related readings and journal writing, coupled with class discussion, typically serve to prepare the students for each project.

Assigned readings and the feedback form for revision (appendix G) come from the text used in the course, *New Directions* by Peter Gardner (1998). The text was selected because, rather than focusing on grammar and form, it encourages an integrated, or holistic, approach to teaching writing, one in which students are encouraged to use material in related readings in drafting their essays. Also, class discussion provides students with the opportunity to share views with peers. This activity is useful in allowing students to formulate their ideas and also to take examples from the experience of their classmates.

Topics made available for the students’ choosing as well as the feedback form itself place the emphasis for revision on content rather than form. Topics, all of which relate to the chapters covered in *New Directions*, include an audience as well as indicate a real purpose (appendix C). For example, a topic offered to coordinate with the chapter on “Cross Cultural Communication”

asked students to write about their experiences at the university either in the form of a letter to students in their school back home or as an article for the university student newspaper. Topics that were assigned students with the chapter on “Education” included a proposal for spending a \$25,000 grant to improve the E.S.L. program or a speech nominating themselves for a position in a campus organization such as student government or the International Students’ Organization. For the chapter on “Gender,” students were given as two possible topics a letter to a future daughter or son about the most important qualities to consider when looking for a romantic partner or spouse or a critique of a movie that provides a particular view of male-female relationships. As another way to promote authenticity in the language and the genres used, the feedback form giving the guidelines for response to first drafts asked the reviewers to consider how well the writers addressed their specific audience. In addition, because the draft was evaluated as a piece of communication, issues such as clarity and coherence became particularly relevant.

Competent modeling as an important element in the scaffolded learning experience was provided by the instructors’ comments, all of which were posted online in Discussion board. Even though both sections posted the essays by group, students in any section had access to the first drafts of all classmates as well as the response of the instructor to each essay. The instructor used the same seven-point feedback form from *New Dimensions* that the student reviewers employed, thereby ensuring consistency at the same time as providing a model of how to respond. I did not become involved with the revision process; the instructor alone guided the students through the first essay project, monitored the student-based revision in the second project, and gave feedback upon which revisions were based in the second, third, and fourth projects as appropriate.

Data Gathering

Once I had formed the groups, I took up a class period of 50 minutes in each section to explain the project, have consent forms signed, and deliver the survey that aimed to find out information about the students' backgrounds with respect to home country, major, and experience and comfort with computer use. I added myself as a member to each online peer group in order to allow communication with participants throughout the course of the project. I sent electronic messages only in the case of students' missing deadlines or misunderstanding some facet of the online work assigned. In other words, I gave minimal feedback, only enough to keep up the students' level of participation and to refocus them where necessary. In addition, students had the chance to ask me questions via e-mail. Of course, they had access to the classroom instructor in this way also.

The blind holistic reading took place in a conference room of the building in which the English Department is housed. The five participating faculty members convened one morning in May between the end of classes and the start of exams. As it turned out, the process took us approximately two hours and a half.

I started the grading session with calibration (see Appendix A for calibration essays). After we had read the essays used in this procedure and compared the scores, we discussed the criteria used for placement and exit in this course (ENGL 188). Then, confident that we were of one mind about the scoring system, I distributed essays for group members to grade. I had taken steps before the session to make sure that anonymity for participating students was maintained. The faculty reading the essays could not determine which essays they were reading because I had coded them as to section, essay number, and draft number (whether first draft or revision). Furthermore, because the essays had been word-processed, I could easily delete the names; for

this reason also, handwriting of individual students could not be recognized. In addition, I sought to foster unbiased evaluation of the writing samples. To this end, I had participating faculty read the essays in a random fashion, taking essays from a pile in the center of the table rather than reading all the papers of one section produced for a particular essay event. Therefore, no reader could determine anything about the essay: from what point in the semester it came, who had written it, whether it was from the experimental or control group, or whether it was a first draft or a revision.

I used the same scoring sheet as was currently being used by the freshman program of English and by the E.S.L. program (see Appendix G). The scoring sheet provided a place for a first reading to be recorded and then a second, to be done blindly, that is, without knowledge of the first score. Readers averaged scores as they completed second readings, and the resulting numbers became the data I used to run the quantitative tests. In the case of a discrepancy large enough to place an essay on two different levels, a third blind reading broke the tie. In the case of a third reading, the last score was averaged with the closer of the preceding two readers'.

Student essays resulting from this project, both the first drafts and revisions, were graded in the holistic fashion described previously. I entered students' ID numbers, the placement scores which served as the basis for placement into groups, and scores on all the essays into a data bank using EXCEL to store the data first. I then imported the data set into SPSS and used SPSS to analyze the data in order to answer the research questions. Additional data came from the survey administered by the classroom instructor in the middle part of the semester. The survey, mentioned previously, focused on students' personal background and language history. A final component of the study involved 15-minute semi-structured interviews conducted with willing

students in both groups. I offered the 28 students who had completed enough work in the course to participate in the interview process a small gift certificate as an incentive.

Analysis of Data

Repeated measures ANCOVA was one method I used to determine the answers to research questions 1-4. For the qualitative section of this study, I audio-taped the interviews and then had them transcribed; resulting data, analyzed thematically by the researcher, supplemented the data acquired through quantitative means as described in the following section.

Qualitative Methods

For the qualitative section of this mixed-method research, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews in the last week of the course. In the interviews, I intended to give voice to the participants in order to learn about their perceptions of the experience of having either peer or instructor review, and about their feelings concerning other key issues of the study. For instance, I wanted to find out how important their topics had been in their writing performance. I also wanted to learn about their views of their writing progress. I have used pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.

Table 8 summarizes demographic information about participants in the semi-structured interviews. The facts were gathered by means of a questionnaire (see Appendix H) administered by the classroom instructor. Socio-economic level was self-reported.

Table 8
Participants in the Interviews

name	age	Country of Origin	Time in the U.S.	Major	Socio-Economic Level	Experimental Vs. Control
Adam	23	S. Arabia	3 ½ yrs.	Computer Science	Middle	Experimental
Alan	32	S. Arabia	8 mos.	Accounting	Middle	Control
Andrea	19	Pakistan	9 yrs.	Pre-Medicine	Upper	Experimental
Angel	22	France	7 mos.	Management	Middle	Experimental
Anna	18	Colombia	2 mos.	Undecided	Upper	Experimental
Cindy	19	Taiwan	7 mos.	Hotel Mgmt.	None given	Control
Don	23	Colombia	5 yrs.	Business	Upper	Control
Edith	32	Brazil	2 yrs.	Sociology	Lower	
Frank	21	China	4 yrs.	Engineering	None given	Control
Herb	22	Ecuador	3 mos.	Engineering	Middle	Experimental
Jack	21	Japan	1 yr.	International Studies	Middle	Experimental
Lenny	30	Haiti	5 yrs.	International Studies	Lower	Control
Manuel	22	Ethiopia	2 yrs.	Biology	Upper	Control
Matt	19	S. Arabia	9 mos.	Accounting	Middle	Experimental
Melissa	19	Ecuador	18 mos.	Drama/Communic.	Upper	Experimental
Mona	44	Cuba	5 yrs.	Business	Middle	Experimental
Noel	24	Chile	3 mos.	Engineering	Upper	Control
Robert	30	Azerbaijan	4 yrs.	Accounting	Upper	Control
Steve	27	Korea	13 mos.	Music	Working	Experimental
Susan	19	Senegal	3 mos.	Business	Upper	Control
Walter	20	Hong Kong	3 yrs.	Pre-Pharmacy	Lower	Experimental
Yancy	25	Vietnam	11 mos.	Studio Art	Middle	Control
Yasmine	19	Cuba	2 yrs.	Finance	Lower	Experimental

The classroom teacher had circulated sign-up sheets in both participating sections, and 23 of the 28 students eligible signed up for a 30-minute slot, fifteen of which would be devoted to the actual interview. I informed the students that there would be a monetary incentive involved in the process; in fact, I gave out small gift certificates to a national bookstore with a few local branches to those who came for the interviews.

I asked each interviewee six questions in a semi-structured format. The guide consisted of the following:

1. Have you seen changes in your writing this semester?
2. If your writing has changed, how has it changed? If not, why do you think it hasn't improved?
3. What made your writing improve, or what prevented your progress?
4. What is your opinion of peer group work in your classes? How helpful were your group activities this semester?
5. How important is the topic when you are writing an essay? How would you describe a good topic?
6. What activities assigned by your instructor this semester helped you the most? (Examples of activities include on-line essays, peer group work, grammar exercises, and reading model essays from the textbook.)

During the final days of a 15-week semester, I invited the 28 participants to join me for a short interview session. I conducted the interviews in my office in the Liberal Arts Building on campus during the afternoon hours of the target week because most of the students had classes in the morning. Happily, 23 of those eligible showed up. Because they were finishing up their

E.S.L. composition course, I felt that they could assess their performance in the course and discuss the factors that had played a key role in whatever improvement they had made. After a few minutes of small talk pleasantries, I asked the students individually, behind closed doors, a series of questions and audio taped the ensuing conversation. I used both a standard (SONY) and a micro-cassette (OPTIMUS) recorder in order to make sure that the data would be available later. So I had both a standard and a micro tape at the end of each interview. I conducted the interviews informally, at my desk, with a comfortable office chair for the students to sit in to one side. I wanted to make sure that the approximately fifteen-minute conversation with each participant was successfully recorded. I conducted between two and six interviews on four successive days, in the afternoon.

The perception participants had of me was most probably that of an authority figure. I was coordinating the program of English as a Second Language for the semester because the permanent administrator was serving as Undergraduate Coordinator of English. So the students had seen me advising and testing at the beginning of the semester. In addition, seven of the twenty-three had been students of mine in previous E.S.L. composition courses at the university. I set out to make each student comfortable with a few minutes of small talk. In the interviews with students whom I hadn't known before, I asked where they were from and how long they had been writing in English. In the interviews of students I knew, I asked how the semester had gone and what they were doing over the summer. Because students usually see me as approachable and interested, the atmosphere seemed relaxed.

I reported and analyzed the qualitative data in the following way. First, I reviewed each transcript with an eye to organizing the data according to the interview structure. In other words, I looked for and marked responses to the questions, in the order I had asked them. I copied into a

notebook each question and all data that constituted responses to that question. Thus, the basic organization of reporting the data follows the format of the semi-structured interview itself.

Once I had arranged the data as group responses to the interview questions, I looked within each question's responses for common themes. First, I assigned a name and a code color to each theme within the responses to a particular question. Then, I combed through the data pertaining to that question and color-coded them for internal organization. I also marked passages for direct quotation, using the same coding system. Next, I wrote up the section on common themes, in which I focused on reporting what the majority of participants had said. I also included enough direct quotation to allow readers to become acquainted with the students whose work had been the subject of the study. As a final part of this section of reporting the data, I reviewed each question's section for important exceptions. I then followed the same procedure of coding this material and writing up what the participants had said, with ample quotation.

The second part of my analysis involved looking at the transcripts again, using a different lens. This investigation focused on what participants had contributed that had not come as a response to a particular question, but that seemed to be significant nonetheless. In other words, I returned to the transcripts to look for tangential themes; I wanted to see what unexpected significant points students had made in the interviews. This activity resulted in the second level of data reporting, one that turned out to be unusually productive. I found myself being led back to the literature in unanticipated ways. For instance, the suggestion that Robert made about dividing students into groups according to their interests caused me to reflect on the arguments of the Writing Across the Curriculum camp and to revisit key articles within that sub-specialty of the field. Also, the fact that so many students expressed an appreciation for seeing issues from so many points of view in the peer group experience echoes the literature; studies indicate that one

key advantage to small group work in the classroom is the diversity of background and the enrichment of the learning environment from having contributions from such widely divergent members.

The final step of my analysis was the conclusion; in order to return to the central questions driving this research, I used the qualitative data (along with the quantitative tests) to make the observations and assertions that come in the final chapter. That is, I looked at the qualitative data with an eye to answering the questions I had posed at the beginning of the study. I reviewed each question in turn in order to discover what the students' comments had revealed about these main points of investigation.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The results of quantitative tests appear in this section in tables, followed by analysis. Each table is accompanied by a brief description. First, the sample means with standard deviations are presented. Then, the results of the ANCOVA appear in two tables, one with data from the first drafts and the other with data from the revisions. Next, the results of tests run for within-subjects effects and within-subjects contrasts are presented in two tables. After those tables, the research questions appear again.

In the qualitative section, I report data from transcripts resulting from the semi-structured interviews with participants, in the order of questions asked. I then give a summary of data taken from the transcripts as well. Next, I point out emerging themes that I have gleaned from crystallizing the information I obtained from the students in the interviews. These points lead into the concluding remarks and also provide a transition to the final chapter of this paper.

Quantitative Section

In Table 9, descriptive statistics for the covariate and the eight levels are summarized. For each, the sample means and the standard deviation are presented for both the experimental and the control groups.

Table 9
Sample Means of Both Groups, with Standard Deviations

Name of	Experimental	Experimental Standard	Control	Control Standard
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(co)variable	Mean	Deviation	Mean	Deviation
pretest	80.6471	2.34364	79.7000	1.94651
Essay 1, first draft	80.4118	2.85173	78.5000	3.59784
Essay 1, revision	82.4706	2.60090	80.7000	1.63639
Essay 2, first draft	80.5294	2.93934	80.8000	2.44040
Essay 2, revision	82.1765	2.03824	82.3000	2.66875
Essay 3, first draft	81.4706	3.18429	81.8000	3.42540
Essay 3, revision	83.5882	2.50147	83.9000	3.17805
Essay 4, first draft	83.0000	3.33542	82.6000	2.83627
Essay 4, revision	84.6471	3.21988	82.7000	3.56059

Research questions were as follows:

1. Does directed revision result in significantly better written product as measured by expert holistic scoring?
2. Is peer feedback as effective in improving student writing as instructor feedback?
3. Does peer feedback result in development as measured by change in score from revision to first draft of the next essay project?
4. Does instructor feedback result in development as measured by change in score from revision to first draft of the next essay project?
5. How do students view the essay revision processes? (oral question)

Tables 10 and 11 show results of multivariate tests on first drafts and revisions of the essay projects, respectively. Repeated-measures ANCOVA with the pretest as covariate revealed that there were no significant (at .05) differences among the sample means. For the experimental group, $df = 17$; for the control group, $df = 10$. (See charts.)

Table 10
Multivariate Tests on First Drafts of the Essay Projects

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
ed1	Pillai's Trace	.158	1.380a	3.000	22.00	.275
	Wilks' Lambda	.842	1.380a	3.000	22.00	.275
	Hotelling's Trace	.188	1.380a	3.000	22.00	.275
	Roy's Largest Root	.188	1.380a	3.000	22.00	.275
ed1 Pretest	Pillai's Trace	.155	1.350	3.000	22.00	.284
	Wilks' Lambda	.845	1.350	3.000	22.00	.284
	Hotelling's Trace	.184	1.350	3.000	22.00	.284
	Roy's Largest Root	.184	1.350	3.000	22.00	.284
ed 1 ExpvsCtrl	Pillai's Trace	.111	.916a	3.000	22.000	.449
	Wilks' Lambda	.889	.916a	3.000	22.000	.449
	Hotelling's Trace	.125	.916a	3.000	22.000	.449
	Roy's Largest Root	.125	.916a	3.000	22.000	.449

Table 11
Multivariate Tests on Revisions of the Essay Projects

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
r1	Pillai's Trace	.229	2.180a	3.000	22.00	.119
	Wilks' Lambda	.771	2.180a	3.000	22.00	.119
	Hotelling's Trace	.297	2.180a	3.000	22.00	.119
	Roy's Largest Root	.297	2.180a	3.000	22.00	.119
r1 Pretest	Pillai's Trace	.226	2.143a	3.000	22.00	.124
	Wilks' Lambda	.774	2.143a	3.000	22.00	.124
	Hotelling's Trace	.292	2.143a	3.000	22.00	.124
	Roy's Largest Root	.292	2.143a	3.000	22.00	.124
r1 ExpvsCtrl	Pillai's Trace	.209	1.934a	3.000	22.000	.154
	Wilks' Lambda	.791	1.934a	3.000	22.000	.154
	Hotelling's Trace	.264	1.934a	3.000	22.000	.154
	Roy's Largest Root	.264	1.934a	3.000	22.000	.154

Table 12 presents results of the tests run on first drafts of essays to determine if any significant difference occurs on any of these levels. With significance set at .05, the figures show that there is no significant difference between any of the first drafts considered as pairs or paired with the pretest (covariate). Nor is there a significant difference between any of the revisions considered together or with the pretest. In other words, multivariate tests showed that no significant within-subjects effects occurred.

Table 12
Tests of Within-Subjects Effects on First Drafts and Revisions

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
ed1 *	16.6	3	5.533	.796	.500
ed1 (Pretest) *	16.057	3	5.352	.770	.515
ed1 (ExpvsCtrl) *	14.400	3	4.8	.690	.561
ed1 (Error) *	500.577	72	6.952		
r1 *	24.518	3	8.173	1.604	.196
r1 (Pretest) *	24.579	3	8.193	1.608	.195
r1 (ExpvsCtrl) *	17.600	3	5.867	1.152	.330
r1 (Error) *	366.785	72	5.094		

Table 13 summarizes the results of tests run to determine if any linear pattern exists among either the first drafts or the revisions considered as a group. With significance set at .05, the results show that there is no significant trend on a linear scale, in either a positive or a negative direction. That is, multivariate tests showed that no significant within-subjects contrasts in a linear dimension occurred.

Table 13
Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts for first drafts and revisions

Source (r1): linear	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
ed1	.743	1	.743	.078	.782
Pretest ed1	.274	1	.274	.029	.866
ExpvsCtrl ed1	5.807	1	5.807	.613	.441
Error ed1	227.407	24	9.475		
r1	2.101	1	2.101	.266	.611
Pretest r1	2.854	1	2.854	.361	.553
ExpvsCtrl r1	.028	1	.028	.004	.953
Error r1	189.513	24	7.896		

- Does directed revision result in significantly better written product as measured by expert holistic scoring?

The quantitative test (repeated measures ANCOVA) indicates that no statistically significant difference exists between the first drafts and the revisions in either group. The

entrance composition scores show that the subjects' writing skills placed them in close proximity to each other numerically; in other words, the clustering effect appears in the small standard deviations. A cursory examination of sample means reveals the fact that the revisions in both groups represent a decrease in scores as recorded by expert holistic grading. However, the differences are not significant.

2. Is peer feedback as effective in improving student writing as instructor feedback?

I found no statistically significant difference between the development in writing in the experimental (peer-reviewed) group as measured by the change of score from revisions to first drafts of the next essay projects and that of the control group.

3. Does peer feedback result in development as measured by change in score from revision to first draft of the next essay project?

I found no statistically significant development in writing in the experimental group as measured by the change of score from revisions to first drafts of the next essay project.

4. Does instructor feedback result in development as measured by change in score from revision to first draft of the next essay project?

I found no statistically significant development in writing in the control (instructor-reviewed) group as measured by the change of score from revisions to first drafts of the next essay project.

Qualitative Section

The data for this section come from the series of semi-structured, fifteen-minute interviews I conducted with twenty-three participants in the study during the last week of a fifteen-week semester. The six questions that I posed (orally) supplemented the quantitative tests

run on numerical data by providing the perspective of the students on the processes involved in writing revisions and on other related issues as well. In a post-positivist sense, the answers to my research questions cannot lie only in numbers: the subjective viewpoints of those undergoing an experience must be privileged to provide data of an entirely different kind. How successful the revision process had been in helping these students to improve their writing proficiency can, after all, be determined by those most directly involved. I also wanted to investigate their thoughts on what activities, besides the writing of the first drafts and revisions, had helped them to progress. The interviews also gave me a chance to look into their views on the topics and their possible role in making them successful writers on specific essay events.

Students' Perception of Changes in Their Writing

Asking the first question, about whether or not the interviewees had seen changes in their writing, gave me the idea that students felt generally satisfied with their English composition work. In fact, all except two answered “yes” directly. One said he “didn’t know” and “wasn’t sure” if he had improved. The only student who had seen no improvement gave this answer: “Not much, not really much. I don’t know what is the difference. In 187 (the previous course) I need to get an 80 to get in 188, but now I get 85 on my essays. But I didn’t know the difference between the composition, but my points are up.” This response raises the issue of teacher subjectivity with respect to grading. Instructors naturally tend to give students higher and higher scores as the semester progresses, perhaps at times without any basis. The quantitative tests applied to the essays show that, in fact, participating students’ scores did not correspond to the instructor’s grading of them.

Improvement in development. Participants gave quite similar answers when asked how their writing had changed. One of the most common responses involved improvement in development, mentioned by almost half of the participating students. The idea of using better or more examples was raised by several students. Cindy said, “It’s hard to change the way I write, but I add more details,” while Robert had this to say: “I used to have a problem with giving specific examples; just now I am getting better at this because in my native language when we are writing essays, we are not giving specific examples; we speak in general.” Another aspect of development pointed out as an improved area was ease of expression. Herb said, “I don’t know; writing for me is much more easier (sic). I am getting better at expressing my ideas.” From Melissa came this observation: “(Before) I wrote papers that I had only one paragraph. Now I think I improved.”

Improvement in morphology and syntax. The other major category of improvement was in sentence-level issues, especially with respect to morphology and syntax (grammar). Nine of the 21 had seen improvement in this area. Lenny’s comment about his accuracy summarized this point: “I use to make mistakes every other second of the day. And now I feel comfortable to write an essay without many mistakes.” Most specific grammar issues involved verb tense or form. Anna said, “And now I have to say something is in present perfect.” From Alan on the same topic came, “I feel that my grammar has improved. For example, I used to have a problem using ‘have ’and ‘had.’” Noel felt that his subject-verb agreement was better: “I didn’t put the ‘s’ like when we talking (about) ‘one.’” Edith pointed to improvement in her knowledge of syntax when she said, “I feel like I can write more complex sentences more than before.” Andrea, too, had learned about English syntax: “You get to know better the sentences. She has

taught us stuff, like how to cut the sentence down and make it shorter. So I have been using that, which is helpful.”

Other areas of improvement. Knowing more words had helped a number of the students with their writing. Five of the twenty-one mentioned vocabulary as an area of significant improvement. Anna said, “I think that I know more words, and that makes it easier to say what I want in different words... I think it’s mostly from the vocabulary.” Andrea observed that, “The words I use are, writing-wise, better.” A couple talked about having more coherence, having learned about “transitions from paragraphs, how to transfer” (Frank), or “the connectors” (Don). Only one (Robert) mentioned content, while Alan alone discussed greater control in technological aspects of his writing. His comment was about the software program, Blackboard: “I haven’t used Blackboard before; we don’t have it back home. We usually use Microsoft Word; before we did it manually.”

Instructor as key factor in students’ progress

Concerning the idea of what made their writing improve, the overwhelming majority mentioned the efforts and techniques of the instructor as the key factor. Six students directly mentioned the instructors’ corrections and comments on their essays as having had the greatest positive effect on their writing throughout the semester. Andrea praised “the way she teaches,” and Frank said, “I think my teacher did a great job.” Several participants talked about the process of writing itself and practicing as key to their success. Two students pointed to grammar exercises as having been helpful. It is interesting that only two students mentioned peer work in a positive way with respect to their improvement in their writing. Matt and Manuel shared the opinion that “dividing us into groups” was useful.

Positive perceptions of peer group work

The key issue of the interview concerns how the students viewed the online group experience. Most students responded with both positive and negative comments. I have decided to focus on the frequently mentioned words in this section and to explore the various aspects of each concept that came out in the course of my discussions with the participants. When asked what advantages the group experience provided, students answered “ideas” most frequently, followed by “mistakes,” and, finally, “points of view.”

“Ideas” as an advantage of peer group work online. Many participants mentioned “ideas” as the greatest advantage to working online in groups, with peer essays available for perusal and review. Even though only the experimental group (section) was responsible for giving peer feedback, both classes had been divided into groups for online posting of the essays. All feedback, whether from peers or the instructor, was available to the whole class as well. So students could read as much or as little of others’ work as motivation and time permitted.

In addition, students worked in their groups to choose the topic about which they would write for a particular essay. From a choice of three topics that the experimenter had written to tie in with readings from the text, each group decided on one for them all to write on in a face-to-face meeting conducted during class-time. Therefore, these various group activities became the context for discussion. Some of the “ideas” came from reading others’ essays; some were gained from peer feedback; some concerned “ideas” for a specific topic and were primarily generated during the class group activity.

Sharing ideas. Anna referred to the reading of other students’ essays as an advantage of group work “because everybody has different ideas.” On the same topic, Matt said, “I like to work in a group. They help you and you help them, and you can get information from them and

ideas about things.” Both students seem to appreciate getting “ideas” as a general concept, unrelated specifically to the topic at hand. And Angel had this to say: “When I like an essay, I read them... Sometimes on the Internet I really like how they are written, and sometimes I read second revision. I really like how they wrote because they had some really good ideas.” Winona put it this way: “I want to see what other people think, the way they write. I just want to know what is in their mind.” Melissa took advantage of the group activities in various ways to get ideas: “...we can share ideas about the writing. We can help each other. One group I’ll read their feedback. I think different topics from mine because I wanted to know what the ideas were. Some because of the topic and some because of the ideas I disagreed with. Well, I would say it is good to read other people’s essays and to think of ideas in groups.”

Learning from others. Lenny drove home the point that the online group activity helped him get “ideas” in the general sense of information, or education. He said, “I like reading the essay. Well, it is very important because we share ideas. If we have time, we can share much more talking together. I’m from Haiti, and other students are from other places, so we have to talk to get common ideas. Well, it is important to work in groups because we share common ideas and we have fun to talk about subjects and topics.” Robert also pointed out the opportunities for cross-cultural education inherent in E.S.L. group work. He had this to say: “It helps because I can share my opinion. I can listen to others’ opinions, and a lot of my class is from different countries. And I learn about their cultures and background. I think it’s great; it’s teamwork.”

Intertextuality. A number of students used the word “ideas” in the specific context of getting prepared to write on a particular topic. The meaning in this case refers to either a brainstorming type of activity conducted during class-time in small groups or to the act of

reading student essays posted on Blackboard. Manuel said, “(We) share ideas before we write and we help each other. I think it is good to work in a group because you can get ideas from them.” Andrea used the essays of other students online for the same purpose: “If, for some reason, I did not get to type my essay before and some people had already posted it and I like to read theirs and get an idea of what they wrote and then write mine.” Winona said, “It does help if we really think about a topic. We have more ideas to bring some more.”

Seeing “mistakes.” Participants used the word “mistakes” often in answering the question of what the advantages of group work were. As with the word “ideas”, however, they used the word in different contexts and, as a result, gave it a variety of meanings. Most frequently, the students talked about “mistakes” they had made in grammar, sentence structure, or organization, and indicated that the group experience had helped them because most of their peers habitually made the same “mistakes.” Manuel, in fact, said just that: “I don’t know. I think it’s helpful because most of us make the same mistakes. So I think it’s helpful to read other people’s papers....When you read your group’s papers, that is helpful. It is hard to find your own mistakes. When I read my paper, I find it perfect. But when you read others, you see mistakes.” As with the word “ideas” also, students referred to the various group activities as providing benefits in helping them with mistakes. These activities included reading peer essays online, receiving feedback from peers, and viewing feedback from the instructor to peers about their essays. Melissa said, “I like to read their essays with my classmates because I see mistakes in grammar and organization.” Adam responded in this way: “(Group work) is a good thing for students to see mistakes. I think it’s better (than getting feedback from the instructor). First I was, like, I don’t know. It’s hard, but then you get used to it. I think they helped me developed my sentences.”

E.S.L. students welcome criticism. The preponderance of references to mistakes in these interviews points to the E.S.L. students' preference for criticism referred to in the research. As Hyland (1995) points out, the international students differ from native speakers in mistrusting positive feedback and seeking negative, or critical, comments instead. This set of interviews supports that proposition. Herb offered the following view of peer feedback: "Some are critics. Because I like to know what is wrong with my essay. Sometimes I can know what is good, so I really want to know my errors... Sometimes when you write an essay, you put everything you got there and you think it is good. But sometimes the corrections or the peer responses tell you something and you try to change some main points and you correct it." Alan said, "If I had time, I check that the essays and I check (the) teacher's. My group... yes, I tried to see their mistakes—everything, grammar. And besides seeing just my mistakes, I see other students' mistakes." Robert used a comparative approach to finding his errors: "The benefit of working in a group to me was just pure comparison. I could compare my essay to my class's essay. When I read it, I can catch some spelling corrections or grammatical mistakes."

"Points of view" as an advantage of peer group work online. Besides "ideas" and "mistakes", "points of view" came up frequently in these interviews. Students saw group work as providing the advantage of a multiplicity of perspectives in various ways. Yancy had this to say on the subject: "I think you should get advice from a lot of people, not just the teacher. You need to know what everyone thinks so that you can make it better... If I had to choose between the teacher and the student, I would choose the student. I do like to have different responses. Like one guy did not really focus on my examples and one guy was thinking about my grammar. I like when many people respond." The comments from Adam showed that he held the same view: "I guess it's a good idea to get feedback from other students because other students might be good

at grammar, but the other student might be good at the development or the structure, so it helps me.” Anna agreed: “In some of the feedback, I get many of them tell me (sic) what they think about my essay and what they think about my ideas, and if they agree with what I wrote. I can know that they are thinking the same thing or if they don’t agree with what I wrote.” Angel said that, as a result of group work, “Now I have learned to understand different point of views.” Finally, Andrea contributed this comment on the benefits of getting many points of view: “Because I like to know what other people think. If a student and a teacher give you feedback, that’s a benefit because you have two people looking at your essay and two points of view. And you can say, ‘This person is saying this, and this person is saying this. And let me see if I can do both because both could see something wrong and the other something else.’”

Negative views of peer group work

The question about what was not helpful about group work yielded much greater volume of response that did the question about what was helpful. In general, the participants seemed more expansive and answered with more conviction. I had the impression that, being a generally polite and considerate group, many of the interviewees had made an effort to find something positive about the experience. But when given a chance to voice reservations and complaints, a strong voice of conviction often came through.

Time constraints. Some of the more minor complaints involved a lack of time to fulfill the requirements of the assignment with the peer group and a lack of effort on the part of group members. With respect to the time involved in completing the peer group assignments, Steve said, “Well, I don’t like it because it’s kind of extra work. You have to write an essay and then you have to write a peer response.” Jack agreed: “I just don’t really like it. It was more work.” Matt indicated that he didn’t always read his group’s revisions because he “didn’t have time.”

Noel made the following comment on the topic of time management: “I don’t think that students would take the time to correct every little mistake. But the teacher, she cares only about you learning. So she corrects every little mistake. I don’t think they would spend the time to do that.”

Lack of interest. This comment raises the related issue of lack of effort or interest on the part of group members. Melissa spent some time ruminating on what went wrong with the project, and she seemed to conclude that a lack of interest underlay the difficulties. She said, “I really don’t know...I think I had a good group, a responsible one. But some member (sic) did not give helpful feedback. Maybe, yes, they didn’t feel comfortable to say what they think about my essay; maybe they were not interested.” Jack corroborated this observation and pointed to himself as an example of a student lacking interest. He said, “Actually, I don’t much care about the other students’ development. I have lots to do, so I read other students’ writing, but I don’t care if his writing is developed or ‘Oh, this is much better than before.’” As a general comment, he said, “I think people are so busy, so they are not serious...Some people don’t care and take advantage.”

Poor quality of feedback. Another problem voiced by a number of participants concerned the quality of the feedback. A couple of students mentioned the fact that essays or feedback might not be posted on a timely basis. Jack said, “I just hate group work because you know people don’t work on time.” Susan said, “In my group we have some people who don’t even post essays on time. And I don’t have time to read.” The major complaint about feedback, however, focused on the intrinsic quality. Herb said about his peer group members, “Sometimes they’re not right.” From Winona came this comment: “The student will write something just to get it done.” Comparing student feedback with teacher comments, Steve said, “She always tells me about wrong thing and don’t do this again. But students never talk like that, just, um ‘I think this

is really awkward.” Mona mentioned a problem with the first essay, in particular. She said, “The corrections were not complete. English is not my native language, and I want to improve my language. Sometimes talking with international students is not the best way to help.”

Problem of students’ being on the same level. Perhaps by way of explanation for the poor quality of feedback, a number of students pointed out the fact that students are on the same level. Steve said, “Like I told you, students sometimes don’t want to tell the truth because they are student and I am a student. So we are the same level. So they say, ‘I can’t even explain you did wrong thing.’ And I don’t say, ‘Hey, you’re wrong. Don’t do that.’ I am really hard to correct another student’s writing because my writing is also not good. But I would have to review another student’s writing, so that’s really hard.” Winona said, “I would read, but I really didn’t believe in it (peer feedback). I don’t really follow what they say. I mainly follow what they teacher says. I would say, ‘Is it really true that I have a problem?’ I don’t really see it.”

Other complaints about peer feedback. Specific issues concerning the poor quality of group work came out of the interview process. Several students spoke about the trouble they had had understanding what their peers were trying to communicate to them. This problem resulted in awkwardness in some cases. Angel said, “Sometimes I don’t understand what they wrote. Sometimes you don’t know how to express what you feel about (the) essay. You try to be a gentleman.” Melissa said the feedback was often of poor quality: “Some member(s) did not have helpful feedback. All of the members put input on my feedback, but they didn’t write good comments...because they sometimes wrote like your paragraph has mistakes, and what are the mistakes.” Anna expressed the preference for feedback about editing problems rather for revision: “I don’t get any comments on how I write but what I write. But how I write, like, it’s not that my sentences are well-structured, like well-written. But it’s like general things. So I

think it doesn't help me a lot." Mona said that for some of the essay projects, "the corrections were not complete."

Problems reviewing peers' essays. Participants complained about quality problems not only in the feedback from peers, but also in the student essays they were required to review. Herb expressed this position when he said, "Sometimes my friends don't write so well. So we got many others that, we don't know, sometimes, we think it's okay. But it is not. Sometimes they're not right. And sometimes I don't like to read those essays because they are not so well-written as the ones in the book. So I really don't like that." Winona also felt that reading other students' essays was less than helpful: "I can see that they have problems, but I cannot see it in my own. That's my main problem." Steve spoke of the difficulties having to write feedback to a stronger student. He said, "I would have to review another student's writing, so that's really hard. One student he is really good; he is a really good writer. And I think he is one of the best.... When I review (his) writing, that's really talent to me because his writing is much better than me. And I know that. So how can I review the essay which is much better than me? Because he is much better than me. It's like this: 'Okay, your writing is strong, blah, blah, and there are some problems. Here is some grammar stuff. So everything is good except some grammar mistakes.' But I have also grammar mistakes. It's very weird to me."

General complaints about group work. Several participants let me know that they object to working with peers (at least in E.S.L. classes). Jack said, "I just hate group work.... Even though my group members I try to help, but I don't know. But I think American people sound better than me, what they are trying to say. I just don't really like it." Anna offered this summary of her feelings about peer review: "It's not a good thing. I just know it." Melissa agreed: "I

would not recommend to make the students to give feedback to other students. It's not helpful, and it was not helpful to me. It didn't work."

Preference for Instructor Feedback

Many of the students expressed a preference for feedback from the instructor. A number of the participants used the word "trust" in saying that they could count on the teacher to give reliable suggestions and corrections. Winona stated directly, "I trust the teacher more because students are really on the same level. The teacher is more professional." Don also used the key word "trust" in answering this question: "I would rather have feedback from the instructor. I trust the teacher better. I...wouldn't feel comfortable with student feedback. You are learning from the teacher, and I just feel more comfortable from the teacher feedback." Adam said, "... (W)hen I get feedback from the teacher, I improved more. Because maybe students make mistakes." Melissa expressed this view: "I had feedback from the teacher in 186 (a previous writing course, and I'd prefer that because I know my mistakes; I can change it. I can improve my revisions and my essays and my writing." From Angel came this: "I think it is good to get feedback from the teacher about vocabulary or something like that when you make mistakes because my peers cannot correct my mistakes. But teacher feedback can more focus on vocabulary and grammar mistakes, syntax." Anna said, "I get better information from the teacher than from my classmates." Steve agreed: "You know students can help me, but teacher really knows much better than students." Jack said he would have preferred to receive feedback from only the instructor "...because teacher is native American. They know English." Frank said on this topic, "I would like the instructor's feedback is the right way because mostly I think that ...grammar is really important in the next course. I think teacher can show the right way, but students don't

have it right 100% for the grammar. And students make some mistakes. And teachers are a lot better.”

The Importance of the Topic

Without exception, the students I interviewed said that the topics had had a significant impact on the kind of writing they had been able to produce. When asked how important a factor the topics had been in their writing success or failure, most of the participants responded, “Very important.” (One said “really” important and another “pretty” important.)

Having enough ideas. The major concern was having enough “ideas” to be able to write a proficient essay on a particular topic. Melissa said, “Sometimes I like to write, but then, when I start writing, I don’t know what to write about....because when I go home and I see the topic again, I say, “Oh my gosh, I don’t know what to write about.” Anna responded, “There are topics that I am, like, ‘Okay, what should I write here?’” Yancy said that...“very, very difficult topics you don’t know about it so well. You have to investigate it.” And Don illustrated his point that the topics were “very” important with this description: “There were some topics that I sat in front of the computer, and I was speechless. I was, like, blank.”

A strong link emerged between the concept of the “good” topic and the word “ideas.” For example, Yancy said, “We choose. We agree that everyone have more ideas, something we know something about.” And Melissa put it this way: “A topic that you can share your thoughts, your ideas. But a good topic is maybe, if you like the topic, you can write about it with your ideas and your experiences.” Noel made this connection when he said, “(The best topic is) the one that would be easiest to write about or have more ideas about.”

A good topic is one that is “easy.” Most of the students used the word “easy” to describe the ideal topic. A good topic is “kind of easy to write for me” (Jack), “easier to write on”

(Winona), “the easiest one we can write on” (Susan). The term “easy”, though, was often linked with the point of development; the “easy” topic seemed to mean one that offered the students the best opportunities to expand their thesis statements with supporting points and evidence. Frank said, “Then we’ll talk about which topic is better ‘cause why this topic is better (is) because it’s easier and how to write it. I had a lot of things to talk about.” Matt concurred: “Before we choose, we must ask each other what is easier or what we could write about more.” Adam made the same point: “The topic I really like is the topic that I can write more on because some I had no information about.”

Interest level as a key element in the topic. Anna and Susan expressed the opinion that the topics were “interesting.” Anna added that, because they were interesting, “They make me think a lot.” Although she found the topics interesting, Susan “would have preferred to have more.” However, most of the participants felt that they had had enough choice in the selection of the topics for the essays. From the three given for each thematic unit, each small group picked one of the topics on which they would all write. For the most part, this system seemed to satisfy the students. Jack, Winona, and Susan stated this view directly. Don and Noel indicated that they had had enough choices in the topic selection process, and Frank thought the amount of choice was good in the beginning. “(But) at the end, it got harder and harder.”

Complaints about topics. A couple of students felt dissatisfied with the topic selection process. Melissa observed that her group had not taken sufficient time to select the topic and that, as a result, she had experienced difficulty when it came time to write her essay. She said, “I wanted to change my topic every time. But we couldn’t because we decided on the group. And we can’t change the topic.”

Robert's complaints did not concern the topic selection process so much as the topics themselves. "... (S)ome topics are really boring to me because I write better when I write something I am interested in. I can't say they were bad. I just say that I was not interested." A few other participants shared this view. Steve, for instance, said, "... (T)he very first topic was about our country. And that was too easy and too general, and it was the same thing.... Everybody knew the answer.... The topic is the answer. Why ask me? You know the answer." When asked what makes a good topic, Don, Andrea and Lenny also focused on the content and emphasized the fact that a topic should be meaningful. Andrea said, "You have (to have) a reason to talk about something."

When students offered their opinions of specific topics, none agreed. Melissa expressed frustration that she couldn't write about her own country. But Steve indicated that topics about the students' own countries were "too easy." He complained that the topics as a whole were "too general." Anna insisted that she had to "know the topic," though. She mentioned one specific topic, on "spouse and marriage," that she didn't know about and that, therefore, she couldn't write on. Noel disagreed, however, and said that the topic on "having a good spouse" was one of his favorites. His other favorite topic was on cell phone use. He disliked the last topic, which asked the students to role play being president of a student organization; he found that one boring. Another topic in the same unit, on leadership, asked the students to identify the characteristics of a good leader. Frank said about this topic: "I don't really have any idea how to write it. I don't want to be a leader, so I don't know." Don said, "I have heard from the students that some of the students didn't like the topics. Maybe if we could write about something about life or personal experiences or human behaviors. Like common problems in the world."

All Class Activities Seen as Helpful

The last major area I covered in the interviews with the students concerned which activities had helped them most during the semester. When asked what the activities were, I mentioned the fact that the course consisted of writing first drafts and revisions, but also grammar exercise homework, reading assignments of model essays, group work on student essays, and a number of classroom activities that had been developed by the instructor. A few students took the position that “everything helps.”

The key role of the instructor. Some participants reiterated their belief that the instructor’s skill in either classroom presentation of grammar rules, her review of homework exercises, or the feedback she gave in either revising or editing tasks for essay-writing had helped them most. Winona emphasized the importance of specific teachers when she said, “Different teachers like different things. Last semester, it was more details. And this semester, it’s more grammar.” Again, the idea that the teacher as authority was the primary factor in the course came out. Cindy said that the instructor had been beneficial “because she knows what’s wrong.” Mona made this observation: “... (E)ven when I try to use the book, it is good when the teacher checks my work.”

The act of writing itself brings about improvement. Ten of the participants said that the act of writing itself helped them to improve the most. They didn’t focus on the same aspect of the writing process, however. Melissa and Noel described the revision or editing stage of essay-writing as the most helpful. Robert pointed to not only the revising stage, but also the composing, or “first draft” phase, when he said, “To me, I think the most important thing is the structure.” Lenny suggested that he considered a more casual, less structured type of writing most helpful: “Every day, like, if I’m home, without doing anything, I will write something down and see how I can make it much more easy to read.” Several other students agreed with

Lenny and named “practice” as the most important aspect of writing. Mona used a combination of activities, in a kind of blended technique. She described writing an essay and, at the same time, checking grammar in the textbook.

Grammar practice viewed favorably. Generally, the participants expressed favorable opinions of the grammar work they had done over the course of the semester, either in class or as homework. Most indicated that “yes,” the grammar exercises had been helpful, although a few said that they had some trouble applying the rules to their own writing. Jack was one of these: “Of course, it’s helpful, but you know, but grammar, my opinion, grammar, I have to study myself....I forget everything after class.” Winona also had trouble applying the grammar: “It (doing grammar exercises) did help on the exam. But it did not really help in my writing. Sometimes I remember, but most of the time, I don’t.” Robert said that he had experienced great difficulty with the application of grammar rules to his writing because of the large number of exceptions to those rules. Adam hedged with the answer that he could apply “some of them, yes.” However, Melissa, Edith, Anna, Noel, and Lenny answered in the affirmative when asked if they had been able to apply the grammar rules they had learned in class and on homework assignments to their own essay writing.

Few credit peer group work for their improvement. Comments in this section about group work were sparse. When group work was mentioned, the feedback was usually negative, however. Alan said that he had had no sense during the semester that he was part of a group of any kind. Andrea suggested that the online format for group work be abandoned in favor of face-to-face group sessions. Although she said that there wasn’t any activity that hadn’t helped her writing during the semester, she expressed this view on the online group peer review: “I think that they should talk about their essays like face-to-face in their groups and it will get a lot

better...She should let us come in, sit in groups, rather than online, because we could talk about our mistakes. And I could ask the person, ‘Why do you think this is wrong?’ Online you don’t get to ask that. The communication would be much better.”

Emerging Themes

The second part of this qualitative investigation concerns what important themes emerged indirectly, that is, not in response to the interview questions. In order to accomplish this goal, I returned to the transcripts with an eye to what the students may have been suggesting were important questions to bring up in the course of my research.

Lack of Fluency

The students used the same words (“ideas,” “mistakes,” for instance) when talking about their writing, and this point seemed extremely significant when I considered the plight of the second language students who are asked to compose essays in English on a variety of topics, many of which they have no familiarity with. They may simply not have had the language to give nuanced answers, in many cases, and this fact could very well have created an impediment to the interviewing process. But the reality is that most foreign students at this level of study lack the fluency and the vocabulary to go into much depth in answering the questions. So, when most of them said that the best topics were ones on which they had something to say, or “ideas” for, a large part of what they meant must have been that they lacked the idioms and lexicon that allowed them to write easily on the topic. In other words, they were constricted by their lack of fluency. My interview questions did not deal with the issue of fluency at all, and I wonder if developing it shouldn’t be one of the primary focuses of any instruction in English as a Second Language.

Several participants raised the issue of fluency's being a critically important aspect of success in essay writing. Susan said that "talking to native speakers" had helped her most to improve her writing. She added, "I have a lot of friends that are international, and so they don't help me too much. I have to be with the American in order to improve my English. But I don't have American friends. But still I watch T.V. and listen to (the) radio." She also acknowledged the key role that vocabulary plays in developing fluency: "I can open the dictionary and see a word, but I don't know in what context I am suppose(d) to use it." The role that fluency plays in the success of the E.S.L. student cannot be understated. Because fluency develops outside school at least as much as in the classroom, it is not strictly in the purview of the university to foster fluency as part of an academic program. But exposure of English of all kinds provides useful vocabulary and idioms that enable E.S.L. students to navigate through composition courses with greater success. So many factors play into the development of fluency, including the degree of dependence on the original culture, personality traits, work and family situation.

Winona told me in the interview that she had had success in writing courses. (Her exact words were these: "I do well on the writing tests."). And then, when she went on to describe her approach, she indicated that she attributed this success to her fluency in English: "But when I am writing, I don't think much about grammar. I just write, and I write in different tenses. I don't know when to use it or how to use it. (Doing grammar exercises) did help on the exam. But it did not really help in my writing. Sometimes I remember, but most of the time, I don't." Lenny may have been talking about fluency, or "naturalness" of expression when he talked about his technique for improving his writing. He said, "Every day, like, if I'm home, without doing anything, I will write something down and see how I can make it much more easy to read."

Herb also spoke about the importance of fluency in writing well in English. He said, “I speak Spanish--- my native language is Spanish—so sometimes I need to express myself. So to have an idea how you write an essay in English, I have more ideas than before (by reading model essays). Sometimes I don’t know how to say many words. And to read an essay that is not mine helps me get more. I don’t know how to say it.” He is not discussing content here, but, rather, the language itself—the idioms and lexicon that pertain to a particular subject. And perhaps that is really what Adam meant when he said that he “read things to see the style.”

The Role of Schemata in Writing, Not Just in Reading

Another major point came out of reviewing the transcripts for themes that were not so immediately apparent: the importance of schemata in not only reading, but also writing. The notion that background knowledge affects the reading of a text is more widely understood than the role that schemata play in the writing process. When the participants responded to the question of what makes a topic a “good” one, many of them said that a good topic was one that they had “ideas” about, or one that was “easy.” In reviewing the transcripts, I considered the possibility that, once again, the constricted language of the students prevented them from providing nuanced answers, which they could have easily given in an interview in their original, or first, languages. Perhaps they did not mean “ideas” as “opinions”, and “easy” as “simple” or “not difficult”; it seems quite likely that they were saying that they had no preparation or experience with the topic.

Familiarity with the subject and background information in the field seemed to be of primary concern here. Lenny was one participant who seemed to link the concept of “ideas” with having background information in the subject area: “(What is important about a topic is) the sense of it and the meaning of it. If I feel comfortable to write about this, well, I have enough

ideas to provide about it.” The role that schemata play is clear in the following comments from participants: (A good topic is one on which)... “I think I had a lot to talk about it (Andrea);” “I had a lot of things to talk about (Frank);” “...you can share your thoughts, ideas...and your experiences (Melissa);” “You have things that you can say (Angel).” Adam agreed, and he said that some of the topics he had “no information about.”

Going one step further with this notion of schema theory’s role in composition studies took me back to the comments of one student who suggested that the grouping in the class should have been done on the basis of students’ common concerns. Robert said, “It (group work) is a little more complicated than just getting students together because I think some more research needs to be done about it because people have different interests, and I think this has to be considered.” His viewpoint provides the basis for the “Writing across the Curriculum” movement. Although this topic had no connection to the research questions, it raises a fundamental question about the role of writing instruction in a Liberal Arts curriculum. Whether the humanities should bend to the specific conventions and genre expectations of other disciplines in instructing and evaluating composition students is an issue that has yet to be resolved.

Instructors’ Granting of Higher Grades Despite Lack of Improvement

Reviewing the transcripts after having run the quantitative tests, I came across the comments of Steve about his failure to see any progress in his writing. The numbers support his perception in a general way; the improvement throughout the course of the semester did not measure significantly. His observation was that the instructor of his writing course had been giving him higher scores on essays throughout the semester; however, he did not see positive changes in his writing. This comment speaks to a tendency on the part of instructors to give

increasingly high scores on writing projects over time in an effort to encourage their students. As is natural, too, the instructors become personally invested in the success of their students and seek personal gratification from the progress their students make. Whether or not the writing itself improves is an unanswered question, as reflected in the holistic blind readings of “objective” faculty who took part in this study.

Summary

The quantitative tests run on data based on students’ essay scores indicated that no significant progress occurred through the course of the semester, in either the peer-reviewed or instructor-reviewed sections, and that no significant development occurred as measured by the change from one revision to the next first draft. However, in the interviews, students generally expressed satisfaction with what they perceived to be improvement in their writing skills.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Contrary to expectation, this study indicates that E.S.L. students make no progress in any aspect of their writing performance as measured by expert holistic scoring over the course of one semester. The quantitative tests show that revision, whether scaffolded by peers or by the instructor, does not result in significantly better writing, as measured by holistic scoring. Furthermore, no development was seen from the revisions of the essay projects to the first drafts of the next essay assignment. All but three of the subjects succeeded in the course in which they were enrolled, however, by achieving a passing score on the final composition proficiency test, or by gaining approval of a committee reviewing portfolios (in the case of students who unexpectedly failed the proficiency essay). In doing so, they proved to be typical sections of this course. Furthermore, most of these students, following the pattern among E.S.L. courses at this university, will pass into freshman English composition within one or two more semesters.

In this chapter, I offer a number of possible explanations for these somewhat shocking findings. I see great significance in the fact that most of the participants who were interviewed perceived growth in their writing proficiency, in addition to their other English language skills. This perception, coupled with the reality that the vast majority of the participating students passed the course in which they were enrolled, leads me to the conclusion that other key factors played a role in the students' success. Their progress did not show up in the findings of this study, but the fact that they must have progressed in some important way seems indisputable, due to their subsequent success in higher level courses. Further research could involve investigating these students' performance in subsequent English courses to identify these

elements. Conducting research of this kind over a longer period of time could yield answers to these questions.

Alternatively, the affective aspects of their experience may have had a great impact on their performance. Their participation in the course might have given them increased confidence, especially considering the positive view most of them held of their instructor and of the course in general. Another explanation is that they may have made more effort to prepare for the final, high-stakes essay test, administered as the exam for the course than they had for the four essay projects that constituted the data for this research. The students' grade was based on the exit essay, after all, and that final test project was not included in the parameters of this study.

Moreover, a preliminary look at the qualitative data suggests that peer editing may not work so well with E.S.L. writing students as it does in native speaker composition classes. Unlike in first language classrooms, second language students, due to cross-cultural expectations, tend to see the teacher as the authority, and the only one qualified to evaluate or critique their writing. The students expressed the idea that they "trusted the teacher more," whereas native speakers preferred getting feedback from their classmates. Another interpretation rests on the recognition of the limitations of peers to guide and direct students, especially in contrast to an effective, well-trained instructor.

Modeling, as Bandura (1977) points out, is a vitally important part of the teaching-learning interaction. The qualitative data point to the significance of Bandura's comments about the importance of modeling as one method of scaffolding in the Vygotskian framework of learning. In the case of E.S.L. peer groups, students expressing mistrust of their peers' feedback communicate rather a "blind leading the blind" feeling about the process. Whether or not the students have the expertise necessary to scaffold their classmates in doing revisions of their

writing, if the student writers lack confidence in their advisors, the process cannot function effectively. The fact that the modeling peers had provided to their group members was not authoritative became clear in the interviews. Students expressed doubt that their peers were providing them with adequate modeling in the form of the peer feedback. They trusted the teacher but felt that, because their classmates were on the same level, feedback about their writing from students was of questionable value. Especially in the areas of local error (grammar, syntax, and vocabulary), students tended not to view each other as sufficiently qualified to make corrections on one another's papers.

Bandura points out the complexity of the modeling process: far more than just proficiency in English goes into a successful modeling event. Such factors may include gender and age, for instance. Even though gender and age were included in the quantitative tests and considered as variables possibly having an interaction, no significance appeared. Whether more direct feedback from the instructor on the peer review process itself is necessary should be the focus of further research on this topic, along with the more subtle aspects of relationship among those giving and receiving peer review.

Nonetheless, talking with participants in the interviews about the feedback from peers revealed a widely-held view that the quality of the feedback was poor or inconsistent due to either a lack of interest or knowledge. Another complaint about the peer review process was that it was time-consuming. This view corroborates the research conducted by Belcher (2000) with native speaker students of writing. Additional qualitative data support the research of Harris (1992), who found that peer response groups have mixed results.

Even though the design of the study encouraged feedback about the more global issues of content and rhetoric, second language problems arose and often prevented the students from

effectively giving or receiving feedback. As Zamel indicated in his 1983 study, only very advanced E.S.L. students give feedback on a global level. Where students clearly did benefit from group work, however, was the in group discussion, “brainstorm,” or sharing of ideas. Participants talked about how sharing ideas, either through discussion or through reading other students’ papers, made the writing of essays easier, particularly with respect to development. The sharing of ideas was viewed as good for general edification, too, not just for writing essays. Several students talked about the educational value of seeing what others think. In this sense, the multiplicity of views and perspectives present in every E.S.L. classroom is a great resource.

The teacher of the E.S.L. classroom remains the repository of knowledge when it comes to fluency issues and many grammar points. The many exceptions to grammar rules and idiosyncratic features of the American English language may mean that review of students’ work by a native speaker is invaluable as a source of feedback. E.S.L. students are so focused on “mistakes” that they edit prematurely in spite of being directed to observe and follow the (somewhat) discrete stages of the writing process.

Also, as Tudge (1990) points out, regression occurs along with progress in the uneven, back-and-forth pattern of development. Rather than a straight line of improvement, the scaffolded learner’s missteps and mistakes could cause an outside evaluator to conclude that development is not occurring. The fact that the blind, holistic readings did not score the revisions of the four essay projects significantly higher than the first drafts reflects this picture of the zpd: it is “around,” rather than consistently in front of the learner. Therefore, in order to judge development, a longer view must perhaps be taken. I recommend future research on this topic be conducted over a longer period of time.

Other explanations for the lack of significant progress in the revision process and the overall level of writing proficiency can be identified. The instruction, as a whole or with respect to either materials or pedagogy, may have been ineffective for these particular students. Alternatively, the scoring scale and the clustering of composition scores may have resulted in an insufficient range to measure change; indeed, the range of scores expected at this level consists of 78-84. A difference of seven points is a narrow margin in any case, and most of the participants did not advance even to that extent.

The role of topic choice cannot be overstated. The recommendation of Goodman and Goodman (1990) that students should choose topics for reading and writing whenever possible is corroborated by the qualitative data. The participants indicated that the topics made a significant difference in both the execution of their essays and their success as measured by the score given by their instructor. The fact that they had some choice of topic meant to some that they felt a degree of involvement in what they were writing. Furthermore, the writing that they did appeared to them socially meaningful activities and the tasks as authentic. From the qualitative data, however, the difficulty of pleasing everyone with the topics creates a challenge for every instructor; participants contradicted each other when asked which of their topics had been good and which bad. Nonetheless, the general view of the give and take process of peers working with ideas in groups emerged as a key advantage. This fact was apparent in the frequently expressed view that learning the opinions of the other students in their groups, and in other groups as well, had been edifying and also extremely interesting to them. Being privy to the many different “points of view,” especially on a cross-cultural level, on all the topics was singled out as one of the primary benefits of the peer group online essay project.

Two aspects of this study take me back to the work of Bartholomae. In writing about the state of composition as a field, Bartholomae observed that we writing instructors embrace a “discourse of error.” He further opined that we cannot accept the messy, risk-taking essays that we might admire for their authenticity of voice and clarity of purpose. Rather, we praise the writing that seems safe and clean because it is less controversial to do so.

Our inability to talk with each other about writing, about the student text and what it represents...leads us (or our institutions) to give awards to papers we do not believe in and to turn away from the papers we do, papers most often clumsy and awkward but, as we say to each other, ambitious, interesting, a sign of a student for whom something is happening. In spite of our positions as critics, as teachers we are trapped within a discourse of error that makes it impossible to praise the student paper that is disordered and disorderly. (Bartholomae, 1996, p.16)

This view was expressed in another context by Goodman and Goodman (1977), who view “mistakes” as “miscues” rather than errors. To them, miscues are viewed as evidence of readers’ using their pre-existing knowledge to negotiate texts. These phenomena are actually celebrated rather than excoriated in the Goodman “whole language” framework because they indicate that the learners are taking risks. Only in this way can development occur. Yet we as writing instructors refuse to tolerate error, much less celebrate it.

The lack of statistical significance on sample means resulting from the blind holistic readings showed that revisions were no better than the earlier version; the tests run showed little difference between the later first drafts and the earlier ones, or even the pretest. Because looking at the quantitative data in this study causes me to ask how the revision scores could be so often lower than those the students scored on the first drafts of the same essay project, I have

continued to look for other possible explanations. One such possible reason is that, very frequently, the direction given to students between the first and the second drafts (revisions) of a paper asked for greater development, more detail, and other areas of substantial reworking. These are not simple editing jobs. Therefore, the students were taking more risks in the course of doing their revisions, and they might have been producing works that were “disordered” and “disorderly,” to use Bartholomae’s words.

Bartholomae’s “discourse of error” is also reflected in the words of the E.S.L. students who focused so intently upon their “mistakes” and the correction of those errors. More than the native speaker groups involved in studies on composition, many E.S.L. students welcome and appreciate correction and criticism, particularly when they come from the instructor. Perhaps because of this difference in academic culture and expectation, the traditional relationship of student-instructor persists: the “I”-“thou”, formal positioning of the students as lower in status and value and, therefore, empty vessels needing to be filled with knowledge and strictly trained by the teacher.

The review of literature of this study raises the question of what role cultural studies should play in the field of composition. The work of Derrida (1978) and Bakhtin (1981) focuses on giving voice to marginalized students whose views should be heard and valued. To them, the topics for writing instruction would be meaningful to the students because they would be trained to position themselves in relationship to the authority that oppresses them. However, the E.S.L. writing class consists of so many disparate members that no stance with respect to an authority could be appropriate for them all. In fact, every language group, geographical region, socio-economic group and major field is represented. The only points of commonality are their need for increased proficiency in writing in English and the desire to obtain an undergraduate degree

at a North American university. Some students in these sections of English have more in common with the basic writer than others do. But the students who have been educated in American embassy schools, for instance, are as well prepared for higher education as students coming from excellent secondary schools in the United States. Their prognosis for success, as Liebman (1992) points out, is tied to the education they received in their home countries, and many of these underwent significantly more rigorous academic training than the immigrant students who graduated from a U.S. high school. In such a disparate community, perhaps the expressivist approach of encouraging writers to find their own voices through the modified strategies employed by the process movement based on the recommendation of Murray (1977) and Macrorie (1970) makes more sense than it would, for instance, in the more homogeneous populations of basic writers who are native speakers of English.

On the other hand, such a rich multi-cultural context for learning could provide a great resource for the writing teacher. It is, after all, a basic tenet of Vygotsky that learning occurs within a cultural and social milieu. To him, the process isolation of the writer would seem incorrect and unnatural. In this sense, the Vygotskian theory dovetails with that of cultural studies proponents, who suggest that academic writing must be seen as part of the larger social world of discourse (Trimbur, 1994). Perhaps the E.S.L. writing students could be led to position themselves within the broad cultural context of their specific writing community within the classroom. As McCormick asserted (1994), making students aware of their lenses in writing acknowledges the fact that writing occurs and is learned in rich social contexts. And the culture from which each student comes is clearly a unique lens.

In a very different sense, however, the presence of so many cross-cultural differences in the E.S.L. writing class may cause problems below the surface of the group interaction having to

do with different social values of group members. Accommodation and seeking support from others instead of criticism have been identified as Confucian societies' orientation with respect to group dynamics (Carson & Nelson, 1994; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). This collectivist instinct runs counter to the spirit of peer review, in which the feedback might be seen as hostile or offensive. Chinese students may be reluctant to initiate the feedback process because of their cultural training (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 2000). Another explanation for the interview participants' preference for teacher feedback could be the differing expectations students have in Asian cultures about the transmission of knowledge (Zhang, 1995). At best, the research shows that E.S.L. students welcome peer response only as a supplement to teacher review (Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, & Huang, 1998).

The failure of the peer or instructor review process to produce writing that was significantly better could be due to the fact that this academic activity does not directly lead to increased fluency in English, although any dealings conducted in the target language may result in higher proficiency. Fluency, though, rests in the control of idiom and social vocabulary. Besides accuracy and content, which are generally the focus of holistic scoring, the role of fluency in making a piece of writing effective cannot be overstated. Several students in the interviews mentioned having "natural"-sounding English as the greatest measure of success in writing. This aspect of language learning does not occur exclusively in the academic setting, but, rather, is a function of many complex factors, such as the work environment or social context in which the students operate. The key place that fluency has in effective writing points to the need to promote mastery of idiom and vocabulary specific to the assigned topics. These topics often are considered as outside the purview of the writing teacher, who in a mere three hours a week must assist the students in improving writing skills. But the fact that skills are integrated and that

any separation of them is arbitrary becomes clear when we consider the critical importance that fluency, or ease of expression, plays in success in not only writing courses, but in the undergraduate program as well.

In the interests of promoting fluent expression, thematic organization of not only units, but entire courses might be advisable. The qualitative data here indicate that making the reading/writing connection in fields that the students are interested in or already involved in and activating their schemata would enhance their ability to write effectively in English courses. Certainly, writers perform better when they control the concepts related to their topics and have the language with which to present their ideas. However, the community of writing instructors in higher education disagree about whether or not this type of writing is what we should aim for. Instruction could serve, alternatively, to broaden the experience and understanding of students rather than to facilitate their writing skills. Whether we as educators should force engineering students, for example, to write on non-technical issues clearly outside their fields in order to bring them the enlightenment we associate with an undergraduate degree from a North American university is a matter of serious debate in the academy. Proponents of “Writing across the Curriculum” seem to oppose this idea in favor of the “path of least resistance” for the students. In other words, the fact that students write better when they have familiarity with and information about the topic seems the more important aspect of writing instruction, and the one that should serve as the basis for the writing program. Therefore, the purpose of the university itself is at question here.

One proponent of “Writing across the Curriculum” pointed out in his research that instructors of writing at the freshman level are such a disparate group themselves that they cannot possibly reach consensus about what makes a piece of student writing effective (Broad,

2000). In fact, he identified seventy-four valid criteria that holistic scorers in a freshman English program used in rating student essays. In the face of this plethora of criteria, the lack of consensus about the essays that served as the basis for this study hardly seems surprising.

Because so few students' entry scores fell into the categories of either weak or strong writers, the question of which group benefited more from the peer review work could not be determined by the quantitative data. Indeed, the numbers were exceedingly small in both categories; a significant number of participants' scores fell into the middle range. Another question that went unanswered was the role technology played in the study. Little data developed on this issue, and what did emerge in the interviews was mixed with respect to the value of technology in writing instruction. Only two students mentioned technological factors as being significant in their performance: one student expressed the belief that learning to work in the Blackboard software program would be a boon to him in future composition work; another said she wished the group work had been conducted face-to-face rather than online.

The resistance of the participants in the interviews to their peers' feedback takes me back to the research on the ownership of text, with great implications for intellectual property, that Andrea Lundsford (2000) pointed out. That is, student authors who claim ownership of their texts reject the collaborative model of writing presented by Peter Elbow (1981) in his workshop format. But Lundsford maintains that the concept of "author" is an anachronism, a romantic notion that is losing its significance in the reality of contemporary methods of producing and publishing texts. In the context of the composition classroom in which group work has been instituted, when ideas are brainstormed, they are shared and become part of the public domain in the sense that group members may use them in their own essays. This collaborative model of

writing is becoming increasingly accepted also as technology makes available to all great numbers of ideas and texts of all sorts.

After all, according to Berlin (1996), the ability to collaborate and work in groups is one of the target skills that the contemporary university should strive to foster in its students, along with the ability to learn quickly on-the-job, a talent for multi-tasking, and extensive familiarity with technology. In his view, the content would clearly play a role that is less important than the process itself. Again, the purpose of the university itself is in question; whether we should strive to prepare students for the workplace and to provide them with skills that industry has identified as desirable in potential employees is at issue.

In summary, the mixed method design allowed me to investigate the questions through different avenues. In retrospect, I realize that the qualitative technique of interviewing was made more complex by both cross-cultural attitudes to authority and language problems that interfered with the clear communication of ideas; this portion was impeded in a number of instances by the limitations of the language proficiency and the culturally-based reticence of many of the participants. The further complication of cross-cultural expectations of group dynamics makes evaluating the success of collaborative groups in E.S.L. instruction even more problematic. In addition, although I did not include the factor of gender or age in the qualitative portion of the study, the effect of these elements in the process of both giving and receiving feedback bears investigation.

It is important to reiterate the fact that, although students in the experimental group expressed a preference for instructor feedback, they conceded that peer feedback might have benefited them as well, because, after all, “everything helps.” As a supplement to instructor review, peer feedback could offer advantages related to the multiple points of view represented

in every E.S.L. classroom. Much more research on the question of the efficacy of peer review in E.S.L. classes is needed. While educators continue to use collaboration as the basis for instruction, it may not be the most suitable method for students whose backgrounds and language profiles are so different. At least, instructors should take great care to assign peers to groups in such a way that they can work most effectively together.

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VITA

Kathryn Fiddler Butcher was born in Evanston, Illinois. While growing up, she moved with her family to Georgia, Tennessee, and Connecticut. After attending high school and college in Massachusetts, she completed an M.A. in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages at New York University. She taught at several private and public universities in the New York area after graduation. In 1979, she moved to New Orleans, Louisiana and began teaching at the state university where she still works. In addition to E.S.L. writing, she teaches freshman composition and introductory literature courses. When not grading essays or planning classes, Kathryn relaxes through yoga, golf, gardening, and photography.

Living in a number of different states has given her exposure to some of the varieties of American English and an opportunity to learn about the richness and complexity of the language. Throughout her teaching career, she has felt privileged to work with so many students striving to improve their language proficiency and hopes to continue her adventures with the English language.