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## Exploring the Relationship between English Composition Teachers' Beliefs about Written Feedback and Their Written Feedback Practices

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Exploring the Relationship between English Composition Teachers'  
Beliefs about Written Feedback and Their Written Feedback Practices

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

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To Philip, Anna, and Amy:  
Your unwavering love, support, encouragement, and sacrifice made this journey possible.  
I love you.

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Speaker taught the first graduate course in which I enrolled twenty years ago, and I was blessed to have him as the professor for my first doctoral seminar. He pushed me to think critically and to question my assumptions about teaching and learning. Thank you, Dr. Speaker, for helping me to refine the framework for my study and for offering specific advice on how to make this document even stronger.

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## ABSTRACT

For teachers of freshman English composition, the most time-consuming aspect of teaching is responding to student papers (Anson, 2012; Straub, 2000b). Teachers respond in various ways, but most teachers agree that they should offer written feedback to students (Beach & Friedrich, 2006). However, little research has been conducted to determine how teachers' written feedback practices reflect their beliefs about the purpose of such feedback. This qualitative study explores the relationship between English composition teachers' beliefs about written feedback and their actual written feedback practices.

The participants were a sample of four instructors of freshman English composition at a mid-sized metropolitan public university. Interviews, classroom observations, course documents, and samples of teachers' written comments were analyzed to determine teachers' written response practices and their beliefs related to the purposes of freshman writing and their roles as writing teachers. Results suggest that teachers were aware of their beliefs, and their written response practices were consistent with their beliefs. Teachers utilized different approaches to respond to student writing, but those approaches are consistent with current recommendations for responding to student writing.

Three major themes emerged from the study. First, teachers must be given the opportunity to reflect about and articulate their beliefs about written response so they will know why they respond in the way they do. Second, teachers work within the boundaries of their specific writing program to organize their written responses to student writing. Third, teachers must respond to student writing from varying perspectives as readers of the text. The findings support studies which indicate that written response is a sociocultural practice and teacher beliefs

are just one aspect of the complex nature of teacher written response. The study should add to the fields of response theory and the formation of teacher beliefs.

Teacher Beliefs, Teacher Response, Written Response, Freshman English Composition, Response Theory, Reader Response, Sociocultural Theory, Comments, Assessment



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background**

Most colleges and universities require incoming freshmen to complete at least one course in freshman English composition (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2003). Whether the function of freshman composition is to provide a service to the university (Bartholomae, 1985; Giles, 2002; Huot, 2002; Spack, 1988) or to assist the writers in finding their voices (Elbow, 2000; Giles, 2002), most students entering the university will find themselves taking a composition course. Additionally, while each composition course will differ slightly based on the particular needs of the institution and the unique characteristics of the teacher and students in the course, the overarching purpose of freshman English composition is for students to improve the quality of their writing (Beach & Friedrich, 2006; Sommers, 1982, 2006).

For students, therefore, the primary activity in freshman English composition courses is writing. Acting on the premise that the purpose of freshman English composition is for students to improve the quality of their writing, teachers must have some way of indicating to students how they are to become better writers. If, as Mina Shaughnessy (1977) argued, writing is an act of confidence, then the teacher's role is critical in building the students' confidence. As the teachers respond to student writing, they have the opportunity to help the students improve their writing. Teacher feedback, therefore, is a critical component of teaching students to write (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Haswell, 2008; Perpignan, 2003; Shaughnessy 1977; Sommers, 1982, 2006; Stagg-Peterson & Kennedy, 2006; Stern & Solomon, 2006).

For freshman English composition teachers, the most time-consuming aspect of teaching is responding to student papers (Anson, 2012; Batt, 2005; Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Elbow,

1999; Horvath, 1984; Sommers, 1982; Straub, 2000). According to Haswell (2008), college writing teachers spend an average of seven minutes per page commenting on student writing. Regarding the difficult and time-consuming task of responding to student writing, Straub (2000b) said,

It is the most demanding, work-intensive part of the job, and I would argue that there is no more important task that writing teachers take on. Response is at the heart of writing instruction. Here on the pages of your students' writing you find the most telling signs of what they are getting from the course. You have the best opportunity to give substance to the principles you've been advocating in class. . . . [Responding to student writing is difficult] because so much in response depends on your goals for commenting. . . . To respond well, you have to know what you want to accomplish in your comments—and you have to know what you want to accomplish in this assignment and through the class as a whole. (pp. 1-2)

Among the types of responses is teacher written feedback whereby teachers reply in written form to the students' work. Huot and Perry (2009), in fact, claimed that teachers' written response is “[a]n important element of most writing classes” (p. 428). The focus and form of teachers' written feedback vary from teacher to teacher, as do the purposes for such written feedback. However, teachers generally agree that they are “supposed” to offer written feedback to their students (Batt, 2005; Beach & Friedrich, 2006; Freedman, 1987b; Straub, 1999) even if the teachers are not sure why they spend the time responding to students' writing. Also, teachers often are not sure as to how they are supposed to respond. Most researchers agree that there is no “right” way to respond to student writing (Anson, 2012; Elbow, 1999; Huot & Perry,

2009; Sommers, 1982, 2006; Straub, 1999, 2006), nor do all students take heed of the comments and suggestions offered by teachers (Anson, 2012; Knoblauch & Brannon, 2006).

Two seminal studies on written teacher response were conducted in the early 1980s, studies which still are being referenced in recent scholarship on response such as Beard, Myhill, Riley, and Nystrand (2009); Elliot and Perelman (2012); and Straub (2006). In the first of those groundbreaking studies, Nancy Sommers (1982) reported the results of a study she conducted with Lil Brannon and Cyril Knoblauch. In the study, Sommers, Brannon, and Knoblauch examined the written comments of thirty-five instructors teaching composition at two universities. Additional data consisted of interviews with the teachers and selected students. They then compared the teachers' comments to the comments produced by a computer that had been programmed to analyze students' essays. Sommers noted that the teachers' comments were "arbitrary and idiosyncratic" compared to the "calm, reasonable language" of the computer's comments (p. 149). Two major findings arose as a result of Sommers' study. The first finding was that teachers tended to appropriate the students' texts. In other words, teachers imposed their ideas on the students' ideas, and the resulting comments led students to make revisions based on what they believed the teacher wanted, even if the students had other ideas for the text. Sommers indicated that this appropriation seemed more likely when the teacher focused on local errors (grammar, style, word usage) rather than content errors (organization, logic, macrostructure). Additionally, students were often confused by the teachers' comments, which at times were contradictory.

Sommers' second finding was that "most teachers' comments are not text-specific and could be interchanged, rubber-stamped, from text to text" (p. 152). This finding is particularly troubling in that such comments indicate a tacit assent to a set code for responding to student

text. Students come to believe that writing happens in relation to a certain set of abstract rules that they (the students) must somehow identify and follow. Overall, Sommers contended that “although commenting on student writing is the most widely used method for responding to student writing, it is the least understood” (p. 148).

In an equally groundbreaking study on teacher response, Brannon and Knoblauch (1982) discussed the problems that occur when teachers appropriate students’ texts. An assumption that all teachers should make is that student-authors have every right to say what they want to say in the way that they choose to say it. Brannon and Knoblauch found that as teachers responded to student writing, they asserted a sense of “oughtness” to students’ texts; the teacher-readers asserted control over the student-authors by making comments based on what the teacher-readers felt the “text ‘ought’ to look like or ‘ought’ to be doing” (p. 158). Thus, the teachers’ ideas become more important than the students’ ideas, and students end up conceding their authority to the teacher. Why is this teacher control of text problematic? According to Brannon and Knoblauch, “Regardless of what we may know about students’ authority, therefore, we lose more than we gain by preempting their control and allowing our own Ideal Texts to dictate choices that properly belong to the writers” (p. 159).

With the indictment (whether true or not) against the “rubber-stamped” comments and Ideal Texts assumed by many freshman English composition teachers, these two studies paved the way for further research into teacher written response, much of which focused on the efficacy of the written response. In fact, the work of Sommers and Brannon and Knoblauch informs much of the current literature on teacher response (Anson, 2012; Fife & O’Neill, 2001; Huot, 2002; Huot & Perry, 2009; Straub & Lunsford, 1995). While their findings have led to further empirical research, the researchers in some of the subsequent studies operated under the

assumption that ineffective response practice and teacher appropriation of student text are somehow a *result* of teacher commentary, so in order to solve those problems of ineffectual response and teacher appropriation, teachers must change the way they comment. Many of those studies (Connors & Lunsford, 1993; S. Smith, 1997; Straub, 1996a, 1996b, 1997b; Straub & Lunsford, 1995) imply that the teachers' written commentary is the most important form of response to student writing.

Current response theorists Anson (2012), Huot (2002), and Huot and Perry (2009) agree that in the thirty years since the publication of the articles by Sommers and Knoblauch and Brannon, the body of literature on teacher response has focused mostly on the various ways teachers respond or on broad principles for how best to respond to student writing. Moreover, Knoblauch and Brannon (2006) and Sommers (2006) both critique the findings from their early work as being too speculative. Despite the more current research on teacher written response, to my knowledge, hardly any studies exist in which researchers examined teachers' beliefs (i.e. their theoretical orientations) related to their practices of providing written feedback. This present qualitative study, therefore, will explore a very limited aspect of teacher response as related to freshman English composition: teachers' beliefs about teacher written response as part of the writing process and how their written feedback reflects their beliefs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Freshman English composition teachers spend a significant amount of time grading student essays (Anson, 1989a, 2012; Huot, 2002). They do so based on a set of beliefs, whether explicit or implicit, about the purpose of written feedback and the nature of the writing process. Even though researchers have not reached a consensus as to the effectiveness or usefulness of the feedback (Anson, 2012; Elbow, 1999; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 1997; Huot, 2002;

Sommers, 1982; Straub, 2006; Truscott, 1996, 2007), teachers continue marking papers believing that their comments are necessary in order for students to become better writers. Perhaps the problem is not what students do with the written comments, something which has been studied extensively and about which there is no consensus (Auten, 1991; Ferris, 1997; Fuller, 1987; Hayes & Daiker, 1984; O'Neill & Fife, 1999; E. Smith, 1989; Straub, 1997a; Ziv, 1984). Indeed, many students already have difficulty knowing how to make use of teachers' written comments (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Fife & O'Neill, 2001; Sperling & Freedman, 1987; Sommers, 1982). Rather, perhaps the problem lies in the confusion between what teachers' written comments convey either implicitly or explicitly to students about the purpose of those comments and the actual types of comments written on the papers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine how teachers' written comments reflect their explicit beliefs about the purpose of written response and their own roles as writing teachers. While both first language (L1) and second language (L2) researchers have studied types of teacher written response (Batt, 2005; Beach & Friedrich, 2006; Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Freedman, 1987a; Ferris, 1997; Perpignan, 2003; Straub, 1996a; Straub & Lunsford, 1995 ) and student reaction to teacher written response (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Fife & O'Neill, 2001; Sperling & Freedman, 1987; Sommers, 1982), few researchers have examined whether teachers' written feedback accomplishes what they say they expect it to accomplish. Additionally, few researchers have sought to make teachers aware of how they respond in writing as related to their expressed beliefs about the purpose of written response. This study adds to the field of response theory by examining the connection of beliefs (often theoretical in nature) and practice among response

practices of teachers of freshman English composition. This study also adds to the knowledge about response practices by highlighting the importance of practicing written response according to a set of theoretical beliefs.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Response as Conversation**

While the work of Sommers (1982) and Brannon and Knoblauch (1982) laid a solid foundation for written response theory, their work did not take into consideration the context of the rhetorical situation, and they revisited their earlier works to mention the importance of context (Knoblauch & Brannon, 2006; Sommers, 2006). Sommers (2006), in revisiting her earlier study, noted that perhaps one of the problems related to response is that teachers did not see themselves as being in a partnership with the students whose writing they critiqued. When teachers do not recognize the importance of this interaction with students, they may not offer written response that is effective. The very definition of *response* implies interaction. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2011), response is “something constituting a reply or a reaction.” Therefore, teachers’ written response to student writing should be a reaction to what the student has written. An implied assumption is that teachers interact with student text; as teachers react to the text, they form their written responses. Treglia (2009) indicated that such student-teacher interaction is critical in the context of the freshman English classroom.

In the field of rhetoric and composition studies, Kenneth Burke (1974) described the importance of interaction in what has become known as the Burkean Parlor metaphor:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for

them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (Burke, 1974, pp. 110-111)

As indicated by Burke, in order for a conversation to occur, someone cannot respond unless he has listened to the conversation happening around him. In applying the Burkean Parlor metaphor to the assessing of student writing, the teacher must practice listening through reading what the student has written. Once the teacher has become informed of the student's ideas through careful reading of the student's work, he will form an opinion as to what the student means, and he will then enter the conversation through his written feedback to the student. Teachers' written responses, therefore, come as a reaction to what they have read and understood.

Based on the Burkean Parlor metaphor, the specific framework for this study comes from research into teacher response as a conversation. Theoretically, in order to perceive writing as a conversation, teachers must first understand that writing is a rhetorical activity (Lindemann, 1982). Daiker and Hayes (1984) believed that "each response we make to a student's writing involves a rhetorical situation as sensitive and complex as any that we, as teachers, are likely to face" (p. 4). If Lindemann (1982) and Daiker and Hayes (1984) are correct, then the act of response is a specific type of rhetorical situation in which teachers have to consider more than



just the actual words on the page. Sommers (1982) inferred that as teachers attended to their students' writing, they had to consider the rhetoric of their own responses. Tinberg (2006) suggested that teachers should create "a landscape for [their] commentary" (p. 263). In the rhetorical context or landscape, then, both teachers and students construct personae through their commentary (Batt, 2005; Beach & Friedrich, 2006; Sommers, 1992; Straub, 1997b, 1999).

According to Beach and Friedrich,

In constructing his or her own writing personae, a student either invites or deflects teachers' identification with that persona. This suggests that teachers need to reflect on how they construct students' personae, and on how students perceive teachers' identities—their beliefs, attitudes, and agendas—through teacher feedback. (p. 224)

Students construct their personae of teachers based on the teachers' written feedback.

Consequently, teachers who are unaware of their own beliefs about writing and response will convey inaccurate or confusing personae to their students. Teacher response, therefore, cannot be separated from the context of the rhetorical activity of writing.

Several researchers (Anson, 1989b; Danis, 1987; Hayes & Daiker, 1984; Fife & O'Neill, 2001; Lindemann, 1987; Straub, 1996b; Ziv, 1984) examined how teachers' written comments serve as a type of dialogue between the student-writers and the teacher-readers. When framing response as a conversation, teachers must first see themselves as readers and listeners (Danis, 1987; O'Neill & Fife, 1999; Straub, 1996b). The idea of teachers as listeners is that the teacher-readers enter into the conversation by first reading what the student-writers have to say; in other words, the teacher-readers "listen" to the student-writers by trying to understand the writers' intent. By reading and listening to the student-writers, the teachers have begun treating students

more as writers and less as students; thus teachers have a better starting point for their responses (Elbow, 1999).

Anson (1989b) combined the idea of response as an act of rhetoric and an act of conversation. He noted that the reflective responder “tended to be more casual than formal, as if rhetorically sitting next to the writer, collaborating, suggesting, guiding, modeling” (p. 353). These practices mentioned by Anson—collaborating, suggesting, guiding, and modeling—are typical of teachers who view response as a conversation with the student-writer. Freedman (1987a), like Anson, contended that teachers assume many roles as they respond to students. Straub (2000) described the same types of roles for teachers, adding to the list roles like “adviser,” “fellow explorer,” ally,” and “sounding board” (p. 61). Danis (1987) used some of the same language when describing how she responds to student writing. When teachers respond according to the “conversation image” (p. 19), they see themselves as collaborators or coaches rather than critics, and they tend to enter the conversation as listeners first so that they can determine what the writer is trying to say before responding. By imagining an ongoing conversation, teacher-readers “dramatize the presence of the reader” (Sommers, 1982, p. 148) and “compensate for that person’s physical absence” (Danis, 1987, p. 19).

Not all researchers used the term *conversation* when describing the practice of response, though their ideology is the same as those who see response as conversation. Some researchers called teacher written response a *dialogue* (Chandler, 1997; Lindemann, 1987; Ziv, 1984). According to Lindemann (1987), teachers should write responses that are dialogic in nature and that maintain communication between the student-writer and the teacher-reader. Ziv (1984) used the imagery of dialogue to describe the type of responses that teachers should make: comments “can only be helpful if teachers respond to student writing as part of an ongoing

dialogue between themselves and their students” (p. 376). Chandler (1997) suggested that comments leading to “constructive” dialogue result from the positive relationship between the teacher and the student (p. 273).

Several recent researchers have expanded the idea of response as conversation in that the conversation must include classroom context as well. Rutz (2006) examined the work of Sommers (1982), Connors and Lunsford (1993), and Straub and Lunsford (1995) and concluded that while those studies contributed to an understanding of how teachers comment via textual analysis, they did not take into account classroom context. Sommers (2006), in a reflection of her 1982 essay, concluded that the main vehicle for writing instruction is the classroom relationship. Finally, O’Neill and Fife (1999) contended that response as conversation must consider other factors related to teacher response, factors which deal with the context of the response situation, which they define as “a complex interaction of pedagogical, textual, and personal contexts” (p. 39). They asserted that teachers must view response as more than just the students’ written text and the teachers’ written comments.

Finally, response as conversation does not assume one approach to the writing process. Teachers can espouse any theoretical orientation to writing but still approach writing as a conversation (Straub, 1996b). This understanding supports what many of the previously mentioned researchers have said about response theory: there is no “right” way to respond to writing just as there is no “right” theoretical orientation to the writing process. In seeing writing as conversation, teachers, regardless of their view of the writing process, still must concentrate on student content. Teachers therefore have a choice in where they place their comments and in how they phrase those comments. Conversational responders can write marginal comments,

interlinear comments, or end notes; the key is making sure that the written responses are text-specific and create a dialogue with the student.

### **The Connection between Reading and Writing**

Implicit in the rhetorical act of writing is the presence of a reader. Much has been made of the connection between reading and writing (Nystrand, 1986), though Choo (2010) posited that researchers often create a dichotomy between reading and writing. Choo suggested that “the relationship between reading and writing is far more complex than earlier researchers have imagined,” especially related to “how writing draws upon reading experiences” (p. 167).

One theory which examines the complexity of the reading/writing duality is Louise Rosenblatt’s (2004) transactional theory of reading and writing. In her transactional theory of reading and writing, Rosenblatt, borrowing from semiotics and pragmatics, suggested that “every reading act is an event or a transaction involving a particular reader and a particular pattern of signs, a text, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context” (p. 1369). Part of the transaction with the text involves the reader’s attitude or “stance,” his purpose. Rosenblatt contended that the reading event takes place on a continuum bounded by two extremes of a reader’s stance: the *efferent* stance and the *aesthetic* stance: “The efferent stance pays more attention to the cognitive, the referential, the factual, the analytic, the logical, the quantitative aspects of meaning. And the aesthetic stance pays more attention to the sensuous, the affective, the emotive, the qualitative” (p. 1374).

Understanding reader’s stance is important in a study of teacher written response since teachers’ responses will result from their stances at the time they are reading (and assessing) students’ writing. Rosenblatt claimed that since each reading of a text “is an event in particular circumstances, the same text may be read either efferently or aesthetically” (p. 1376). Also, the

teacher-reader's purpose could dictate a different stance than the student writer intended. In the context of this study, a teacher-reader's stance could determine the type of written comments made.

This transactional aspect of reading and writing complements the idea of conversation. Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000), describe reading and writing as communicative activities. Therefore, as writers transact with their own work, they act as the first critical readers of the text (Rosenblatt, 2004). Likewise, when teacher-readers, who respond in writing, transact with the student writing, they act as authors in rewriting the text (Nystrand, 1986; Roenblatt, 2004).

Smagorinsky (2009) discussed the transactional aspect as related to the reader's ability to understand text. He rejected a simplistic definition of the word *understand*, arguing instead that there could be more than one way of understanding or engaging a text based on the reading/writing transaction. He suggested that readers both decode and encode a text "by placing it into dialogue with and in extension with other readings of text," thus leading to the "construct[ion] of a meaningful reading transaction" (p. 523).

The conceptual framework of conversation as response, supported by the transactional theory of reading and writing, offers a solid foundation for a study of teacher written response.

### **Research Question**

In qualitative inquiry, research questions are more exploratory in nature (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Meloy, 2002; Patton, 2002; Piantanida & Garman, 1999). Yin (1989) suggested that "how" questions are useful in qualitative research as they allow the researcher to explore a phenomenon. Therefore, the main research question for this present study is broad in nature, and the four specific areas of focus assist in the development of the specific interview questions. Additionally, the works of

Sperling (1994), Straub and Lunsford (1995), and Straub (2000) were instrumental in the development of this study, so the research question is an adaptation of the types of questions they asked in their studies.

### **Main Research Question**

How do freshman English composition teachers' written comments on students' essays reflect their beliefs about the purpose of response and their roles in the writing process?

### **Areas of Focus**

In order to answer the broadly stated main research question, I explored four broad areas of focus:

- Instructor Beliefs about the Purpose of Freshman Writing
- Instructor Knowledge of the Specific Writing Program
- Instructor Understanding of Best Practices for Written Response
- Instructor Perspectives of Their Individual Written Response Practices

### **Significance of the Study**

This study should contribute both to theory and to practice. Despite the studies in teacher response which describe the types of comments teachers make, few studies examine the relationship between teacher beliefs (theory) and response practices. While some teachers may have a conscious understanding of the types of comments they make on student essays, they may or may not realize if or how their comments reflect their beliefs about the writing process. Ideally, this study will help teachers recognize the types of comments they make and the belief systems that they have. If the written comments do not reflect their beliefs, then teachers should make changes so that their theoretical orientations align with their response practices. Thus,

teachers will minimize confusion for students and teachers' comments will help students to improve their writing.

This study will not provide a "how to" process for responding to student writing, nor will it lead to a list of best practices of teacher written response. In general, the impact on teacher practice will come as teachers learn to think critically about their response choices and their philosophical understanding of the writing process.

### **Assumptions**

Although a qualitative study is generally exploratory in nature, it will include certain assumptions. For this study, I made the assumption that all teachers know their theoretical orientations toward the writing process. In other words, a teacher is aware of why he or she teaches writing in a certain manner. Perhaps teachers' awareness comes from coursework taken at the graduate level or from years of refining their theoretical orientations through classroom practice. No matter how the teachers acquire their philosophies about writing, I made no assumptions as to which theoretical orientation is "correct"; I assumed only that teachers could articulate their beliefs about the writing process. I also assumed that teachers respond through writing. Many teachers hold student conferences to discuss student writing or tape record their reactions to the writing; however, I assumed that at some point, teachers will write comments on student papers in response to student text. Finally, I assumed that teachers respond in writing based on the notion that students will use the comments as a basis to improve their writing skills, though I will not focus on how students use the teachers' comments.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study will focus on one set of cases, teachers of freshman English composition at a mid-sized, metropolitan public university. The teachers all participated in the revision of the

freshman English writing program; at the time of data collection, teachers were completing their second year in the new program. During the interview process of data collection, these teachers were asked to describe their beliefs about the nature of the writing process. Because they have all been recently focused on the core values of the revised freshman English program, they may choose to give answers based on those core values rather than on their own theoretical orientations. While the teachers in the program have certain autonomy in their classrooms, they all use the same textbook and teach under the same general guidelines as outlined in the freshman English writing program manual. Thus, one delimitation is that teachers self-report their beliefs.

Another delimitation, also dealing with case, is that the teachers to be interviewed are all teaching the second course of the writing sequence, in this case, ENGL 102. Because students in this course have had experience writing, teachers may view them differently from beginning writers and may therefore respond differently. Also, the type of writing in ENGL 102 differs from the type of writing in ENGL 101. In ENGL 101, students are introduced to the skills necessary to meet the outcomes of the writing program. In ENGL 102, students are expected to exhibit proficiency in the three outcomes (*The Curious Writer*, p. v). This delimits the study in that the findings will reflect the experiences of teachers in one type of freshman English composition classroom in a specific writing program with specific standard outcomes.

In ENGL 102, teachers must formally assess 3,000 of a student's minimum 5,000 words per semester (*The Curious Writer*). In order to manage the written comments of the teachers, I examined teachers' written comments on just one formally assessed piece of writing per student. This delimits the study in that this one piece of writing, as a snapshot in time, may not fully represent the way that teachers comment over the course of a semester.



Finally, teachers respond to student writing in multiple ways. This study is concerned only with the written responses of teachers, though such written responses do not exist apart from the larger context of the classroom situation. However, I needed some way to gauge teachers' responses to student writing. A final limitation, therefore, is that the only type of response being examined is written response to one piece of student writing.

### **Definitions of Terms**

Although many of the terms used in this study will be explained in context, a few terms necessitate clear definitions so that the reader understands the terms in the way that the writer intends.

#### **Edited American English**

For the sake of consistency, I will use the term *English* to refer to *Edited American English* (EAE). According to the American Council on Education, which oversees the General Educational Development (GED) testing program,

Edited American English (EAE) is fundamentally the same as Standard Written English (SWE), i.e. those conventions of grammar, usage, and mechanics that writers and speakers adhere to in order to communicate effectively. In planning ahead for the 2002 Series GED® Tests in 1997, the Writing Test Specifications Committee aligned itself with the National Council of Teachers of English, who use EAE as the norm for the variety of English that is most used by educated speakers of the language.

#### **End Notes**

Some written response may come via *end notes*. *End notes* refer to the longer, narrative-type comments that teachers place at the end of a piece of student writing. End notes will also constitute data for this research.

## **Error**

For the purposes of this study, the term *error* refers to a deviation from Edited American English.

## **Freshman English Composition**

In the context of this paper, *freshman English composition* refers to the first-year writing courses offered and required by most universities. In some schools, students take a core sequence of writing classes. Student placement into writing courses depends on several factors such as standardized test scores (ACT and SAT), university placement exams if required, transfer credits from another college or university, or college credit granted to high school students for performance on Advanced Placement exams or the College Level Examination Program (CLEP). In this paper, however, *freshman English composition* will refer to the writing courses, not literature courses, students take during their first year of college. The specific course being studied in this research is the final course (ENGL102) of a two-semester sequence that most freshmen take. Students may test out of the first-semester course, but most students take ENGL 102.

## **Interlinear Comment**

As teachers respond to student writing, they often comment in the white space between lines of text. Such comments are called *interlinear comments* and may be as simple as proofreading marks or as complex as questions regarding content (Anson, 1989; Haswell, 2008).

## **Marginal Notes**

Some teachers will respond to student writing via *marginal notes*. When teachers write comments in the side margins or in the actual text of a student essay, those comments are called marginal notes. In the context of this study, the marginal notes constitute data.

## **Summary**

Teachers of freshman English composition spend much time marking student essays. If teachers intend for those marks to lead to student improvement, then teachers must align their beliefs about the writing process and the purpose of response to their written response practices. The purpose of this study is to determine, via qualitative case study methodology, if a select group of freshman English composition teachers' response practices reflect their self-stated beliefs.

## **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. In Chapter 1, I presented the background for the problem I will study. I then presented the conceptual framework, the research questions, and the significance of the study. After the significance, I discussed assumptions of the study, delimitations of the study, and some definitions of key terms. I concluded the chapter with a summary and the organization of the study.

In the following chapter, I examine the research related to the study. Specifically, I review literature related to the socio-cultural theory of writing, the teacher as reader, teacher written response practices, and the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices. Each main section ends with a summary.

In Chapter 3, I justify the choice of qualitative case study methodology; describe the proposed setting and participants; explain the proposed methods for data collection, analysis of data, and data verification; and disclose the role of the researcher.

I present the results of the study in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. In Chapter 4, I show the results from the four individual case studies by presenting the findings regarding their beliefs, their written response practices, and themes specific to the individual participants. Each

individual case ends with a summary. In Chapter 5, I present the findings from a cross-case analysis in which I look at common beliefs among the four participants, compare their response practices, and reveal three emerging themes regarding the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their practices.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss the findings from the study. I begin the chapter with an overview of the study followed by a discussion of the findings. These findings fall into three broad areas: teachers' beliefs, teachers' written response practices, and the connection between beliefs and response. After reflecting on my role in the research process and presenting some conclusions about the findings, I suggest limitations of the study, implications of the study, and suggestions for further research. The dissertation concludes with a final summary of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this present study is to examine the relationship between teacher beliefs and teacher practices regarding teacher written feedback. The main research question guiding the study is “How do freshman English composition teachers’ written comments on students’ essays reflect their beliefs about the purpose of response and their roles in the writing process?” To help me answer that question, I examined research studies and other literature pertinent to the discussion.

I begin this review of related literature with an overview of the sociocultural theory of writing. The sociocultural theory has become a prominent theme in recent research related to writing. The framework for the study, response as conversation, is rooted in the sociocultural theory since sociocultural theory is dialogic in nature, an important quality in teacher written response. In the second section, I investigate the subject of the teacher-as-reader as a way to situate the role of the teacher in the writing process. Once the role of the teacher is established, I evaluate literature related to teacher written response practices. Every teacher responds differently to student writing, and teachers have many options for responding in writing. Finally, I examine literature related to the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices as I intend to study the link between teachers’ written response practices and their beliefs about written response.

#### **Sociocultural Theory**

##### **Background**

**Historical aspects of composition research.** Research about teachers’ written feedback needs to be situated in research in the larger field of writing. An underlying framework for this

research project is that writing is a conversation; thus, it is neither solely cognitive nor solely social. Instead, writing is both a cognitive and a social process, and writing cannot be studied apart from its social and cultural contexts. This theory, known as the sociocultural theory of writing, draws on the cognitive research of the 1970s and the social research of the 1980s. I review some of the more important studies of the 1970s and 1980s related to the process of writing. The sociocultural theory also relies heavily on the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1986). Rather than examine the totality of their work, I instead examine the aspects of their research which are important to the sociocultural theory. Finally, I summarize the major aspects of the sociocultural theory especially as related to teacher written feedback.

**Writing as a cognitive process.** Only since the 1970s has writing been recognized as a distinct area of study (Nystrand, Greene, & Wiemelt, 1993; Sperling & Freedman, 2001). Prior to the 1970s, current-traditional rhetoric was the predominant philosophy of composition. In current-traditional rhetoric, the product is more important than the process. Superficial correctness, form, and grammar tend to be the focus in current-traditional classrooms (Crowley, 1998; Silva, 1990). While no one would argue that the finished product is important, teachers who are oriented in the current-traditional paradigm see invention, arrangement, and style as most important. (For a look at the development of current-traditional rhetoric, see Berlin [1987]).

In the 1970s, reacting to the product-centered focus of current-traditional rhetoric predominant in most composition classrooms and responding to a challenge from the Braddock Report (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, 1963) to study how writers write, researchers began to study the process of writing. Early researchers included Emig (1971) and Perl (1979). Emig's 1971 study *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* is widely considered a foundational

work in the study of the process of writing as evidenced by its inclusion in composition theory handbooks such as *Cross Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader* (Villanueva, 2003). In her case study of eight twelfth grade students, Emig asked the students to think aloud about their writing as they composed essays. By studying students' taped think-aloud accounts, interviewing those students, observing them as they composed, and examining their writing, Emig found that the students' strategies for writing changed depending on their purposes for writing. She also determined that writing did not occur in a linear fashion. Perl (1979) conducted a similar study when she observed the writing processes of five low-performing college writers. She concluded that although these writers "displayed consistent composing processes . . . that were recognizable" (p. 328), they could not be said to be proficient writers. However, their cognitive processes had logic, and thus, Perl's work added to the growing body of research suggesting that writers use various cognitive strategies as they write. The work of Emig and Perl focused primarily on four areas: writers' behaviors during prewriting, writers' activities during pauses in their writing, and the speed at which the writers wrote. Their studies, though limited in scope, showed that writers display certain similar cognitive characteristics as they write and that writing is a recursive process rather than a linear process.

While other researchers (Applebee, 1981; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Faigley & Witte, 1981) conducted cognitive studies of the writing process which corroborated Emig's findings, the work of two researchers (Flower & Hayes, 1981) led to the development of a cognitive model of writing. Undoubtedly one of the most foundational studies of the cognitive process of writing, their work (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes & Flower, 1980) led to a cognitive model of composing to which researchers still refer. According to Flower and Hayes (1981), "The process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers

orchestrate or organize during the act of composing” (p. 366). To collect data, Flower and Hayes asked college freshman writers to think out loud while they were writing essays. Flower and Hayes focused primarily on the strategies writers use to plan, translate, and review their writing. They found that during this planning, translating, and reviewing, writers cycle back and forth between those three subprocesses as they create meaning. Called “the most enduring and influential” model of composing (Sperling & Freedman, 2001, p. 372), the Flower and Hayes model became the basis for much of the current research into the composing process and laid the groundwork for much of the future research into writing. (For meta-analyses of writing research, see Hillocks [1986, 2008].)

The research which began in the 1970s and focused on the cognitive processes involved in writing led to changes in classroom pedagogy as teachers began looking for ways to help students understand these processes. Maxine Hairston (1982) believed that this change in perspective was significant: “Those developments [taking place in composition research], the most prominent of which is the move to a process-centered theory of teaching writing, indicate that our profession is probably in the first stages of a paradigm shift” (p. 77). While Hairston acknowledged that many people teaching composition were uninformed about the shift to the new process-centered theory and therefore continued to teach in the current-traditional model of writing, she still believed that this shift signaled a change in the way that composition researchers studied writing. McVee, Dunsmore, and Gavalek (2005) echoed Hairston in believing that the “cognitive revolution” had a “profound and pervasive” influence on literacy research (p. 531).

This early cognitive research contributed to the idea that meaning is constructed. Through the studies being conducted, researchers began to see that language is a constructive



process and that the mind plays a critical role in shaping meaning. Due to the research into the cognitive strategies used by writers, “cognitive language processes became thoroughly interesting and credible as the source of meaning and hence ripe for serious study” (Nystrand et al., 1993, p. 185). Indeed, research into cognitive-process approaches to teaching writing is still being conducted in current times, both in first language (L1) and second language (L2) research (Sperling & DiPardo, 2008; Zuengler & Miller, 2006).

**Writing as a social process.** While researchers in the 1970s began focusing on writing as a cognitive process, other researchers in the late 1970s and the 1980s began to view language as both social and functional (Nystrand et al., 1993). Compositionists conducting research into the social nature of writing considered themselves social constructionists (Bruffee, 1986). In social constructionism, writers are seen not as individuals creating meaning but as members of discourse communities. In these communities, meaning happens not in isolation but as writers interact with others in the same community. In composition studies, participants in these discursive communities deal with academic discourse.

One of the classic studies into the social nature of writing was Mina Shaughnessy’s *Errors and Expectations* (1977). In her work with “non-traditional” students at the City University of New York (CUNY), Shaughnessy looked at the logic of student errors in her groundbreaking study of the writing of basic writers. She was one of the first researchers to contend that “writing is a social act” (p. 83). She proposed that students who have difficulty writing do so not because of any cognitive failure but because the basic writing students whom she taught had not been exposed to the academic discourse expected of them. She determined in order to help students become proficient writers, teachers had to “[be] able to trace the line of reasoning that has led to [their] erroneous choices” (p. 105).

In his classic essay “Inventing the University,” Bartholomae (1985) suggested that students had to be made aware of the expectations of the discourse community in which they were now participating. Rather than teaching a prescribed set of cognitive strategies, Bartholomae contended that students had to learn the expectations of the academic community. He believed that writing teachers could help students to learn this academic discourse. Similarly, Brodkey (1987) discussed the importance of getting student writers to contribute to academic discourse by requiring them to make choices rhetorically during the act of composing. Their choices would involve interaction with other members of the discourse community (i.e. the composition classroom). In making rhetorical choices, students show that they understand the demands of the academic community. In short, becoming part of a discourse community, particularly an academic discourse community, requires students “not only [to] acquire content knowledge” but to “be able to manage this knowledge within certain linguistic and rhetorical conventions” (Nystrand et al, 1993).

Bizell (1982) also suggested that problems in writing and literacy should not be seen as a lack of cognitive ability but as a lack of familiarity with the academic discourse required of students. Like Shaughnessy, she suggested that teachers look for patterns of error and then teach students the conventions of academic discourse by teaching them language patterns and logic needed to function within the community. She cautioned teachers not to see students as deficient in knowledge but rather to recognize the differences between their home cultures and communities and the academic discourse community.

### **An Integrated Theory**

**Background.** The social-constructionist theory, while combining aspects of the cognitive and the social, focuses primarily on how the *individual* makes meaning within the

social context (Murphy, 2000). A better model needed to be developed to integrate fully the cognitive, social, and cultural strands of research. Researchers in the 1980s and 1990s began to call for alternatives to the separated cognitive theories and social theories of writing (Bartholomae, 1985; Berlin 1988; Bizell, 1982; Freedman, 1996; Knoblauch, 1980; Rose, 1989). In 1989, Flower noted that composition researchers were “caught up in a debate over whether we should see individual cognition or social and cultural context as the motive force in literate acts” (1989, p. 282). The conflict between the cognitive and the contextual led to what she saw as an unhealthy dichotomy. Many researchers suggested that an integration of cognitive, social, and cultural research would offer a better explanation of how students write (Freedman, 1996; Kelly, 2006; McVee, Dunsmore, & Gavalek, 2005; Sperling & DiPardo 2008; Sperling & Freedman, 2001).

Rose (1989) challenged composition instructors to develop new methods of literacy instruction that included the social, the contextual, and the cultural. In *Lives on the Boundary*, he wrote,

[T]he challenge that has always faced American education, that it has sometimes denied and sometimes doggedly pursued, is how to create both the social and cognitive means to enable a diverse citizenry to develop their ability. It is an astounding challenge; the complex and wrenching struggle to actualize the potential not only of the privileged but, too, of those who have lived here for a long time generating a culture outside the mainstream and those who . . . immigrated with cultural traditions of their own. This painful but generative mix of language and story can result in clash and dislocation in our communities, but it also gives rise to new speech, new storied, and once we appreciate the richness of it, new invitations to literacy. (p. 225-6)

Rose, along with Delpit (1995), underscored the importance of culture in a literacy environment. Delpit argued that teachers need to guide students to acquire the dominant discourse but help them to find their own place in the discourse. She said that teachers must “saturate the dominant discourse with new meanings, must wrest from it a place for the glorification of their students and their forebears” (p. 164). Composition researchers and teachers alike realized that effective writing pedagogy had to consider more than a social-constructionist model.

**Influence of Vygotsky on sociocultural theory.** Many sociocultural researchers credit Vygotsky as the theorist whose work has had the most influence on sociocultural theory (Antón, 1999; de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Gipps, 1999; Lantolf 1994; Lima, 1995; McVee et al., 2005; Sperling & Freedman, 2001; Wells, 1999; Zuenger & Miller, 2006). In fact, Vygotsky’s influence on sociocultural theory is so prominent that some researchers use the term *Vygotskian sociocultural theory* to describe sociocultural theory (Zuenger & Miller, 2006). Vygotsky believed that human behavior and cognitive development occur both in and through activity with other people. The activity takes place within a specific social, cultural context that has its own history. Because of these interactions, knowledge is constructed through an active learning process.

**Zone of proximal development.** Vygotsky’s (1978) language theories focused on the connection between psychological development and social context. Vytoksy believed that human learning “presupposes a specific social nature” and that learners “grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (p. 88). Comparing learners to buds or flowers, Vygotsky suggested that with assistance, learners will develop into independent thinkers. The buds or flowers develop through their interactions which occur in the classroom within what Vygotsky called the “zone of proximal development [ZPD]: the distance between the actual developmental

level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (1978, p. 86). In other words, through the interaction with a more capable other, the learner acquires skills and knowledge that he would not have been able to acquire on his own.

Perhaps one of the most important theories in literacy, the ZPD provides a framework for learning. Other disciplines have shown how knowledge of the ZPD can help teachers realize the potential in their learners. Antón (1999) suggested that the ZPD is the place where learning moves from social to the cognitive; the activity of learning promotes the development of learning.

***Scaffolding.*** A natural extension of the ZPD is the notion of scaffolding. Although Vygotsky himself never mentioned the term, researchers such as Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) applied their interpretations and understanding of the ZPD to educational contexts. In scaffolding, a student interacts with an adult or more knowledgeable peer to acquire knowledge or learn a task. Much like construction scaffolding, educational scaffolding is a process in which teachers provide temporary support for the learner. In modeling a task, performing a portion of the task with and for the learner, or offering guidance to a learner, the teacher or peer acts as a scaffold (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). The support of the teacher or peer is taken away gradually as the learner becomes competent in the task. Teachers scaffold assignments within learners’ ZPD to facilitate optimal learning for the learners.

Some researchers have discussed the use of scaffolding in a writing classroom. Wells (1999) saw scaffolding as a “way of operationalizing” the ZPD, identifying three features of scaffolding: “the essentially dialogic nature of the discourse in which knowledge is co-constructed; the significance of the kind of activity in which the knowing is embedded; and the

important role played by the artifacts that mediate the knowing” (p. 127). Sperling and Freedman (2001) discussed its importance as a means of socializing learners into “critical writing life of both school and civic culture” (p. 374). In the writing classroom, then, teachers assist students in learning how to use written language as a means of functioning in the discourse community of which they are part. The goal of response in the sociocultural classroom is independence: teacher response acts as a scaffold to lead students to become proficient (Freedman, 1987b). While some researchers (Cazden, 1993; Stone, 1993) have suggested that the scaffolding metaphor is too teacher-centered, scaffolding remains an important aspect of the Vygotskian influence on sociocultural theory.

**Influence of Bahktin on sociocultural theory.** Of equal influence on sociocultural theory are the ideas of Bahktin (1986).

***The utterance.*** According to Bahktin, the basic unit of speech is the utterance. Utterances are formed through the speaker’s social interactions with others. He said, “For speech can exist in reality only in the form of concrete utterances of individual speaking people, speech subjects. Speech is always cast in the form of utterance belonging to particular speaking subjects, and outside this form it cannot exist” (p. 71). Bahktin suggested that people assimilate language only through utterances. Speakers form utterances only in relation to other people who are situated culturally in time and place. Therefore, an utterance can exist only in relation to its position in a chain of other speech events, so it is already embedded socially, culturally, and historically in the expressions of others.

***Language as dialogic.*** Bahktin (1986) advanced the idea that language is, by nature, dialogic. To him, once an utterance is spoken, it becomes dialogic and social. In this respect, he complemented Vygotsky who believed that words have meaning but speech has sense (1986, p.

245). The utterance is always addressed to someone and anticipates a response; therefore, language is dialogic and situated (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Because language both responds to past interactions and anticipates future interactions, it is never fixed. Bahktin (1986) asserted,

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and boundless future). Even *past* meanings, that is those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) - they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context) ( p.170).

In terms of the writing classroom, this fluid nature of language has great pedagogical implications. Sperling and Freedman (2001) contended that student's writing is "imbued with the viewpoints and values of multiple and sometimes competing voices" (p. 375). Some of those voices will be the voices of peers and teachers. Teachers will need to be conscious that students' writing will reflect how they value those voices.

### **Characteristics of Sociocultural Theory**

The sociocultural theory (alternatively written as socio-cultural theory) integrates research in the cognitive, social, and cultural strands. One of the early sociocultural researchers, Wertsch (1991) and Wertsch and Toma (1995) asserted that the sociocultural perspective focuses on the relationship between mental processes and the "cultural, historical, and institutional settings" (1991, p. 6; 1995, p. 56). De Guerrero and Villamil (2000) suggested that sociocultural

theory is less a theory and more a “system of ideas . . . that looks at learning as a fundamentally social act, embedded in a specific cultural environment” (p. 52).

Because sociocultural research draws from stands of other research, it has no widely recognized definition. However, Wertsch and Toma (1995) provided a definition that includes many of the characteristics that sociocultural researchers consider important. They proposed that “ the goal of [sociocultural] research is to understand the relationship between human mental functioning, on the one hand, and cultural, historical, and institutional setting, on the other” (p. 56). Despite the lack of a firm definition of sociocultural theory (O’Connor, 1998; Thorne, 2005), sociocultural theory has several identifying characteristics which distinguish it from earlier sociocognitive theories. The characteristics overlap so that a discussion of one characteristic may include attributes discussed in another section. In general, however, sociocultural learning is situated, dialogic, and mediated.

**Situated learning.** One characteristic of sociocultural theory is that learning is situated. By this, researchers mean that learning happens within a specific context (Donato & McCormic, 1994; Gipps, 1999; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Sperling & Freedman, 2001; Zuengler & Miller, 2006) . Lave and Wenger (1991), the first to propose situated learning, argued that learning is more than just the transmission of facts whereby one person transfers knowledge to another. Instead, meaning is co-constructed, and learning is situated in specific social and cultural contexts and embedded in a specific environment. Gipps (1999), building off of the work of Lave and Wenger (1991), suggested that learning is situated in “certain forms of social (co)participation” and is “distributed among the co-participants” (p. 373). In other words, meaning is not constructed individually but instead is a product of the everyday social interactions in which the individual is engaged (Murphy, 2000).



Situated learning provides the context for learning and is more authentic. According to Zuengler and Miller (2006), “situated learning foregrounds learners’ participation in particular social practices, understood as habitual ways people (re)produce material and symbolic resources, often attached to particular times and places, and comprising communities of practice in complex, often overlapping ways” (p. 41). Sperling and Freedman (2001) suggested that the formation of literate practices happens as students are situated in social and cultural contexts.

The classroom is one specific example of a situated learning space (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Murphy, 2000). Donato and MacCormick argued that the “situated activities” in a classroom influence the acquisition of specific strategies to help learners become competent members of a discourse community (p. 453). They viewed the classroom as a culture, a “social arena in which learning is constructed as gradually increasing participation in the values, beliefs, and behaviors of a community of practice” (p. 454). The classroom, therefore, is the situated context (socially, culturally, and historically) in which learning occurs.

Several researchers suggested that not only is learning situated, it is also *situating* (Brandt, 1992; Nystrand et al., 1993; Sperling & Freedman (2001). Rather than view context as something to take in, these researchers stipulated that context should be created by the participants (Brandt, 1992; Nystrand et al., 1993). Learning, then, happens when those students involved in the construction of meaning create the environment in which the learning will occur. Sperling and Freedman (2001) said that “writing is situating, helping to shape and maintain roles and relationships that are ratified in the broader social and cultural context” (p. 377).

**Dialogic learning.** Owing to the influence of Wells (1999), Vygotsky (1978), and Bahktin (1986), socioculturalists suggest that learning is dialogic. According to Wells (1999), knowledge is constructed as learners ask questions and collaborate. He believed that “education

should be a dialogue about matters that are of interest and concern to the participants” (p. xi).

His theory of dialogic inquiry is concerned with the dialectal relationship between the individual and society. In discussing the influence of Vygotsky and Bahktin, Gee (2000-2001) contended that

Vygotsky shows how people’s individual minds are formed out of, and always continue to reflect, social interactions in which they engaged as they acquired their “native” language or later academic languages in school. Bahktin stresses how anything anyone thinks or say is, in reality, composed of bits and pieces of language that have been voiced elsewhere, in other conversations or texts. . . . For Bahktin, what one means is always a product of both the meanings words have “picked up” as they circulate in history and society and one’s own individual “take” or “slant” on these word (at a given time and place) (pp. 114-115).

In a dialogic classroom, therefore, language both responds to and anticipates other language.

The discursive practices in the discourse community encourage this dialogic perspective. When a student talks or writes about his experiences, he echoes past dialogues and the understanding he has of those dialogues. Murphy (2000) suggested that a teacher’s response to a student text is one exchange in a series of exchanges between the student-writer and the teacher-reader, both of whom have roles in constructing knowledge. She added that teachers’ comments “are one of the means by which communication is achieved—or not, and by which knowledge is constructed—or not. . . . [T]eachers’ comments are facilitators of intersubjective processes” (p. 81). Beck (2006) suggested that teachers’ responses, dialogic in nature, require active engagement with students’ implied meanings.

**Mediated learning.** In sociocultural theory, meaning is negotiated culturally and historically through social mediation (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006). According to Vygotsky (1978), higher mental functions are a result of the mediation of language. In mediation, language is a symbolic tool (called a semiotic tool by Vygotsky) by which learners are able to move from basic mental reasoning to higher mental functioning. Lantolf (1994), expounding on Vygotsky's influence on sociocultural theory, said,

Just as physical tools . . . allow humans to organize and alter their physical world, Vygotsky reasoned that symbolic tools empower humans to organize and control such mental processes as voluntary attention, logical problem solving, planning and evaluating, voluntary memory, and intentional learning. Included among symbolic tools are mnemonic devices, algebraic symbols, diagrams and graphs, and most importantly, language. . . . Thus, symbolic tools are the means through which humans are able to organize and maintain control over the self and its mental, and even physical, activity.

(p. 418)

As students master the tools, they move into higher mental functions (Antón, 1999).

*Mediation* refers to the process by which something is passed from one person to another. In the context of sociocultural theory, then, *semiotic mediation* can be loosely defined as the use of language as the means of passing something to someone else. This mediation occurs during discourse, discourse which happens in context of any social setting. In the context of a classroom, teachers and capable peers guide students to perform certain culturally defined tasks, enabling the learner to appropriate those higher mental functions necessary for students to become part of the discourse community.

## **Aspects of Sociocultural Theory and Writing**

Writing is a sociocultural process. According to Beard, Myhill, Riley, and Nystrand (2009), this sociocultural influence is seen especially in writing development. As society has changed, writing has had to keep pace with the changes. Today, “writing development is being shaped by new sociocultural transformations in increasingly multiracial, multicultural, and bilingual societies” (p. 3-4).

Englert, Mariage, and Dunsmore (2008) identified three basic tenets of sociocultural theory as related to writing instruction: sociocognitive apprenticeships in writing; procedural facilitators and tools, and participation in communities of practice. First, closely related to the notion of mediation, one classroom practice deals with “the importance of offering sociocognitive apprenticeships that support novices in the participation and performance of a discipline, including the acquisition of the discourses, tools, and actions” (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2008, p. 209). This tenet relates closely to the ZPD and to mediation. Teachers and other students act as mediators within a student’s ZPD to allow that student to acquire the targeted skills or knowledge. The job of the teacher is to plan the learning moves to set up writing apprenticeships.

A second pedagogical tenet of the sociocultural writing classroom is “the provision of cultural tools . . . and procedural facilitators to prompt students’ use of cognitive tools and strategies” (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2008, p. 211). This tenet relates to scaffolding. The tools of writing, which can be physical, mental, or linguistic, help writers organize their thoughts and construct well-written texts. Procedural facilitators (cue cards or think-aloud protocols, for example) can help scaffold learning. The goal of the cultural tools and procedural facilitators is that the learner will internalize the tool or facilitator (Wells, 1999).

The final tenet is “the establishment of communities of practice that emphasize knowledge construction and knowledge dissemination” (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2008, p. 214). Through opportunities to engage with others through writing and to receive feedback from teachers and peers, learners acquire appropriate language proficiency. In practice communities, teachers provide authentic opportunities for students to use text in various ways. Additionally, a characteristic of a practice community is the relationship between readers and writers. Based on Bahktin’s (1986) claim that writing is dialogic, writers in practice communities use texts as “thinking devices” to engage in conversations with readers. Beach and Friedrich (2006) extended this idea by claiming that revision requires the writer to consider competing perspectives and test their tentative understandings of the social context. Lee (2000) proposed that when students reflect on the competing perspectives, they experience a process of “revisoning” their own thinking as they revise their work.

### **Summary**

Sociocultural theory, heavily influenced by the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bahktin (1986), arose as a response to what researchers perceived as inadequate theoretical orientations toward language and learning. Informed by cognitive, social, and cultural research strands, sociocultural researchers focused on the construction of knowledge in a situated, mediated, dialogic environment. Implications for classroom practice include the importance of creating apprenticeships in writing, providing cultural tools and procedural facilitators, and establishing communities of practice.

### **The Teacher as Reader**

Before teachers can write on student text, they must first read student text. Therefore, in order to understand how teachers read and respond to student writing, they must first realize the

importance of reading. According to Phelps (2000), “The defining aspect of pedagogical response is not the teacher’s rhetoric but the teacher’s receptivity to the student text (and to what lies beyond it): Response is most fundamentally reading, not writing” (p. 93). Only recently, however, has literature begun to focus on how teachers read student writing (Anson, 2012; Huot, 2002; Huot & Perry, 2009; Kynard, 2006; Murphy, 2000; Phelps, 2000; Zebroski, 1989). Huot and Perry (2009) contended that reading is an interpretive, creative, and evaluative act: “The question then for reading student writing is not whether we will evaluate, but how we will use that evaluation” (p. 431).

### **Teacher Roles in Response**

At various times in the process of assessing student writing, teachers take a variety of roles. Treglia (2009) called these roles “fundamental” since the teacher is the “facilitator and manager of the microcosm that is the class” (p. 67). At various times, the teacher must navigate the competing roles required of her as a reader. Anson (1989a) called these various competing roles the “schizophrenia of roles” (p. 2). At times, teachers act in a supportive role as they function to guide the writer, while at other times, teachers act in a more critical role (Anson, 1989a, 1989b; Fuller, 1987; Hodges, 1992; Horvath, 1984; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984; Straub 1996b, 2000; Straub & Lunsford, 1995). Murray (1982) described three distinct roles of the teacher in evaluation students’ writing: The teacher acts as the judge who evaluates and penalizes students, the “Moses” figure who insists on form when content is not yet there, and the listener who hears what students are trying to say.

Teachers often assume various roles in an effort to deal with the artificiality of the classroom writing situation. Sommers (1982) recommended that when reading early drafts of a student essay, the teacher should read less as a critical reader and more “as any reader would,

registering questions, reflecting befuddlement, and noting places where. . . [he is] puzzled about the text (p. 176). Spence (2010) called such reflexive reading “generous” reading. Generous readers see the student’s work as writing, as legitimate as any other type of text (Donahoe, 2008). In this role of generous reader, the teacher as careful reader should expect to uncover meaning in the text (Tobin, 2000). When teachers read generously and respond as any reader would to a student’s text, the student is able to reflect on what he has written and revise those portions that seemed not to work for the reader.

Besides being a generous reader, a teacher can also read as a coach. In a multi-draft classroom, the teacher-as-coach helps the student learn through trial and error. Where the student writer fails to make meaning for the reader, the coach assists the writer to find those areas of writing that may need to be revised. The teacher-as-coach can help the writer see what he may be unable to see on his own (Moffett, 1983).

As the audience for student writing, teachers should always be aware of the relationship between the teacher-reader and the student-writer. Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen (cited in Straub & Lunsford, 1995) noted four such relationships or roles: “pupil to teacher as trusted adult, pupil to teacher as general audience, pupil to teacher in their particular relationship, and pupil to teacher as examiner” (pp. 8-9). At various points in the writing process, teachers will assume these different roles. The “trusted adult” approaches the reading as a generous reader, seeing the text as honest communication. The “generalized reader” concerns himself with the content in the writing, paying little attention to the rhetorical context of the writing event. The “particular teacher” acts similarly to Moffett’s coach, encouraging the writer and focusing on the writer’s intentions. Finally, the “examiner” reads the writing as the final product to be marked so as to provide instruction for the student to apply in the next writing situation.

Thinking styles can be another way to categorize teachers' roles as readers. Anson (1989b) applied the work of Perry (cited in Anson 1989b) to his understanding of teacher roles in response. He noted three types of readers based on teachers' epistemologies. *Dualistic responders* focused primarily on the surface features of the student writing. In this role, teachers mark student work assuming right and wrong ways to approach the writing assignment, comparing writing to some ideal text. *Relativistic responders* wrote very little in the margins of the student text (unlike the *dualistic* teachers who wrote comments all over the students' papers), preferring instead to write modest comments in an informal endnote. These teachers, believing in student ownership of text, are "unwilling to trespass but able to enjoy or respectfully question" the meaning in the text (p. 349). The final type of responder is the *reflective responder*. While these teachers had no trouble marking student work, the language of the comments suggested that they were acting less as authorities and more as casual readers, representative of the classroom and the community.

In Anson's study, three-fourths of the readers were dualistic responders. His findings suggest that most teachers concern themselves less with meaning and more with form. Among all of the roles that teachers assume during the course of reading and responding to student work, the role they should assume the least is the role of critic (Anson, 1989b; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984; Straub, 1996b; Straub & Lunsford, 1995).

In a study of the reading and writing connection, Nystrand (1990) discussed the fallacies of the "reified reader"—the hypothetical Reader to whom many writing teachers tell students to direct their writing. This reified reader is a composite reader "who, like any reification, never actually reads anything" (p. 8). The problem is that if students write for the Reader, then the assumption is that writing is a unilateral act, something which is not true. In discussing the



relationship between the reader and the writer, he said that writers should never write for a faceless reader: “Texts function and take on meaning only in the context of particular reader-writer pairs; . . . For this reason, writing, though ostensibly monologic, is nonetheless dialogic; the specific communicative structure of any given text depends on not only the writer but also the reader” (p. 8). Teachers need to remember that they are not the Reader. Instead, they are a reader.

A teacher as a reader of text is able to shift perspectives (Huot & Perry, 2009). Zebroski (1989) illustrated this shift in his study of the voices he hears as he reads student writing. He responds to student writing based on his reactions to the voices. He named his voices in relation to their functions, and each “voice” is represented as Zebroski reads and responds in writing to student text. Simon Newman is the “pop grammarian” whose responses focus on mechanics and grammar. John Crowe Redemption’s comments emphasize structure at the sentence and paragraph level. The third voice is Mina Flaherty. Her responses deal with the writer’s logic, and the final voice is Mikail Zebroski Bahktin, whose responses deal with ideology. Zebroski’s voices demonstrate how readers as teachers should rely on the varying perspectives so that they can choose the best pedagogical approach for teaching.

Kynard (2006) studied her own response practices, highlighting the importance of teachers being aware of their purposes for responding. She urged teachers to be “double readers,” teachers who are readers of the “classroom text” with its accompanying political ideology and teachers who also are readers of “a socially constructed student’s text” with its own ideology (p. 372). Kynard claimed teachers who view response as reading should be conscious of both ideological and sociological factors related to the classroom context.

## **Teacher as Listener**

One criticism of teacher response is that teachers do not consider the writing to be an act of communication between the writer and the reader. While it is true that teachers often get overwhelmed by the task of responding to student work, it is also true that student writing does carry meaning. Anson (1989a) wrote that “it is time—or lack of it—that so often manages to redeem us from the admission that we have corrected, circled, checked, and assigned points to our students’ writing but forgotten in the arduous and painful process, to *listen* to what they have been saying” (p. 6, emphasis added).

Reading is a rhetorical act (Danis, 1987; Lindemann, 1982, 1987). When teachers approach the task of responding to student work, they should do so first as listeners. What voice does the student have? Does that voice “work” for the particular piece? Can the listener hear the voice in the text? Once teachers hear what students are trying to convey, they are better able to help students adjust their writing to find a fit between what they have said (written) and what they meant. Listening can be complicated by the fact that the listening is “mediated by an object a piece of paper with words on it—which, ideally . . . carries meaning between people who don’t have to be in the same room, or on the same continent” (Danis, 1987, p. 19).

## **Teacher as Participant in a Conversation**

In the sociocultural model of writing, language is seen as dialogic. In teacher response, teachers should view themselves as conversing with students and approach response as a give-and-take dialogue with the student (Anson, 1989; Danis, 1987; Fuller, 1987; Straub, 1996b). Ziv (1984) claimed that comments “can only be helpful if teachers respond to student writing as part of an ongoing dialogue between themselves and their students” (p. 376). Lindemann (1987) suggested that teacher comments should “create a kind of dialogue” between teacher and student

so that the “lines of communication” stay open (p. 216). Anson (1989b) posited that comments should be “more casual than formal, as if rhetorically sitting next to the writer, collaborating, suggesting, guiding, modeling” (352-252). According to Danis (1987), conversational response “encourages me to regard myself in a positive light and to work toward an image of myself that I would want to write for. I would rather think of myself as a collaborator—a midwife, a coach—than a ruthless judge. So I’m faced with the challenge of responding in such a way that students will hear in my comments the kind of voice that I’m trying to project” (p. 19).

In order to view response as conversation, teachers must consider the rhetorical context of the writing situation. Lindemann (1982) asserted that all teaching situations are rhetorical, and Danis (1987) suggested that paper-marking as conversation is one such rhetorical situation. O’Neill and Fife (1999) also reminded teachers to remember the rhetorical context of writing as they respond to student writing. They viewed response as “a complex interaction of pedagogical, textual, and personal contexts [that] had the potential for engaging students in an authentic, constructive conversation with teachers about their writing” (p. 39). Brandt (1990) reminded teachers of the importance of context in the rhetorical situation of conversational response. She showed the varying contexts at work in the acts of reading and responding:

Writers and readers in action are deeply embedded in an immediate working context of aims, plans, trials, and constructions. . . . The language that they write and read finds meaning only in relationship to this ongoing context—a context more of work than of words. Further, reference in literate language is also context-bound and essentially deictic, pointing not in at internal relations of a text but out to the developing here-and-now relationship of writer and reader at work. Texts talk incessantly about the acts of reading and writing in progress. No matter what their ostensible topic, written texts are

primarily about the writing and reading of them. What they refer to is not an explicit message but the implicit process by which intersubjective understanding is getting accomplished. That is what you have to know in order to read and write. (p. 4)

As reader and writer interact, and as teachers respond conversationally to the student text, meaning is constructed.

### **Question of Control**

Whenever teachers respond to student writing, a concern is that they will assume too much control over the text, thus robbing the student of authorial control. In the construction of knowledge, teachers exert influence over students because of teachers' social, cultural, and historical experiences. Because knowledge is interpretive, teachers have to be careful to avoid exercising too much control lest they interfere with the process of meaning-making (Treglia, 2009).

The types of teacher comments dictate the kind of power a teacher exerts over the student text. Sommers (1982) found that too many teacher comments were focused on the teacher's purpose rather than on the student's meaning. Therefore, students felt compelled to write what they believe the teacher expected. Through the "arbitrary and idiosyncratic" comments teachers wrote, they appropriated the student text, holding it up to an Ideal text (p. 152). Straub (1997a) found that comments on content can exert even greater control over student text than comments on surface features since content-based comments attack the writer's thoughts: "The more a teacher assumes control over what the writer has to say and how she approaches the subject, the more, it seems, she is running the risk of subverting the writer's stake in the writing and jeopardizing the student's chance to grow from the act of revision" (p. 279).

In commenting on student text, teachers must help students understand that they have the responsibility for and control over their writing (White, 1999). Teachers' comments should help students reflect on the text rather than force students merely to respond to the comments. Therefore, teachers must monitor the types of comments they write to minimize the control their comments exert over student writing (Daiker, 1989; Elbow & Belanoff, 1989; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984; Straub, 1996b; Straub & Lunsford, 1995).

### **Summary**

In approaching the reading of student writing, teachers must be conscious of how they read the text. As readers, they must assume various roles, they must listen, they must participate in the conversation of the text, and they must be aware of the potential to exert inappropriate or excess control. The teacher-as-reader should strive towards helping students become participants in "humanity's ongoing conversation" (Danis, 1987, p. 20). By doing so, teachers will inspire students to work harder at finding something worthwhile to say and to do so in a manner which others will be able to comprehend (Straub, 1999).

### **Teacher Written Response Practices**

While teachers have many options for responding to student writing, written response remains the most widely used form of response (Beach & Friedrich, 2008). Other forms of response—taped comments and teacher conferences among them—have merit, but as they are not important in the context of this paper, they will not be discussed. In this section, I explore the literature related to written response practices.

### **No Right Way to Respond**

Just as teachers have many roles they may assume, they have many options for written response (which I will discuss in depth in the following section). One issue related to written

response is that teachers may feel that they have to respond in a certain way based on the latest literature that claims one response style is certain to be effective. Anson (1989a, 2012) criticized compositionists for rushing to claim as certain a new method of response without verifying its credibility or usefulness in certain situations. The “urge for certainty” often results in different challenges. Composition teachers, overwhelmed with the daunting task of responding to student essays, often look for a way to manage the paper load, and the promise of some procedures, which may or may not be proven to be effective, makes them attractive to these teachers who adopt them rapidly, often in spite of their deepest convictions about the complexities of the writing process. . . .Over time, yesterday’s new approaches become today’s “current/traditional paradigm” that unconsciously drives our national ideology of learning and fuels many teachers’ behaviors—and students’ expectations—in the classroom. (Anson, 1989, pp. 2-3).

Such practices, which may work in certain situations but not in others, may be seen as best practices not because they are best practices but because teachers perceive them to be or do them expecting that they will achieve a desired result.

At issue with such thinking is that in writing about such practices, researchers neglect the role of the student. If the role of the teacher becomes the focus, then the dialogic nature of the writing process becomes lost in the rush to adopt the sometimes prescriptive methods. Sommers (2006) acknowledged that some of the response literature “impl[ies] a hierarchy of comments: offering praise, for example, is more constructive than criticism; posing questions is better than issuing commands; and using green pens or blue ink is always preferable to red” (p. 249).

Another issue with trying to determine a “right” way to respond is that response should be based on students’ abilities, their ZPD, and the rhetorical context. Ferris (2003), who has

done extensive study on teacher response related to English language learners (ELLs), said that too many comments can overwhelm students, particularly ELLs; therefore, teachers should restrict the number and type of comments to those which are based on students' ZPD. Similarly, Beach and Friedrich (2006) suggested that effective written response considers the students' ZPD and their developmental phase. Broad (2003) said that teachers should base their criteria for responding not on generic criteria (i.e. a standardized rubric) but on the contextual demands related to the classroom.

Current writing response theorists (Anson, 2012; Huot & Perry, 2009; Knoblauch & Brannon, 2006) agree with Broad regarding the contextual nature of response. Response is most effective when it is one of several strategies used in a specific classroom context. The needs of the whole student should determine the appropriate response practice. Anson (2012) argued that “[t]he shift away from ‘best’ methods is not an admission of methodological defeat, because it substitutes thoughtfulness for mindless application” (p. 198). Teachers, therefore, can “look beyond simplistic cause-and-effect formulas as justification for preferring one practice over another” (Knoblauch & Brannon, 2006).

Other issues related to the “right” way to respond include when in the writing process to respond and where on the page to respond. Those issues, while important, will be discussed in the context of the information to be presented in the following sections.

### **Types of Written Response**

Much literature has been written about the types of teacher response. In the following section, I review the literature related to those types of responses. As previously discussed, there is no right way to respond, but the literature on the various types of responses indicates that teachers have many options when thinking about written responses. Additionally, a written

comment could be considered to be more than one of the types of comments. Finally, although I have organized the following sections in an “either-or” type of format, teachers should resist thinking that they have to respond in dualistic ways (Anson, 1989b). Doing so seems to imply that one way is “good” while the other is “bad” (Straub, 1996a, p. 224).

**Directive versus facilitative (or direct versus indirect).** *Directive* comments tell a writer what to do. While such comments are specific, they leave little choice for the writer. For example, a teacher may write, “Omit this word” in response to a student’s writing. *Facilitative* comments refer to the written comments that suggest students make changes without directly stating that a change must be made. Facilitative comments may or may not be phrased as questions. For example, the same issue—lack of a thesis statement—could be written one of two ways: “Can you identify your thesis statement?” or “Your introduction does not give a clear direction for your paper.” Some researchers refer to facilitative comments as *indirect comments*; I will use the terms interchangeably as they function in essentially the same manner.

Other researchers have suggested that direct feedback may be better. Sweeny (1999) worked with developmental writers at the college level. He found that developmental writers improved the quality of their writing when told directly where and how to make changes. However, English Language Learners (ELLs) may misinterpret indirect feedback. Hyland & Hyland (2001) said that teachers often phrase indirect comments in a way that can confuse ELLs and thus cause problems for them. Since indirect or facilitative comments may also be phrased as questions, the ELLs may not understand how to revise their work.

Some researchers suggested that facilitative or indirect comments are more effective than directive comments. Welch (1997) argued that teachers should avoid directive comments (which he called *forewhadowing* comments), and instead use facilitative comments (which he called



*sideshadowing* comments). He said that in order to challenge students' thinking, teachers should make comments which help them reflect on their ideas. Facilitative comments help create the dialogic tension necessary in a sociocultural classroom, but directive comments force the reader to revise according to the teachers ideal for the text rather than the student's ideal. Facilitative comments give students the responsibility for the text but with guidance from the teacher (Atwell, 1998; Ferris, 1997; Johnston, 1983).

One special type of indirect comment is the *mitigated* comment. Mitigated comments deal with the wording that teachers use to write comments. Both first language (L1) and second language (L2) researchers agree that students can be encouraged or discouraged by the way a comment is worded (Anson, 1989b; Elbow, 1999; Ferris, 1995, 1997; Sommers, 1982; Straub, 1996a, 1997b). Mitigated commentary deals with this tension in the wording of comments. Mitigation is the "a form of politeness intended to buffer and mediate the emotional involvement and possible sense of inadequacy related to receiving critical responses" (Treglia, 2009, p. 70). Some researchers have shown that mitigated commentary leads to improved student confidence (Lea & Street, 2000; Weaver, 2006). However, results regarding the effectiveness of mitigation in revision are inconclusive. Lea & Street (2000), studying L1 students, and Ferris (1995, 1997), studying L2 students, concluded that mitigation boosts student confidence and helps them take responsibility for revision. However, Hyland and Hyland (2001) found that L2 students often misunderstand mitigation, therefore leading to little or no revision.

Treglia (2008, 2009) conducted two studies dealing with mitigated commentary. In her 2008 case study of two teachers teaching both L1 and L2 students, she showed that mitigation does not necessarily improve the quality of revision, but that "it plays a critical role as a 'face-saving' technique and as a tool to motivate and engage students" to be involved in the revision

process (p. 128). In her 2009 study of the revisions of L1 and L2 students, Treglia concluded that while students had no trouble understanding the wording of the mitigation used by the teacher. She said that the “type of comment, linguistic form, and hedging technique [mitigation] used by a teacher did not appear to be determining factors in cases where there were poor or no revision” (p. 83)

**Vague versus specific.** Although teachers use written comment as the primary form of teacher response to student writing, those comments are often inconsistent and vague (Smith, 1997; Straub, 1996a). One of the biggest criticisms of vague, non-specific comments came from Sommers (1982). A major finding of her landmark study was that “*most teachers’ comments are not text-specific and could be interchanged, rubber-stamped, from text to text*” (p. 152, emphasis in original). Calling such comments idiosyncratic, she said that vague comments place all of the emphasis on the product rather than on the process of writing. Zamel (1997), in her L2 study of fifteen teachers’ written comments, found that teachers used vague comments which focused only on surface-level issues in the paper. They saw drafts as fixed or final products. Although Sommers’s and Zamel’s studies have limitations—they did not consider classroom context or teacher background—they did show that vague comments are not effective in helping students revise.

In contrast, many studies found that students prefer specifically written comments. Also called *descriptive* comments, specific comments are more effective in helping students understand the teacher. Teachers who respond in a reader-response manner tend to use descriptive, specific comments (Elbow, 1981; Johnston, 1983). Bardine, Bardine, and Deegan (2000) used a case study approach to study the responses teachers gave to high school students. They found that students preferred specific comments that provided explanations. Ferris (2003)

found that L2 students prefer descriptive comments that suggest ways in which student can improve their writing. Students also prefer descriptive comments that explain why a certain aspect of their writing is good or bad (Beach, 1989). In a 1997 study of 172 first-year composition students' preferences for teacher response, Beach found that students preferred specific, elaborate comments that provided clear direction rather than the vague comments like "clarify." Treglia (2008) conducted interviews of 14 L1 and L2 students. The students remarked that specific commentary dealing that acknowledged their work was the most helpful. To the students, specific comments indicate that the teacher has read their work carefully.

**Content versus form (or global versus local).** A big question for teachers is how to respond to issues of global issues of content as compared to local issues of form. Some of the issues involve when to make comments regarding content and form while other issues involve where to place comments related to content and form. Those issues seem not so important to students. While many researchers insist that effective writing classes are multi-draft classrooms in which comments on content should come on early drafts (Freedman, 1987; Sommers, 1982), others suggested that the timing of global commentary had no effect on revision (Ashwell, 2000; Fathman & Whalley, 1990). As to placement of teacher comment, neither seemed to have a more pronounced effect on students' work. Ferris (1997) found that students prefer specific, marginal comments related to their texts. Connors and Lunsford (1993) noted that their survey respondents praised teachers who used marginal comments in which the comments were written specifically and allowed students to revise. However, they also noted that teachers who wrote end comments likewise received a positive review from the respondents. Other researchers (S. Smith, 1997) suggested that the end comment has the most potential for helping students.

Most of the research related to form versus content dealt with the issue of editing. Typically, editing comments deal with local issues. Most teachers (three-fourths of the teachers in Anson's 1989 study) still mark local, surface issues (Sommers, 1982, 2006) although such marks are not proven to help students avoid them in future writing. One huge issue with responding to local areas is that many times, the teachers themselves do not know what constitutes an error (Anson, 2000; Ferris, 2003). Additionally, teachers vary widely on their perceptions of error. What may be a serious error for one teacher is not seen as serious for another teacher, and comments related to local errors depend on teachers' individual judgments (Connors & Lunsford, 1988). Another factor related to the treatment of local errors is that some types of writing are related to specific genres or ways of thinking, which can lead to an increase in local errors (Briggs & Pailliotet, 1997; Weaver, 1996).

The debate over editing comments for L2 writers is especially intense. According to Truscott (1996), second-language (L2) research verifies that teaching grammar to ELL students is inconclusive, ineffective, and even "detrimental" (p. 330). Ferris (1999) vehemently disagreed with Truscott, defending the teaching of grammar to ELL students. Truscott noted the lack of empirical studies to verify that correcting the grammar of ELLs is effective. Ferris agreed that there is a lack of such studies, but she still believed that correcting local matters is helpful to ELLs.

### **Best Practices**

Although there is no "right" way to respond in writing to student text, broad principles about response can guide teachers in making the appropriate pedagogical choices for their students. A list of definitive best practices in teacher response does not exist. Straub (1996b; 1997b; 1999; 2000a) conducted several studies on the various ways that teachers respond to

students' writing. In an examination of his own practices and as a result of his years of research on response, Straub (2000b) outlined the following principles for responding to student writing:

1. Turn your comments into a conversation.
2. Do not take control over a student's text.
3. Give priority to global concerns of content, organization and purpose before getting (overly) involved with style and correctness.
4. Limit the scope of your comments and the number of comments you present.
5. Select your focus of comments according to the stage of drafting and relative maturity of the text.
6. Gear your comments to the individual student.
7. Make frequent use of praise.

Elbow (1999), who is not at all certain that students respond to teacher comments, nonetheless suggested some broad guidelines for teachers:

1. Get some sort of reflection from student as to what he or she was thinking as the writing was taking place, as in a journal entry or a cover letter. This should be something informal.
2. Glance through peer responses before making comments.
3. Read the entire text before commenting. Then, focus the comments on two or three areas.
4. Write lightly or just put squiggly lines/short phrases, etc. Save comments for a separate sheet so as not to mess up students' papers. He suggested, "Not putting ink on their papers sends an important message about *them* owning and being in charge of their own text."

5. Take a few minutes after returning their papers and have them write a note/reflection about their reactions to comments.
6. Rather than think about the work of responding in terms of comments, simply describe the paper—this is a good way to respond: main points, sub points, structure
7. Phrase the comments positively. (pp. 198-199)

These guidelines, while not a list of “best practices,” nonetheless provide teachers with options for responding in writing to their students’ texts. Some researchers, however, warn against response practices that do not consider the teacher as reader (Anson, 1989, 2012; Huot, 2002; Huot & Perry, 2009). Finally, though a universal list of best practices does not exist, composition teachers generally avoid the “grade-only” comment in which teachers return students’ papers with the only mark on the paper being the grade (Haswell, 2008).

### **Summary**

While research indicates that there is not one right way to respond, research also indicates that some types of responses are more preferred by student depending on the rhetorical situation. Additionally, comments should not be seen as being good or bad because too many factors dictate if and how those comments are effective.

### **Teacher Beliefs**

Over the past forty years, response research has done little to study the impact of teacher beliefs on written response. Research focused primarily on the ways teachers responded to student text (Fife & O’Neill, 2001). Huot (2002) proposed a dialectic theory in which researchers examine why teachers respond rather than how teachers respond, calling for teachers to “reflect upon and articulate [their] beliefs and assumptions about literacy and its teaching” (p.

112). He complained that the emphasis on how teachers respond masks the more important need to have teachers understand the origin of those comments.

### **Relationship between Teacher Beliefs and Practices**

Teachers operate under some theoretical framework in their teaching. This framework informs teachers' practices. Why should teachers be aware of the relationship between theory and practice? Teachers' beliefs guide their pedagogical choices: "Because beliefs help teachers to make sense of what they experience in the classroom, they create meaning for teachers" (Davis & Andrzejewski, 2009).

In relation to teachers' written comments on student text, Horvath (1984) wrote, "It is important . . . , to be aware of the theory informing one's practice and to recognize that students operating under alternative theories may produce legitimate texts that from one blinkered perspective appear unacceptable" (p. 141). This understanding is critical: if teachers are unaware of the theory behind their practices, they run the risk of assuming that their writers have that same perspective about writing. Rutz (2006) conducted a study similar to the studies of Connors and Lunsford (1993) and Straub and Lunsford (1995) in which she interviewed teachers and students and analyzed teachers' comments on written texts. She concluded that teachers varied widely in their response habits, but she noted "a disconnect between the understanding operating in a classroom and the thoughtful assessment of teacher responses by trained readers" (p. 261). The context of the classroom and the reality of the response practices seemed not to concur. The teachers in this study were unaware of the disconnection.

### **Identity**

Teachers' identities are closely related to their beliefs. Sperling and DiPardo (2008) asserted that teachers' identities influence their beliefs and therefore their classroom practices.

In one study, Johnston, Smagorinsky, Thompson, and Fry (2003) conducted a longitudinal study of one teacher who insisted on teaching the five-paragraph theme to a class of eighth grade students even though recent research suggested that five-paragraph essay is an outdated mode of writing. They examined the various influences on her beliefs, and they looked at the logic of her pedagogical choices. They determined that even though she was cognitively aware that she was not making the best pedagogical choices, she did not to discontinue the practice. One deciding factor was the pressure she felt to teach the five-paragraph essay because it was the essay format students were expected to write on the state writing exam. They concluded that teachers' beliefs are often tied to cultural norms and standards even if they know that those standards may not be appropriate.

Olson (2003) studied the phenomenon of cultural identity related to beliefs. He found that "whereas beliefs may be private, even private beliefs take their form from the intersubjective agreements, norms, and conventions that constitute a culture" (p. 136). These beliefs, formed from cultural identity, then become part of the classroom context. Beck (2006) discussed how teachers' identities influence the manner in which they transmit culturally expected ideals to students. He wrote,

Individuals' identities as teachers and learners are composed not only of what they know, but also of their belief in the validity of this knowledge and their estimation of certain kinds of knowledge as more important than others. Although teachers are charged with passing certain culturally sanctioned expectations and interpretations of the world onto students, they necessarily recast these expectations through the subjective lenses of their values and beliefs about learning" (p. 421)



Teachers should be aware of the subjective nature of their beliefs. According to Davis and Andrzejewski (2009), “What [teachers] believe is real and true,” even if those beliefs conflict with “accepted notions in the field” or with their present “physical and social realities” (p. 913). A study by Alexander, Murphy, Guan, and Murphy (1998) found that some teachers are aware that their beliefs, which are subjective, may not correspond to current knowledge, which is objective. This gap affects the pedagogical choices teachers make. In another study (Bardine, Bardine, & Deegan, 2000), one of the subjects found that “my philosophy toward writing and the teaching of writing is not necessarily reflected in my commenting style” (p. 96). She realized that her beliefs did not align with her practices.

Even in content areas, teachers have certain beliefs about what students need to know. These beliefs may conflict with institutional expectations, causing tension for the teacher. Lee (2000) addressed these tensions, suggesting that teachers’ identities can be revised based on their experiences in certain pedagogical contexts. Sperling and DiPardo (2008) suggested that teachers’ identities can change based on the students they teach and on the context of their classroom. However, because teachers’ identities are tied to their beliefs, they may be resistant to change (Davis & Andrzejewski, 2009). This resistance is seen especially when teachers are faced with changes mandated by policy (Fecho, 2001; Gregoire, 2003).

However, teachers will be most effective when their beliefs and their practices align (Korthagen, 2004). Regarding the impact of teachers’ beliefs on their written response practices, Knoblauch and Brannon (2006) eloquently expressed why the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and teachers’ written commentary matters:

[W]hat gives teacher commentary a particular importance in the classroom is the simple fact that it constitutes individualized teaching. Specifically, at its best, it makes explicit

to one student at a time, text by text, what a teacher's values are. It orients students to what the teacher thinks is important in the practice of writing, focuses their attention, encourages them to keep trying, makes them think (if the teacher is lucky), reveals an interested reader, offers advice about how best to accomplish some end or effect, and maybe, occasionally, serendipitously, provides this student or that just the insight needed at that particular moment to make some small, gratifying advance. In part, commentary is a modeling activity, offering the teacher a chance to dramatize the presence of a reader whose needs and expectations can and should influence writing. In part, it's a form of instructional emphasis, most useful when it offers the same message about writing on an individual essay that the teacher seeks to deliver in the course as a whole. It is least useful, by contrast, when it contradicts a teacher's self-professed values and goals, for instance, when an exaggeration of technical decorum in responses to drafts runs counter to syllabus emphasis on purposes, audiences, and lines of reasoning. But more than anything, it is, connotatively, the teacher's personal statement about the relationship she wishes to create between the teacher and the student, and about what matters in the process of becoming a writer.

If, Knoblauch and Brannon contended, written commentary conveys teachers' beliefs, then teachers must work to understand why they respond in the way they do. In order to do this, teachers need to be given time to reflect on their beliefs (Davis, 2006), though finding the time for productive reflection is challenging. However, teachers must be willing to explore their beliefs, to understand how those beliefs affect their pedagogy, and to be willing to affirm, revise, or change those beliefs (Davis & Andrzejewski, 2009).

## **Epistemology**

Teachers' epistemologies form the bases for their pedagogies. Several researchers studied how teachers' epistemologies influenced their pedagogical choices. Through interviews and observations, Hillocks (1999) studied how teachers' beliefs about English and their beliefs about student learning affected what they taught and how they taught it. He found that current-traditional rhetoric was the prevailing epistemology among those teachers studied, and even though he provided intense teacher training, the teachers did not change their beliefs. Hamel (2003) conducted a case study of teachers and found that the teacher's beliefs about the reading process affected their abilities to see how students learned. Based on the findings of these two studies, Sperling and DiPardo (2008) indicated the need for teachers to analyze their own beliefs and, if necessary, to "develop new ways of seeing their teaching and their students' learning" (pp. 84-85).

Teachers need to be aware of how their philosophies of education regarding writing influence their teaching practices. According to Lee (2000) teachers' epistemologies indicate how they intend for their comments to be read. For example, the phrase "better writer" might mean "empowered" to a person with an expressivist orientation, but the same phrase could mean "working toward a radical democracy" to the person with a social-epistemic orientation. The words are the same, but the intent of the words rests with the teacher who wrote them (p. 6).

Davis and Andrzejewski (2009) contended that teacher's beliefs are multi-dimensional, with categories of beliefs ranging from broad societal beliefs to personal beliefs. They suggest that teachers' societal beliefs of schooling and education determine their epistemological beliefs about learning and knowing. In turn, those epistemological beliefs impact the way teachers

think about teaching. Eventually, teachers adopt classroom practices based on their epistemological beliefs.

### **Summary**

Every composition teacher has a set of beliefs about the writing process and the purpose of response. Teachers may not be able to articulate those beliefs, but those beliefs have a relationship to the teachers' practices in the classroom. In terms of teacher response related to teacher beliefs, Freedman (1987b) wrote that "successful response is guided by a strong and consistent philosophy of teaching writing" (p. 160). Helping teachers understand how their beliefs inform their practices is key to helping teachers write effective responses.

### **Chapter Summary**

This review of the selected literature, while limited in scope, provides background and characteristics of the sociocultural theory, a theory which acts as a theoretical base for the study's framework of response as conversation. The literature also showed that teachers have to assume a variety of roles, use a variety of written response strategies, and understand the beliefs which cause them to choose certain response practices.

The main research question for this present study is "How do freshman English composition teachers' written comments on students' essays reflect their beliefs about the purpose of response and their roles in the writing process?" To answer that question, I designed a qualitative study. The methodology for that study is explained in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3  
METHODOLOGY

**Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to determine how teachers' response practices reflect their stated beliefs about the purpose of response and the nature of the writing process. Informed by research on response as conversation, teachers as readers, and teachers' beliefs, I decided to pursue qualitative research, specifically the case study approach, as the best method for answering my main research question "How do freshman English composition teachers' written comments on students' essays reflect their beliefs about the purpose of response and their roles in the writing process?" In this chapter, I provide a rationale for using qualitative research and the case study method, described the setting and the participants of the study, explained the methods of data collection and data analysis, discussed trustworthiness of the data, and disclosed my biases.

**Rationale for Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research, with its roots in disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, is a valid research methodology for educational researchers (Glesne, 2006; Holliday, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam & Associates, 2002). Because qualitative researchers are attempting to understand a particular social phenomenon, they typically are not bound by a priori assumptions and must instead uncover meaning through more interactive methods. Whereas quantitative researchers focus on statistical methods to analyze a pre-determined, restricted set of variables from a large population, qualitative researchers instead use words and pictures to analyze many possible variables present in a narrow set of participants. Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological

traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed reviews of information, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p. 15).

In qualitative research, one assumption is that individuals construct meaning through social interaction (Glesne, 2006; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Piantanida & Garman, 1999; Stake, 1995). Such social interaction is not static; in other words, the world in which people interact socially cannot be categorized into discrete variables to be analyzed. If meaning happens through social interaction, the context is critical. Qualitative researchers focus on social interaction in a particular context. Furthermore, people’s perceptions of reality constantly change. According to Merriam and Associates (2002), “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding what those interpretations are at a particular point in time and in a particular context” (p. 4).

While qualitative research takes many forms depending on the research question, qualitative research design includes several unique characteristics.

1. Qualitative research occurs naturalistically (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 1998, 2003; Eisner, 1991; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 2002). The researcher observes human behavior or events in settings in which they naturally occur.
2. Qualitative research is emergent (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Meloy, 2002; Patton, 2002; Piantanida & Garman, 1999). Because researchers are interested in the participants’ realities, they can have no *a priori* assumptions or hypotheses and instead must construct and reconstruct meaning both during and after data collection. Additionally, in the absence of

- existing theory, or if that existing theory does not adequately explain a phenomenon, researchers inductively build their concepts and themes based on the data they collect.
3. Qualitative researchers use multiple methods of data collection (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 1998, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1988). Whereas quantitative researchers rely on numbers, qualitative researchers rely on text data (words) and images (pictures). Data collection may consist of the traditional methods of observations, interviews, and documents but may also include various audio-visual materials. The product of the data will be “richly descriptive” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 5).
  4. Qualitative research is simultaneous (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 1998, 2003; Eisner, 1991; Merriam, 1988). Researchers concern themselves as much with the process as they do with the product. Because of the humanistic nature of qualitative research, research cannot progress in a linear fashion. Instead, researchers “[cycle] back and forth from data collection and analysis to problem reformulation and back” (Creswell, 2003, p. 183).
  5. Qualitative research is reflexive (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Glesne, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Meloy, 2002; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2002). Because the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, qualitative researchers must take into consideration their personal biases and interests. Qualitative researchers acknowledge how their own voices and perspectives--cultural, ideological, linguistic, political, and social--shape the study. Therefore, many qualitative researchers rely on first-person narratives to report their research.

6. Qualitative research is interpretive (Creswell, 2003; Holliday, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Meloy, 2002; Merriam & Associates, 2002). According to Holliday (2007), qualitative research “maintains that we can explore, catch glimpses, illuminate, and then try to interpret bits of reality. Interpretation is as far as we can go” (p. 6).
7. Qualitative research is holistic (Creswell, 2003; Holliday, 2007; Meloy, 2002; Patton, 2002). Qualitative researchers focus broadly on a social process, program, or phenomenon as a whole. Borrowing terminology from *gestalt* theory, Patton (2002) said, “This holistic approach assumes that the whole is understood as a complex system that is greater than the sum of its parts. The analyst searches for the totality or unifying nature of particular settings—the *gestalt*” (p. 59).

Based on these characteristics, a qualitative research design was therefore appropriate for this study comparing teachers’ beliefs about written response and their actual response practices.

### **The Case Study Design**

While many people are familiar with the term *case study* because of its use in law, medicine, social work, and psychology, they may not be familiar with the term *case study* as a valid design for educational research in education. However, case study offers researchers the opportunity to examine educational practice in its natural context. According to Sperling and Freedman (2001), “one can fully understand neither an instructional philosophy nor a method apart from the ways particular teachers work in particular instructional contexts” (p. 371). No exact definition exists for case study research, but researchers have identified several distinguishing characteristics.



## **Characteristics**

First, case study researchers are concerned with a single case. The case can be a phenomenon (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995) but it can also be a social unit (Merriam, 1988) or a program or activity (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Stake, 1995). According to Creswell (1998), Glesne (2006), Merriam (1988), Stake (1995), and Yin (1989), the case must be a bounded system; that is, the case must be an integrated system “bound by space and time” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 15). The system must contain working parts which may not seem to have any connection, but they have some association (Stake, 1995).

Second, the phenomenon being studied (the case) must be studied in its natural, real-life context (Creswell, 1998; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1989). Yin (1989, 2004) believed that researchers should use case studies because the phenomenon being studied is not always easily separable from its context. Studying the phenomenon in its natural context also allows the researcher to “preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening” (Stake, 1995, p. 12), something which cannot happen apart from the context.

To study the bounded case in its natural context, researchers must rely on multiple methods of data collection (Creswell, 1998; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1989). Those methods include, but are not limited to, interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1988; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The researcher, therefore, is the primary instrument of data collection in a case study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). As will be discussed later, the use of multiple methods of data collection can help the researcher triangulate the data to allow for stronger validation of the observations.

A final characteristic of case study research is its use of rich, thick description (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), case study uses “key quotes, anecdotes, prose composed from interviews, and other literary techniques to create mental images that bring to life the complexity being studied” (p. 16).

### **Cross-case Design**

While many design options exist for case studies, I utilized the cross-case design (also called collective case study or multiple case study; I will use the terms interchangeably). According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), collective case study involves the study of several “instrumental cases” which allow the researcher to “theorize about some larger collection of cases” (p. 33). While the information is not intended to be generalized because of the small sample size, collective case studies are perhaps more able to be representative (Stake, 1995). The case or bounded system I studied is the freshman English program at a mid-sized commuter university serving a metropolitan area. To observe the phenomenon of teachers’ written response practices as related to their beliefs about written response, I observed and interviewed four instructors, and I collected samples of their course syllabi and written comments. Because I had several instrumental cases (individual instructors) within a case (the freshman English program), the cross-case or collective case design was the most appropriate design for this study.

In multiple case study design, two types of analysis occur. Researchers must first look at each individual case as a whole study (Yin, 1989). They describe the individual case using detailed description. This analysis of individual cases is called “within-case analysis” (Creswell, 1998). Once the researcher has considered the conclusions based on the individual cases, she should then look at themes which may be replicated across the cases, called “cross-case analysis” (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 1989). Considering both the within-case analyses and the cross-case

analysis, the researcher then interprets the data to make assertions about the specific case. Based on the research question, I decided that the collective case study was the most effective design for this study.

### **The Setting**

The setting is the freshman English writing department of a commuter university serving a metropolitan area. The university is a comprehensive research university offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees. According to the most current information available, the university has an enrollment of nearly 11,000 students, students who come from all fifty states and from ninety countries. The university offers forty-eight undergraduate programs and forty-three graduate programs. The English department offers several writing classes, among which are ENGL 100, a developmental writing course; ENGL 101, typical of first-semester English composition at most colleges and universities; and ENGL 102, typical of second-semester English composition at most colleges and universities. (Course numbers have been changed for anonymity purposes.) As of 2011-2012, the department employs more than forty-five full-time faculty members, all of whom are required to teach at least one writing class. Part-time instructors and Graduate Teaching Assistants also teach many of the first- and second-semester composition classes. For the purposes of this study, first-semester English composition refers to the institution's ENGL 101 course, and second-semester English composition refers to the institution's ENGL 102 course.

At the time of the study, the freshman writing program was completing its second year of implementation of a revamped freshman writing program. According to documents obtained from the program director, the program focuses on writing as inquiry. As stated in the front matter of the textbook used for both the first- and second-semester writing courses,

The inquiry-based course encourages students to be intellectually curious, to ask questions not only about themselves as writers but also about the nature of writing. To help foster this curiosity, students read and communicate in a variety of genres, learn and hone research methods, and apply a variety of rhetorical strategies. Student texts are developed through scaffolded assignments, consisting of interlinked low- and high-stakes assignments, as well as long and short compositions. These sequential assignments, including self-directed compositions and *instructor-guided revisions* [emphasis added], stimulate exploring, explaining, evaluating, and reflecting. They all work together to help students develop, test, and refine their own researchable questions and engage in self-discovery of the writing process. (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. iv)

I selected this setting in part because the inquiry-based classrooms of this institution focus on “instructor-guided revisions.” One manner in which instructors guide their students to revise work is through their written comments on student work. These written comments will become one source of data.

I also chose this particular setting purposefully as the program has as one of its characteristics that it “fosters best practices as outlined in current composition scholarship” (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. iv). Since I focused my research on theory and practice, this characteristic of the program is critical. In a conversation with the program director regarding assessment of student work, the director indicated that all instructors of freshman composition had to read Nancy Sommers’ 1982 article “Responding to Student Writing,” a foundational article to be sure, but not necessarily the most current. I hoped to determine if instructors’ best practices come from more than Sommers’ 1982 article.

Furthermore, I selected this setting because the freshman writing program is an outcome-based program. By the end of the second-semester writing course, students should demonstrate proficiency in three broad areas: (1) Rhetorical Knowledge; (2) Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing; and (3) Knowledge of Conventions. Within the second area (Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing), one specific outcome is that students will “[u]nderstand writing as a process that involves invention, drafting, collaboration, and revision” (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. v). Whether or not students revise their work based on teachers’ written comments did not concern me; instead, I explored whether or not the teachers’ knowledge of and acceptance of this outcome affected their written response practices.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I chose the setting based on the stated expectation that teachers will assess student writing formally. According to the program information, in each semester of freshman composition, “students [will] compose a minimum of 5000 words, 3000 of which should be formally assessed” (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. vi). In second-semester English composition, teachers formally assess the 3000 “high stakes” words: “[I]nstructors need to guide students to make effective choices, ensuring that students employ a range of research methods, integrate others’ ideas effectively, engage in discourse, and apply appropriate rhetorical strategies” (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. viii). While the assessment can take many forms, my focus will be on the written responses teachers give to students. If teachers are aware of their expectations for guiding (i.e. assessing) students, then their written responses should lead students to accomplish those stated goals.

In short, the setting of the study affords me the opportunity to focus on the phenomenon being studied in a natural context. Additionally, the characteristics of the setting create an acceptable framework for a bounded system (i.e. a case) necessary for case study research.

## The Participants

Based on the collective case study design, I interviewed and observe four full-time instructors of English composition, all of whom teach second-semester composition. While Creswell (1998) suggested that no more than four cases should be chosen, the number of instrumental cases (individuals in this proposed study) should be determined by the needs of the study (Stake, 1995). Because case study involves purposeful sampling (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995), I chose to focus on a small group of instructors selected from a list of ten names given to me by the program coordinator. All of the instructors were members of the task force that undertook the revision of the freshman writing program. Therefore, I expected that they were familiar with the expectations of the program. Additionally, all of the instructors have been teaching in the program for more than four years, and most have been teaching freshman English composition for more than five years. Additionally, the program director indicated that all of the instructors understand the best practices for responding to student writing.

Secondary participants were the students on whose essays the teachers wrote their comments. While I chose not to interview the students, their academic writing framed the context for the teachers' written comments. During classroom observations, I sat in the back of the room or in a corner of the room so that I could observe the instructors' interactions with the students. However, beyond gaining their permission to collect blind copies (students' names removed from the essays) of their work, I had no formal interaction with the students. For the remainder of this study, the word *participants* will refer specifically to the instructors who participated as the students participated only indirectly.

## **Procedures**

Once the setting and the participants had been determined, I proceeded with the study. However, prior to conducting any research, I ensured that I had met all necessary requirements of the institution. I had already completed the “Protecting Human Research Participants” course offered by the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research (see certificate in Appendix A), and I obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B) to conduct the research. Once I obtained IRB approval and had obtained written consent from the chair of the English department to conduct the research (see Appendix C), I emailed the ten instructors (see Appendix D). Three of the ten accepted my invitation to participate in the study and gave informed consent (see Appendix E). Additionally, the program director was interested in participating in the study. Because the program director met the criteria for inclusion and was eager to be a participant, I obtained a signed consent form, realizing that the director’s dual role could impact the data.

Because the research focused on written teacher responses to student writing, I had to obtain written consent from students to use their essays as the backdrop for the teacher responses. Once the chair of the English department and the instructors had provided their written consent, I made arrangements with each of the instructors to attend a class session so that I could explain the study and enlist their students. During the class session, I introduced myself and the study. I offered all students the chance to submit their essays, and I accepted the signed forms of consent of any student who wished to participate (see Appendix F). After visiting the classrooms of all four teacher participants and enlisting students’ permission to use their essays, I collected signed consent forms from a total of 55 students; however, by the time the teachers

submitted the essays for inclusion in the study, I received a total of 40 essays. (See Chapter 4 for further information on these numbers.)

After obtaining all necessary permissions, I emailed the four instructors to schedule initial interviews. I met with each of the four within the span of one week to conduct the interviews. Following the initial interview with each of the instructors, I arranged to conduct two classroom observations. Within two weeks of the initial interviews, I had completed the observations. In order to collect the writing samples, I asked each teacher to gather the essays and submit them at their own convenience. One of the instructors gave me his students' essays between the first and second observations. The other three instructors gave me their students' essays after I had completed the second observation. In the case of three of instructors, I received the essays in paper form. In the case of the fourth instructor, I received the essays electronically via email. In the case of the essays submitted in paper form, the teachers' comments were handwritten on the students' essays. In the case of the essays submitted electronically, the comments were inserted electronically via the "New Comment" function in Word.

Once I had conducted the interviews and observations and collected the writing samples and other documents, I analyzed the data for preliminary results. Part of the analysis involved coding the comments according to a 1994 article by Sperling (see Appendix J for permission to use Sperling's framework). To complete the coding and guard against research bias, I enlisted the help of three graduate teaching assistants. They met with me for training, and then they coded the comments. After the coding was completed and verified, I met with the four instructors for a follow-up interview to review my results of their comment analysis and to get their reactions to the findings. When the last interviews had been conducted, I began an analysis



of all data. In the sections which follow, I have explained in detail those data collection methods and the data analysis methods.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Case study researchers collect three main types of data: interviews, observations, and documents. I conducted two interviews with each teacher so that I would have their own words as data. I also conducted two classroom observations on each teacher. The observations provided a context for both the teachers' spoken words from the interviews and the written words on the students' essays. I obtained several types of documents: course syllabi and student essays on which teachers had written their comments. Other documents included the textbook used by the freshman writing program, the instructors' manual for the writing program, the writing prompts relative to the essays, and any other papers essential to the research. The documents gave context to the study, but they also acted as a "snapshot in time" of the teacher since the documents related to one assignment of one section of one course in the freshman writing program. The documents also acted to support or reject the words of the teacher.

### **Interviews**

In preparation for the interviews, I first had to recruit the participants. I consulted with the chair of the freshman writing program to request a list of names of instructors of ENGL 102 who had been active in the overhaul of the writing program, who had been teaching in the program for at least four years, and who were currently teaching ENGL 102. I emailed them to gauge their willingness to participate so that I would have an idea of how many participants I might have. Four instructors indicated interest. (See Appendix D for the initial asking letter which was emailed to prospective participants.) Once I had obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board to conduct the research (see Appendix B), I met with the chair of the

English department to discuss my research with him and obtain his informed consent (see Appendix C). I then emailed the four instructors who had shown interest in the study. One instructor was not teaching ENGL 102 during the semester I was collecting data, so I excluded her from the list. The other three instructors agreed to participate, and the chair of the freshman writing program was willing to participate as well. All four provided their signed forms of consent (see Appendix E).

I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix G) based on the four broad areas of research of this study. The questions were further developed and refined in consultation with my dissertation committee. Via email, I secured times and locations to conduct the interviews.

To collect interview data, I conducted two interviews with the participants. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), semi-structured interviews work well for case studies because questions are “predetermined but flexibly worded” (p. 40). The predetermined questions allow researchers to focus on the particular issues with which they are concerned but allow the researchers to ask follow-up questions to explore those issues with which the interviewee is concerned. While the interview questions should derive from the main research question (How do teachers’ written response practices reflect their stated beliefs about the purpose of response and the process of writing?), I asked specific interview questions to determine the instructors’ beliefs about the purpose of freshman writing, the instructors’ knowledge of the specific writing program, instructors’ understanding of best practices for written response, and instructors’ perspectives of their individual written response practices (see Appendix G for specific interview questions). I also asked some general background questions to gather demographic information. Such demographic information shed light on the study, particularly in understanding how the participants arrived at their understandings of best practices.

To develop the protocol for the first interview, I relied on several sources. First, a phone conversation with Dr. Melanie Sperling (September 9, 2011) led me to questions regarding response as a conversation. Her early research informs much of the current research into teacher response. Additionally, I will be using Sperling's (1994) coding scheme to code samples of teachers' written responses (see Data Analysis), so I paid particular attention to her suggestions regarding the interview protocol. Second, I referred to the freshman writing program documents regarding the expectation and outcomes of the program to structure questions to elicit information specific to the program. Finally, I looked at response research, particularly the work of Sperling (1994) and Straub (1996a, b) for examples. From these sources, I developed the interview protocol for the first interview the study (see Appendix G). The first interviews lasted between one to one-and-a-half hours per participant.

To develop the protocol for the second interview, I looked at the data results from the coding of teachers' written responses, the analysis of the answers given in the first interview, and the information contained in the syllabi and other documents such as writing prompts. Once each teacher's written comments had been coded and categorized and I had determined the types of responses that teachers write, I analyzed individual interview transcripts to establish each teacher's theoretical base for response theory and writing practice. I then explained the coding process to the teachers, showed the teachers their results in table form and narrative form, and asked flexible questions regarding my findings. Therefore, the interview protocol for this second interview was determined in large part by the teachers' individual results. Therefore, I did not have a firm list of questions since the questions emerged from the data analysis. In essence, I asked if they agreed with my findings related to their specific data, and I wanted to see if my findings about their response practices showed any relationship with their stated beliefs about

response theory and the writing process. The follow-up interviews lasted about one hour per participant.

As part of the interview process, I recorded the interviews using a digital recorder. For the first interviews, I also videotaped them for back-up purposes. Once the interviews were completed and as soon as I was able to do so, I transcribed them verbatim so that they were in a format conducive to analysis. In the transcripts, each participant received a pseudonym so that I could ensure anonymity.

### **Observations**

Because the natural context of the case is critical in case study research, I needed to observe the teachers as they taught freshman composition. Once the teachers had given signed consent for the study, I arranged with them to observe one of their sections of ENGL 102. Because IRB approval came just prior to the beginning of the semester, I was not able to make arrangements to observe the first class period as had been my goal. By the time I secured the necessary permissions from the department, obtained consent forms from the instructors, and conducted the initial interviews, we were about five or six weeks into the semester. I had to observe the teachers at their convenience, but in all four cases, the two observations were held within two weeks of the first interview. Additionally, the observations occurred during the point in the semester when the students had just completed or were just completing their second formal writing assignment. In three of the cases, the assignment was one of the shorter scaffolded assignments leading up to a longer, sustained piece of writing. In the other case, the assignment was the first project or long essay. I completed all observations before receiving blind copies of the student essays.

During the first observation of each instructor, I took about ten minutes of each class period to explain the study and obtain the signed consent forms of those students willing to participate. Of the 62 students present in all the classes at the time I explained the study, I received signed consent from 55 students, an 89% student response rate. After I had obtained the forms, I sat either in the back of the classroom or in a corner in order to observe the teacher and the students. I recorded my observations using field notes (see Appendix H for a blank field note form) following the suggestions by Glesne (2006). Using blank paper and a different colored three-pronged folder for each teacher being observed, I kept types of field notes: descriptive field notes, analytic field notes, and autobiographical field notes. As soon as possible following the observation, I reviewed the field notes to begin preliminary analysis and to clarify or add any information that could be forgotten over time. As part of the review, I typed the field notes so I would have a consistent format for all field notes, thus ensuring easier analysis.

## **Documents**

The first source of document data was the actual written comments of the teachers. To collect these comments, I obtained informed consent from the chair of the department to collect copies of student work. I also obtained informed consent from the teachers and from willing students. Once I had received the signed consent forms from the students, I emailed the list of names to the instructors so that they would know which essays to submit for the study. While I recognize a concern of teacher bias regarding the essays submitted from the study, I had to have some mechanism of collecting the marked essays. To try to control for teacher bias—whereby the teachers could have submitted only those essays to which they had devoted more time or which they felt may have represented them best—I invited all students to participate. In this way, teachers did not choose which students' essays to submit. In essence, the students selected

themselves via their signed consent. I received consent from 55 students, but by the time the blind copies were submitted to me, I received only 40 essays. There were several reasons for the discrepancy in numbers. In one teacher's case, two students failed to submit the work on time, so their essays were not included. In another teacher's case, between the time students agreed to participate and the teacher submitted the essays, she had given her students the chance to receive electronic oral feedback rather than written feedback. Five of the students who had agreed to participate ended up choosing oral feedback so their essays were not included as they did not contain the teacher's written comments. Another teacher inadvertently returned the students' marked papers to them without making the copies. He then relied on them to bring back their marked essays so that he could make copies. Of those students who signed permission, five did not bring their essays back to him for inclusion in the sample. In the last case, two of the students did not complete the assignment, and one student was late with the assignment, so those papers were not included. However, because students self-selected their participation, some of the teacher bias was reduced.

Teachers were responsible for submitting the blind copies to me. Three of the four teachers submitted paper copies of the essays, and one submitted electronic copies. Only one of the four had blacked out the students' names, so when I received them, I immediately blacked out or removed names prior to my reading the essays. I then assigned each essay a letter/number code (e.g. B4). The letter corresponded to the teacher's pseudonym, and the number was randomly assigned according to where the paper fell in the stack given to me.

Once I had given each paper a letter/number, I began organizing the teachers' comments so that I could begin the process of categorizing the comments. I considered any teacher markings on the essays to be a comment, whether it was an underscore, a circle, a word, a

phrase, a sentence, or a paragraph. Some of the longer comments such as lengthy sentences or end notes were broken down into smaller units for purposes of coding. I recognize that by breaking down longer comments, I inserted my bias as to what constituted a unit appropriate for categorization. However, in order to make the comments manageable for analysis, I had to work with smaller units. I have discussed the implications of this in chapter 5. Each comment (which could have been a smaller unit of a longer comment) was assigned a number, and I typed the comments and their number onto a protocol form for scoring purposes (see Appendix I).

To guard against subjectivity in coding the comments, I enlisted the paid assistance of three independent raters, all graduate teaching assistants in the freshman writing program. To control for potential bias, I made sure to use blind copies of all documents. Students' names and instructor participants' names were not visible on any of the documents used for the coding. Additionally, the teaching assistants were not taking nor had they taken courses with any of the instructor participants, and at the time of the study, none of the teaching assistants was being mentored by any of the instructor participants.

To train the teaching assistants, I first met with each to assess their interest, discuss the topic of the research, review my expectations for their help, and explain the timeline for the work to be done. I gave each one a copy of the Sperling article and a copy of a blank protocol form. I asked them to think about the demands of the task before giving me an answer. Since the coding was being done near the end of the semester, I needed them to be aware of the time involvement. Within a week after the meeting, I received email confirmation from all three indicating a willingness to assist with the research. I asked them each to read the Sperling article at least once more, and we arranged a time to meet for training. At that training session, we discussed the meanings of the five orientations, and together we coded one essay from each of the four

instructor participants. We discussed how and why we coded the comments as we did, and I asked if they had questions. The training session lasted for more than two hours. Once the training was done, I gave each teaching assistant a notebook which contained the essays they were to code. The raters took approximately two weeks to complete the coding.

The comments were coded to determine the teacher's orientation as a reader-responder. The five orientations based on Sperling's (1994) work are Interpretive Orientation, Social Orientation, Cognitive/Emotional Orientation, Pedagogical Orientation, and Evaluative Orientation. (For descriptions of these orientations, see Data Analysis below; for examples of comments which reflect these orientations, see Chapter 4.) On the recommendation of my dissertation committee, I added a sixth orientation of Other to provide an option for a comment that may not have fit into one of the five orientations.

Two other document sources relate to the specific writing program. One source was the front matter of the textbook used for both first- and second-semester composition. Though I have already referred to this document in discussing the setting, I used this document to analyze teacher comments and teacher perspectives in light of the program objectives. The second source was the electronic copy of the teacher's manual for the writing program. Although it contains some of the same information included in the course textbook, it also contains information regarding expectations for teacher assessment of student work.

Final document sources included course syllabi, writing prompts, the faculty handbook for the specific writing program being studied, and any other documents as deemed necessary for the study. I collected course syllabi from each of the instructors, and I received an electronic copy of the faculty handbook from the program director. Additionally, I asked each instructor for a copy of the writing prompt for the assignment I would be reviewing. In two cases, the



prompt was emailed to me. I printed the emailed prompt. In the other two cases, I received hard copies of the prompt. One teacher used a “key” of proofreading marks in his class, so I asked for a copy of the key so I would know what certain marks on the essays meant.

Documents were then organized for ease in analysis. Using color coding, I kept the documents for each individual teacher in color-coded, accordion-style pocket folders. The colors of the file folders corresponded to the colored notebooks I used for observations. Additionally, I used colored copy paper to print transcripts and observation field notes, and I copied the student essays onto colored paper so that I would have visual confirmation of the data related to each specific each teacher during the analysis. For example, I used the color green for all documents related to Teacher A and the color yellow for all documents related to Teacher C. Such visual storage helped me as I conducted both the individual case analyses and the within-case analysis.

### **Other Data**

I used email for correspondence with the instructors. With exception of the writing prompts, none of the emails contained information related to data. However, I sent and received all emails using my university email address which is password protected. I set up a digital folder in my inbox, and I placed all emails from participants into that folder. At the completion of the study, those emails will be permanently deleted.

### **Data Management**

Regarding the management of all forms of data, I ensured proper storage and handling of all data as per IRB guidelines. I recorded the interviews using a digital audio recorder and, for the initial interviews, a digital video recorder. Multiple recordings gave me back-ups of the data. Both as and after I transcribed the recordings, I read them as I listened to the recordings to make

sure that I had not omitted any data. However, once I had transcribed the interviews, I deleted the recordings. I kept multiple copies of the transcripts, the typed field notes, the student essays, the rubrics/tables, and the course syllabi. I stored originals in a locked cabinet in my office, and I kept the color-coded copies in a locked desk drawer at home.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

In qualitative research, data analysis does not proceed in a linear fashion; rather, it emerges during data collection. Initial, informal analysis is conducted even during the process of interviews or as the researcher reviews field notes or writes autobiographical notes regarding observations (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006; Stake, 1995). Such informal analysis can lead the researcher to ask follow-up questions during interviews and to look for certain things during observations.

Formal data analysis, however, occurred in stages. First, once I had transcribed the interviews and typed up the field notes, I read them to look for themes to determine teachers' perceptions of their roles in the writing process, their views of response theory and the research that informs their views, their perceptions of themselves as readers, and their understanding of the program in which they teach. Following guidelines suggested by Merriam (1988), I read through the transcripts (data) several times and made notes in the margins; in keeping with my framework, I "[held] a conversation with the data, asking questions of it, making comments, and so on" (Merriam, 1988, p. 131). In essence, I was the teacher-as-reader of the data which I had collected. From the notes made during several readings of the data, I kept a separate running list of the emergent issues or themes. Once these themes had emerged, I described them, categorized the data in light of those themes, and interpreted the data in relation to those themes (Creswell,

1998). As the themes became solidified, I used highlighters to mark the transcripts, the field notes, and the course syllabi.

In addition to establishing themes based on an analysis of the transcripts and field notes, I categorized teachers' written comments in order to determine teachers' orientations towards student writing. Teachers' written responses indicate the type of orientation(s) they assume as they read students' writing. Based on the work of Sperling (1994) and with her permission to use her framework (see Appendix F for written permission), teachers' comments were coded according to five orientations. As cited in her 1994 study, the orientations are as follows:

*Interpretative Orientation.* The teacher-as-reader shapes meaning by relating elements in her students' writing to her own prior knowledge and experiences or to her sense of the student's prior knowledge and experiences.

*Social Orientation.* The teacher-as-reader plays a role in relation to the writer that may or may not be simply the institutional role of "teacher."

*Cognitive/Emotive Orientation.* The teacher-as-reader expresses feeling or employs analysis in responding to her students' writing.

*Evaluative Orientation.* The teacher-as-reader expresses that the writing has or has not worked for her.

*Pedagogical Orientation.* The teacher-as-reader views students' writing as a filter for teaching and learning. (Sperling, 1994, p. 182)

Based on the recommendation from the dissertation committee, the category of *Other* was added to the protocol in the case that the raters felt that a teacher's comment did not fit neatly into one of the five original orientations. Examples of comments for each orientation can be found in Chapter 4.

Once the comments were coded, I looked at the number of comments for each teacher in relation to the number of codings for each teacher. It is important to note that one comment could be coded in more than one category. For example, if a teacher wrote, “This word is confusing to me,” it could be coded into the Evaluative Orientation as a Negative Evaluative comment, it could be coded in the Interpretive Orientation as a reflection of the Reader’s Text Knowledge, and it could be coded as Pedagogical in the Change/Correct Text subcategory. Therefore, the teachers had many more codings than actual comments. The distinction between codings and comments is important since the percentages reported in Chapter 4 rely on the number of codings per orientation rather than the number of comments. These percentages will help participants understand their orientations as readers of students’ writing. The percentages are not intended to show the participants their dominant commenting style. Rather, the percentages simply let the participants know their perspectives as readers on this particular set of essays.

In addition to the within-case analyses, I conducted a cross-case analysis. In the cross-case analysis, I looked for similar themes from the interview data to create a picture of similar beliefs among the teachers. I also looked for common themes among all the data sources. Additionally, I compared the comment analyses of all four teachers to see if any trends emerged regarding the types of comments. Finally, since I will report the results to the program director, I wanted to see how teachers’ orientations and written response practices impact the outcomes of the freshman writing program.

### **Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research is as credible as quantitative research. While some qualitative researchers are reluctant to use the quantitative terms *reliability* and *validity* in describing the trustworthiness of research, Golofshani (2003) suggested that qualitative researchers instead

redefine the words so that consumers of the research understand the terms in light of qualitative research methods. Quantitative researchers separate *reliability* and *validity* in reporting research findings; however, Merriam (1988) advised that “[r]eliability and validity are inextricably linked” in qualitative research (p. 171). Qualitative researchers (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1988), therefore, propose verification strategies so that consumers of the research can trust the results, so I will use the term *trustworthiness* for this section. One widely accepted strategy to verify qualitative research is the triangulation of data. In this particular study, another form of trustworthiness is the use of independent raters.

### **Triangulation of Data**

In general, triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Glesne, 2006; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). Findings based on multiple sources are more credible than findings based on just one or two sources. The use of multiple sources allows the researchers to “[search] for the convergence of information” (Creswell, 1998, p. 213) in case studies. In this case study, those methods include interviews, observations, and documents. The interviews provide the rich, thick data necessary in a qualitative study. The observation data should help confirm or reject information disclosed during the interviews. The documents are a permanent record of the teachers’ ideas at a particular moment in time. They may contain information to confirm or reject information disclosed in the interviews or observed during the classroom visits. During the data collection and analysis, I constantly compared findings from one source of data with findings in other sources of data. Additionally, in the cross-case analysis of this collective case study, I used the results of the within-cases analyses as another form of data.

## **Use of Independent Raters**

To guard against my bias related to the teachers' written comments, I enlisted the assistance of three independent raters. Prior to training them, I determined that each rater would code the same 33% of comments so that I could determine reliability of their codings. In other words, I had counted the number of total comments (N=2355), divided that number by 3, and calculated which of the instructors' essays contained comments that would equal approximately 785 comments. Each of the notebooks contained those exact essays, and the remaining comments were divided equally among the three raters so that were each coding one-third of the remaining comments. After comparing the coding on the same 785 comments that each had done, I found that the raters had agreed on the codings 89% of the time. This 89% reliability meant that I could trust the results of the rest of the coding. For the 11% on which there a discrepancy, I as the researcher decided how to code the comments.

## **Autobiographical Sketch**

In qualitative research, researchers are the primary instrument of data collection, so their experiences, assumptions, biases, and orientations are inherent in the process of collecting and interpreting the data. Full disclosure of these biases at the outset of the study helps prevent other researchers from accusing the researcher of producing a report that is contrived or based on a hidden agenda (Creswell, 1998; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 1988). In this section, I will discuss my experiences in teaching freshman English composition, which will include my beliefs about the purpose of freshman English composition, my role as a teacher, and my written response practices. I will also discuss my assumptions based on my experiences and my potential biases in the study.

I teach freshman English composition in a small Christian college. Students in our undergraduate program must pass at least three writing courses: a freshman composition course similar to first-semester freshman composition offered at most colleges and universities, an argumentative writing course in which students conduct research and write a 15-page research essay on a problem which they have identified, and a senior capstone course in which students write and defend a position paper. While credit for the freshman composition course can be transferred from another school, the other two courses must be taken on our campus. Also, students who do not pass the required machine-scored entrance exam must also take a remedial writing course in addition to the three courses already mentioned. The college's philosophy is that our writing classes will help prepare our students for the kinds of writing they will do in college and in their various ministries. We also believe that our writing courses help students learn the kinds of thinking skills they will need to succeed at the college level and in their various career choices.

During a normal school year, my teaching load consists of twenty-one credit hours, though I usually exceed my teaching load by six to nine credit hours. In general, I teach two or three writing courses (three credits per course) each semester, ranging from the remedial writing course to the senior capstone writing course. Every semester, I assign students the task of writing essays of various types. Once students submit their essays, I grade them. While my colleagues often use graders (graduate students who grade papers, assignments, and tests), I consider it my job to assess and evaluate my students' work, believing that students want to know my reactions to their work. Of what does that grading consist? For me, grading consists of hours of work reading and re-reading the essays, marking grammar "miscues," and commenting on students' content. Generally speaking, I read each essay three times so that my

written feedback takes into account the whole of the student's work. I realize that I do not have to spend the extra time re-reading the papers, but I somehow feel that I have a better understanding of students and their ideas if I have read the work more than once. In addition to marking "grammatical errors" (those deviations from Edited American English), I write marginal comments related to content and longer end notes related to specific issues in the paper. In these end notes, I usually praise students for positive aspects of their work and then suggest a few specific areas in which students might want to focus their energies either in a revision of the current essay or in anticipation of the next assignment. Such practices (marking grammar, writing marginal notes, and writing end notes) are among the best practices mentioned in current research (e.g. Anson, 2012; Straub, 2006) regarding assessing student writing.

Prior to completing this dissertation, I had not thought about why I write the types of comments I write. I do not know that I had been taught how to respond to college writing, especially since I had not taken any college writing courses thanks to the high scores I received on my high school Advanced Placement English test. When I began teaching the argumentative writing course, I asked a colleague how he marked his papers. He showed me how he marked his papers, and I took from him what I thought would work for me. I also considered how I had graded student writing when I taught elementary school. Through trial and error and through feedback from students, I found a way of responding to student writing that worked for me. Even when I took the required introductory composition studies course in graduate school, I did not receive much training in assessing student writing. We had to obtain a sample of student writing from one of the other students in our class, and then we had to grade it. We met together to talk about why we made the commenting choices we made, and we received feedback from the course instructor. However, I do not recall being taught a list of "best practices" for



assessing writing. Instead, I found a way to assess student writing that worked for me, though I did not think about my practices in relation to my beliefs about writing.

Based on an acknowledgement of my experiences and beliefs, I recognize several biases related to the study. Researchers cannot rid themselves from bias but should instead disclose those biases. First, as a teacher of freshman English composition, I have a professional connection to the teachers whom I interviewed and observed. I may not have agreed with their in-class teaching methods or the types of comments they wrote on students' papers. However, during the data collection and analysis process, I tried to resist making judgments about their written commenting practices. Using the Sperling framework helped eliminate some of the bias in that the categories were specific. Additionally, I tried to monitor my biases in the phrasing of my interview questions so that I would be more objective during the interviews.

Second, I did not conduct true “backyard” research in the sense that I did not conduct the study at the institution where I teach. However, I do have a connection with the institution where I conducted the study. I am familiar with the English department and some of its faculty members. As I collected and analyzed the data, I was careful not to let my knowledge of the university or its freshman writing program bias the findings. For example, I carefully read the program documents provided by the institution rather than assume I knew the outcomes of the program. Additionally, I spent equal time with each of the participants during the interviews and the classroom observations.

Finally, in the institution where I teach, professors use “graders”—graduate students who grade most of or all the student work, leaving the professors to be teachers and researchers. Over the past eight years in my current position, I have used a total of three graders, one for one semester, one for one school year, and one for two semesters. When I have used graders, I held

back major assignments to grade myself or I came behind the grader and made changes, sometimes substantive, to their work. However, I stopped using graders for my writing courses because I want to know what my students are doing well and poorly so that I know how or what to teach. I also believe that I have more expertise in my field than does a full-time graduate student who may not be as focused as I am. I have strong feelings about teachers grading their own work. Because I believe that students learn to revise or to be better writers based on the marginal comments and end comments I write, I spend an inordinate amount of time (sometimes three to four hours per day) grading papers. In this study, I had to be careful not to correlate effective assessment with the amount of time spent marking papers.

### **Summary**

The primary research question guiding this study is “How do teachers’ written comments reflect their stated beliefs about the purpose of response and about their roles as writing teachers?” Because a researcher’s main question determines the type of study she conducts, I determined that a qualitative study, specifically a collective case study design, was the most appropriate approach to take to answer this question. I chose the specific setting and participants for several reasons. First, the setting was familiar to me and I had easy access to it. Additionally, the fact that the institution had just undergone a significant overhaul of its writing program made it a logical choice for a setting studying teacher response. Because I had easy access to a program, I also had access to participants whose knowledge and practice would assist me in answering the primary research question. Finally, I believe that I took precautions to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS: INDIVIDUAL CASES

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to answer the research question “How do freshman English composition teachers’ written comments on student essays reflect their beliefs about the purpose of response and their roles in the writing process?” In preparation for the presentation of the findings related to that research question, I established the background of the study in Chapter 1, surveyed pertinent literature in Chapter 2, and explained the specific research methodology in Chapter 3. Here in Chapter 4, I present the findings from this research study related to the individual cases.

My primary focus in this study is to explore the relationship between teachers’ written response practices and their stated beliefs about the purpose of freshman English composition and their roles as writing teachers. In order to answer that broad research question, I gathered data related to the two broad areas being studied: teacher beliefs and teacher practices. To understand teacher beliefs, I interviewed the teachers so that I could ask specific questions related to their beliefs. I organized the interviews around four sub-topics: instructor beliefs about the purpose of freshman writing, instructor knowledge of the specific freshman writing program being studied, instructor understanding of best practices regarding written response or assessment, and instructor perspectives of their individual written response practices. Further data sources related to instructor beliefs included classroom observations and classroom documents such as course syllabi and specific writing prompts. The analysis of these data sources allowed me to draw conclusions about the beliefs of the individual teachers.

To understand the response practices of individual teachers, I relied primarily on the analyses of their written comments (see Appendix I for a sample protocol form for the comment analysis). I presented the results of the comment analyses in both table and narrative form. Further results for teacher response practices came from classroom observation data and from classroom documents such as course syllabi and writing prompts.

In organizing each individual case, I first presented the data related to each instructor's beliefs using data from interviews, observations, and classroom documents. I then reported on the analysis of instructor practices using data from the comment analyses, classroom observations, and course documents. However, because I am interested in the relationship between beliefs and practices, I then explored individual themes for each instructor based on data from all of the sources. How do the data from the interviews, the observations, and the course documents relate to the data from the comment analysis? Finally, I end the chapter with a summary of the findings related to the individual cases.

I presented the information via individual case studies prior to the cross-case analysis because I wanted to retain the individual voices of the four instructors in a way that might be lost in a cross-case analysis. I began each individual case with a quote from the instructor that best represents him or her.

#### **Case Study One: Mr. Anderson**

*I really need to see if you can write an essay at the end of the day  
or I haven't done my job. And I'm not willing to give that up.*

Mr. Anderson, who majored in both English and history for his undergraduate studies, graduated from the same institution in which this research was conducted. His master's degree in English came from a larger university in the southeastern United States, after which he

returned to teach at his undergraduate alma mater, the setting of this project. At the time of the interview, he had been teaching freshman English writing courses and undergraduate literature courses for four years as a full-time instructor, having also taught one year as a graduate teaching assistant during graduate school. As a full-time instructor, he teaches four courses per semester. During the semester in which I conducted this research, he was teaching three sections of ENGL 102 and one section of American literature. He has been a member of the Freshman English Advisory Committee (FAC), the committee which was largely responsible for the overhaul of the freshman writing program, and at the time of the study, he served on the main committee.

### **Teacher Beliefs**

Based on data gathered primarily from interviews, observations, and classroom documents, I report Mr. Anderson's beliefs about teaching writing and responding to student writing.

**Beliefs about the purpose of freshman writing.** When I asked Mr. Anderson what he believed to be the purpose of freshman writing, Mr. Anderson paused then said, "That's a good question." He then said that a freshman writing program serves two purposes. The first purpose is to teach college-level writing. To Mr. Anderson, college-level writing means structure and process. He admitted he was

sort of obsessed with paragraphs. That's what I'm obsessed with. Let's think about what are you [the student] trying to do versus what's actually happening and maybe if we thought about the way it's structured, we could work some of this stuff out. . . . So most of what I do is, Why is this here? What is this order? What is the central idea of this? Where is the evidence? How does the evidence back up the point you're trying to make?

And in my classes, [I use] that language of what is effective writing? so that it becomes, What's effective?

Classroom observations support Mr. Anderson's belief that structure and process are important in college-level writing. During one observation, he spent about 20 minutes discussing how to write conclusions based on suggestions in the textbook. One such suggestion was the *echo*—referring back to the title or title idea in a conclusion so that the essay “works as a whole.” During both of the classroom observations, Mr. Anderson referred students to the textbook for ideas on structuring their essays. In one instance, he wanted to remind them about strategies for generating ideas, and in another instance, he referred them to the section on drafting strategies in preparation for an upcoming assignment.

Additionally, in the course syllabus, Mr. Anderson articulated the importance of structure and process. Under “Course Description,” Mr. Anderson wrote,

In this course, we will address all aspects of the writing process, with particular emphasis on how **audience** and **purpose** shape **the content, organization, tone, and style** of persuasive essays. We will also review the rules of Standard English grammar and the conventions of college writing, focusing on their importance to persuasive/argumentative writing.

Elsewhere in the syllabus, he reiterated the program objective that student will “[u]nderstand writing as a process.”

Mr. Anderson believes that the second purpose of a freshman writing program is to teach college skills. To Mr. Anderson, the skills learned in ENGL 102 are the same skills that students will need in order to be successful in their other classes. These skills include certain ways of thinking, certain ways of approaching text, and the ability to transfer knowledge. He

wants students to be able to ask, “What of the things we did [in class] can be helpful that can be transferable to the future? And then, how can I acclimate myself to what is expected of me and my college environment?” In the terminology of the institution’s freshman writing program, these skills are known as “habits of mind,” a phrase contained in Mr. Anderson’s syllabus related to revising work: “[A]s a habit of mind, revision, specifically as ‘re-seeing,’ rethinking, and rewriting, will be a necessary part of our course.”

Mr. Anderson’s commitment to the acquisition of college skills was evident in the classroom. For example, when he was discussing with the class how to conduct research on the topic of higher education, he suggested not using Google to search for information but instead searching specific online sites that would be pertinent to the topic, sites such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. He believes research skills can transfer to other college classroom settings.

To assist students in writing appropriate college-level essays and in acquiring those skills necessary to succeed in the college environment, Mr. Anderson believes his role is to challenge students and to facilitate out-of-class learning: “I see my role as trying to be as challenging as possible, not in a making-it-too-hard way but [in] being demanding and trying to push them. What can I get them to do? How far can I get them to take it?” Rather than be a teacher who tells students what to do or think, he believes that he should help them to be responsible for their own learning. He also sees himself as an out-of-class facilitator of learning as students come to him for advice or to have him “look at stuff.”

In the classroom, Mr. Anderson displayed this role of facilitator as the class did some freewriting on a given topic. One student had great difficulty with the open-ended prompt, so he knelt beside her, clarified the prompt, looked at her list, and tried to provide direction. He admitted to the class that the prompt was purposely “murky” because he wanted them to make

decisions about the topic. He told them that he wanted them to determine where they “fit in the existing conversation” about the topic.

**Knowledge of the specific writing program.** During the overhaul of the freshman writing program, Mr. Anderson participated in one of the sub-committees. He is conversant in the expectations of the program, suggesting that the program goals are positive. He likes certain elements of the new program, specifically its student-centered focus and its approach that is updated to “catch up with the world most students live in.” He believes that the emphasis on scaffolded assignments leading to longer sustained writing is a positive aspect of the program. He also understands the important terminology of the program: habits of mind and writing as inquiry.

He has some trouble, though, with the more open-ended approach to topic selection. The program goals indicate that students *should* be allowed to choose their own topics for writing assignments, but he sees this “free and open” approach to topics as problematic: “[H]ow do you get the student to do something they’re not necessarily prepared to do? And . . . does the kind of stuff we’re asking them to do really translate to classes they’re going to take in the future?” In other words, he thinks that the program teaches academic writing “without forcing a direction” but that “most classes in college I think force a direction.” He thinks that the program ought to prepare students to do both.

In the classroom, Mr. Anderson allows students some flexibility in choosing topics for the early compositions, but he does so within parameters. The students read and discuss articles about various topics, after which they choose a direction for their writing within the confines of the broad subject being discussed. He prefers restricting them to a broad subject area for earlier assignments so that he can guide them. By the time they write their last major composition, he



offers a more open prompt. He tells them to “[w]rite a problem and solution paper about anything that you think is a problem that calls for a solution.”

Regarding the essential components of the new program, Mr. Anderson discussed several. First, he noted the importance of using low-stakes, in-class writing assignments so that students can generate ideas for their compositions. Such writing “allows students to figure out what they think about things through the act of writing.” He sees this writing as thinking as part of a two-fold process of the creative versus the critical. The creative portion of the process is when students generate ideas, and the critical portion is when students learn to put those ideas together, the mechanical portion of writing. In the classroom, Mr. Anderson facilitated both of these portions through freewriting activities (“Write down whatever pops into your brain, even if it seems crazy”) and discussions on structural aspects of writing such as formulating conclusions. In his syllabus, he also mentioned both the generating of ideas and the structuring of arguments: “Writing as inquiry focuses on both fostering intellectual curiosity and communicating effectively.”

Another component he believes is essential is revision. He sees revision as part of the portfolio process, though he does provide opportunity through the drafting process for students to revise their work. During the drafting process, students receive feedback from their peers and from him. During one of the classes I observed, students spent nearly 40 minutes of a 50 minute class in a directed peer review activity. He gave each student a paper on which he had typed specific questions that they were to answer after reading a peer’s draft. They shared their responses to those questions orally. The questions were designed to make the writers think about audience and to revise according to the peer responses. Additionally, Mr. Anderson holds

mandatory conferences with students in which he can make suggestions about writing so that students can revise.

Mr. Anderson devoted one section of his syllabus to revision because “[r]evision is an important component of writing at the college level, especially for Writing as Inquiry.” He further explains that students should seriously consider “reworking and refining” their writing if they are to develop as writers.

According to Mr. Anderson, a final component of the new writing program is the emphasis on audience and purpose. He said that

with our new program, purpose and audience are highlighted for everyone. And in meetings, we’ll talk about audience, either giving them an audience or saying your classmates are your audience. . . . I think I’m more obsessed about it than most people.

He wrote about audience and purpose in the Course Description section of his syllabus, emphasizing that “**audience and purpose shape the content, organization, tone, and style of persuasive essays**” (emphasis in original).

In the classroom, he reminded them that they need to be credible writers because the readers need to be able to trust them. He told them to consider the “big ethos argument” when writing. Because Mr. Anderson believes his purpose in ENGL 102 is to teach argumentative writing, he says his students’ purpose is to persuade. Therefore, in ENGL 102 audience and purpose cannot be separated from argumentative writing.

**Understanding of best practices for written response.** Mr. Anderson’s training in assessment and response came during his years at graduate school. It consisted primarily of an apprenticeship with a faculty member who reviewed a set of papers Mr. Anderson graded and discussed his impressions with Mr. Anderson. When Mr. Anderson became a teaching assistant,

he attended a week-long orientation session, but that orientation dealt more with matters of classroom management. A practicum course offered more information about assessment, and he was able to do more practice assessment.

When I asked Mr. Anderson about the best practices for written assessment, he was able to articulate many. First, he believes that teachers should write a lot, especially related to the final comment or end note. Also, teachers' comments should be personal, dealing with a specific issue. They should "evaluate the thing for what is it" and should suggest to the student how to make changes. Furthermore, he believes the written comments should model what the teacher is asking the student to do. Rather than write "add evidence," he will write, "You're having trouble using evidence" and he will show the student how to use evidence. Next, he believes that comments should be the teacher-reader's reaction to how the writing is working for the reader. In practice, he often shows this through the use of questions as comments, specifically comments that he writes in the margins of the student paper. Finally, he believes that teachers should write long end notes which deal largely with content of the essay but also with major issues related to grammar. He does not believe that teachers should mark every deviation from Standard American Edited English, but he does believe that teachers should note patterns of deviation, mark them briefly in the text or in the margins, and then comment on those major issues in the end note. While he does not believe that a teacher should write a certain amount of comments, he does believe that each student should get a fairly long end note:

I do want to give everybody a fairly bulky comment and I feel like I need to explain myself through writing to them because it's only fair. To make them do all this writing and then to give a three-sentence comment seems horrible. If I was them I'd be very disappointed. I give them like a full here's my explanation of what I think you're doing

so can look at it and see if you agree. And most of the time we agree which is why this is my job.

Although Mr. Anderson has large handwriting, his end notes tend to be about the same length for each student.

When Mr. Anderson assesses student writing, he uses two colors of ink: red for comments in the body of the paper and blue for the end notes. He typically reads the essays through at least twice. On the first reading, he will mark major grammar issues, and on the second reading, he will write comments in the margins, especially questions. Doing so in this order allows him to focus on grammar first and content second. When he finishes those two readings, he will write his longer end note in which he lets students know what he “got” from the writing.

As this study addresses teacher beliefs, I wanted to know what literature informed Mr. Anderson’s practices. Since a focus of the program is that instructors use best practices, I was curious to know whose work they have read. Mr. Anderson first mentioned the Sommers’ 1982 article “Responding to Student Writing”: “I mean, here we always talk about that Sommers’ article, the old Sommers’ article.” Since all incoming instructors are required to read that article, Mr. Anderson’s comment makes sense. The only other theorist Mr. Anderson mentioned by name is Donald Murray. He referenced a Murray article, “The Listening Eye,” a 1979 article about teacher-student writing conferences. He also quoted Murray in his syllabus, though without citation to the source. In the quotation, Murray explains the many reasons why people write. Later in the interview, Mr. Anderson did mention an article that he uses with students to show them that not all college writing happens in five paragraphs. He referenced Ed White’s

2008 article, “My Five-Paragraph-Theme Theme” though he did not mention it in reference to literature that informs his practice, nor did he mention White by name.

Although he could not mention names of other theorists, he did mention some major ideas in composition theory that he remembered from his graduate school work. He indicated, I remember in comp theory really liking things like critical pedagogy where we’re trying to challenge [students] to think about this position. It’s not just give a response. It’s really like putting things in conversation and seeing how they work, and seeing, are they able to see the conversation?

Mr. Anderson mentioned other major ideas in composition theory such as the importance of audience as mentioned above. He did say that he thinks that some of the ideas in composition research are more theoretical and less practical, though he did not mention anything specific. He did suggest that he has picked up some assessment strategies through “other articles, too, like don’t overwhelm students, try to stay focused on major things, or pick on this to really focus on instead of trying to cover everything.”

**Perspectives of his individual written response practices.** The final topic pertains to how teachers perceive their practices in relation to their beliefs. When asked this question in the initial interview, Mr. Anderson quickly mentioned that he believes that his long end notes and his use of specific comments reflect his strong belief that students should be treated fairly. He also indicated that his written response practices, specifically related to his comments in the margins and his long end note, support his belief that he needs to explain himself through writing. In the second interview, Mr. Anderson kept repeating his belief in the importance of audience/purpose and structure. When I reviewed with him my understanding of what he saw as important, I asked if I had forgotten anything. He said, “No. . . .audience and purpose are my,

like audience and purpose. That's the one [thing] that probably gets written on the board the most times. And structure, especially if I add clarity to structure.”

Mr. Anderson also believes that his practices align with program expectations. While he admitted that he initially does not give students total choice of topics until their final project, he does believe that “the assignments I give try to meet our curriculum and standards and what we claim we're doing with our course goals so that . . . [students] are really being graded on the doing the things that we're specifically asking them to do.”

### **Teacher Practices**

For this portion of the chapter, I used data gathered from the nine essays that Mr. Anderson submitted for the study. The emphasis for this portion of the study was not to see the types of comments that Mr. Anderson wrote; instead, the focus was on how his comments reflect his perspective as a reader of student writing. Where pertinent, I have included data from interviews, classroom observations, and course documents to support the information in the comment analysis, though the integration of all the data will come in the section “Individual Themes.”

Fourteen students in one section of Mr. Anderson's ENGL 102 sections gave written permission for him to submit blind copies of their work on which he had written comments. However, only nine students actually returned their marked essays for him to submit them for the study. The essay was the first Long Composition (LC) of the semester. Students had already submitted several Short Compositions (SC) and some Process Work (PW) leading up to the LC1, so students were familiar with Mr. Anderson's feedback style.

On the nine essays submitted, Mr. Anderson wrote a total of 398 (N=398) comments. A comment could have been a proofreading mark, a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a paragraph. I

counted simple proofreading marks, words, and short phrases as single comments. I divided the longer phrases, sentences, and paragraphs (like end notes) into smaller comments. For example, the end note of one of Mr. Anderson’s essays contained eight sentences organized into four paragraphs. I split this end note into six comments for coding purposes. Thus, the number of 398 does not mean that Mr. Anderson wrote 398 actual comments. In fact, many of Mr. Anderson’s comments were actually proofreading marks. Each of Mr. Anderson’s students received a small “key” for his use of proofreading marks. For example, a checkmark, a star, or a smiley face meant that the writing worked for Mr. Anderson. These proofreading marks were considered as comments since they were intended to provide written response for students.

After the independent raters coded Mr. Anderson’s comments, he ended up with a total of 542 codings (NC=542), thus reinforcing the idea that one comment could function in more than one capacity. Table 1 presents the categorization of Mr. Anderson’s comments by teacher orientation. As shown, Mr. Anderson’s comments received codings in all five orientations. As indicated in Table 1, fully half of Mr. Anderson’s codings reflect his desire to instruct his students (Pedagogical Orientation). His comments less frequently reflect a social role (Social Orientation) or an analytical or emotional response (Cognitive/Emotive Orientation).

Table 1

*Categorization of Mr. Anderson’s Comments according to Teacher Orientation*

TEACHER ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Interpretive	72	13%
Social	46	9%
Evaluative	93	17%
Pedagogical	270	50%
Cognitive/Emotive	62	11%
Other	0	0%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 1 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

In the narrative section that follows, students’ writing has been differentiated from the teacher’s comments through the use of capitalization. Students’ writing has been typed using all capital letters and has been typed exactly as written in the essays. Mr. Anderson’s comments have been enclosed in quotation marks so as to avoid confusion.

**Interpretive orientation.** In the Interpretive Orientation, teachers interpret writers’ words through their own background experiences, text knowledge, and inner feelings or through their perception of the writers’ background experiences, text knowledge, or inner feelings. Thirteen percent of Mr. Anderson’s codings fell under the interpretive category. Table 2 presents the breakdown of Mr. Anderson’s comments in the Interpretive Orientation according to the specific subcategories. Because Mr. Anderson had no comments coded into the subcategories of Reader’s Experiences or Writer’s Experiences, I have not discussed these subcategories.

Table 2

*Interpretive Orientation: Mr. Anderson’s Comments according to Subcategory*

INTERPRETIVE ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Reader’s Experiences	0	0%
Text Knowledge	38	7%
Inner Feelings	1	0%
Writer’s Experiences	0	0%
Text Knowledge	30	6%
Inner Feelings	3	0.5%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 2 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

Most of Mr. Anderson’s comments in the Interpretive Orientation fell into the subcategory of Reader’s Text Knowledge. For example, one student wrote the following sentence in his essay “Technology and the Mind”: IN FACT, DUE TO THE VAST ARRAY OF



KNOWLEDGE AVAILABLE TO AN INDIVIDUAL, WE CAN ONLY EXPECT TO GROW IN LEAPS AND BOUNDS. In the margin next to that sentence, Mr. Anderson wrote, “T1” indicating that based on his knowledge of text structure, that sentence functioned as the writer’s thesis. In that same paragraph, the student wrote, IT [THE INTERNET] CAN CONNECT PEOPLE INTO A WORLDWIDE NETWORK WHERE EVERYONE CAN EXCHANGE IDEAS AND KNOWLEDGE. WE ARE CREATING SOCIAL BONDS WITH PEOPLE THAT SHARE OUR INTERESTS AND IT IS AMONGST THESE PEOPLE GROUPS THAT NEW IDEAS AND TECHNOLOGIES ARE CREATED. Next to this series of sentences, Mr. Anderson wrote “T2” showing this writer that he (Mr. Anderson) perceived a second thesis. In the long end note to the student, Mr. Anderson wrote, “A clearer thesis, more proof along the way, and more specific examples discussing individuals would enhance your working essay into an even more effective argument.” These three written comments to the student reflect his knowledge of text structure: an essay needs a coherent thesis. They also reflect his belief that structure is a critical aspect of writing.

In terms of Reader’s Inner Feelings, Mr. Anderson wrote only one comment that fell into this category. One student’s essay, “Thinking Fast Isn’t Thinking,” prompted Mr. Anderson to write a comment revealing his inner feelings about the subject matter in the essay. The student wrote, IN LAYMAN’S TERMS, OUR BRAINS CHANGE BIOLOGICALLY TO ADAPT TO OUR OVERUSE OF THE INTERNET. IT SOUNDS COOL, BUT THOSE CHANGES MAY NOT BE REVERSIBLE. WE CANNOT TURN OFF OUR DEEP THINKING TODAY BECAUSE IT IS INCONVENIENT, AND THEN TURN IT BACK ON TOMORROW WHEN WE FEEL LIKE PONDERING SOME DEEP PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTION. In reaction, Mr.

Anderson wrote, “Or, at the least, it would be hard to re-wire,” indicating his feelings regarding brain changes.

Six percent of the total codings fell in the Writer’s Text Knowledge subcategory. In “Use, Don’t Abuse!” a student told a story about a computer teacher who helped him to understand that many computer issues are operator problems—the user may not have done something as simple as plugged in the computer. Next to this story, Mr. Anderson wrote, “a very useful story” reflecting his sense of the writer’s use of an illustration as a strategy in an introduction. Other times, Mr. Anderson questioned writers about various aspects of their text structure. Next to one student’s rambling paragraph, Mr. Anderson wrote, “What are you trying to do in this ¶?” to show the writer that he could not make sense of the writer’s text structure. Mr. Anderson’s belief in the importance of structure explains his comments in this subcategory as he wants students to be aware of the structure of their writing.

Rarely (<1% of the time) did Mr. Anderson make comments in the Writer’s Inner Feelings subcategory. In “Thinking Fast Isn’t Thinking,” the student wrote, BUT IN THE SAME WAY THAT THE NAZI PARTY CHANGED THE WAY THE GERMAN PEOPLE THOUGHT, SO TOO WILL THE INTERNET CHANGE THE WAY WE THINK IF WE ARE NOT CAREFUL. To this, Mr. Anderson replied, “So there remains some hope?” showing his perception of the student’s feelings about society’s over-reliance on the Internet.

**Social orientation.** Writing teachers cannot escape their roles as teachers, but sometimes, they respond to student writing as if they were part of the same social group as that writer in a specific context. In the social orientation, the teacher can respond as a peer (someone who has no more knowledge than the student regarding a particular subject) or as an expert (someone whose role can be as an expert reader, a literary scholar, or an instructor). Nine

percent (9%) of Mr. Anderson’s codings fell into the category of Social Orientation. Table 3 presents a breakdown of Mr. Anderson’s codings in the Social Orientation.

Table 3

*Social Orientation: Mr. Anderson’s Comments according to Subcategory*

SOCIAL ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Peer	3	0.5%
Expert	43	8%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 3 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

In the Peer subcategory, Mr. Anderson had very few codings (<1%). In his end note to a student who wrote the essay “Technology and the Mind,” Mr. Anderson commented, “I’ve recovered enough from Mardi Gras to grade your essay.” With this comment, Mr. Anderson took on the role of social peer, a fellow spectator of and perhaps participant in a local holiday. One of Mr. Anderson’s earlier comments—“So there remains some hope?”—functions here as well to show his role as a fellow human being concerned about the effects of the overuse of the Internet. The written comment functioned in both an Interpretive role and a Social role.

About eight percent (8%) of Mr. Anderson’s codings were in the Expert subcategory. Many of these codings came from the proofreading marks that he used as he graded the essays. With the return of their first marked SC, Mr. Anderson had distributed a key of proofreading symbols to which students could refer as they read his comments. These proofreading symbols were very didactic in nature, indicating Mr. Anderson’s role as an expert reader of text. Of course, such symbols also functioned pedagogically (see Pedagogical Orientation below), illustrating again that comments could be coded into more than one category.

Other written comments were also very didactic and nature and fell into the Expert subcategory. In “There Are No Easy Answers,” the student wrote the following phrase to end his introduction: WHICH LEADS ME TO BELIEVE THAT TECHNOLOGY WILL ULTIMATELY LEAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT. Mr. Anderson commented, “Focus on what you really argue,” directing the writer to rethink the last part of his thesis statement. On another student’s essay, Mr. Anderson wrote, “wc” (for “word choice”) above WAFFLE in the sentence CHRISTIANS GENERALLY WAFFLE IF THE TECHNOLOGICAL AGE IS AN OASIS FOR MENTAL BENEFITS OF A BRAIN CELL APOCALYPSE. Here, he acted didactically but also as a reader responding to both his and the writer’s text knowledge.

His written comments in this subcategory may seem to contradict his belief that his role is to facilitate learning rather than to be the authority figure, but such expert comments are intended to help students revise their work. As noted in his course syllabus, “Revision is an important component of writing at the college level.” To facilitate his belief that revision is important, he needs to act as an expert at times so that students will be aware of areas in which they should rethink and revise their writing. Additionally, Mr. Anderson believes that the drafting process is essential in the college writing classroom. He said that although the writing program uses scaffolded assignments to lead to longer pieces of writing, he is “still trying to hold onto drafting because I feel like without it, you don’t go anywhere.” His expert comments help his students in the drafting process.

**Evaluative orientation.** At times, teachers’ comments reflect that the writing has or has not worked for them. In the Evaluative Orientation, the teacher responds either positively or negatively. When teachers respond in the Positive subcategory, they are telling the writer that the writing works for them. A comment coded in the Negative subcategory means that the

student writing is not working for the student. About 17% of Mr. Anderson’s comments were Evaluative. Table 4 presents a breakdown of Mr. Anderson’s codings in the Evaluative Orientation.

Table 4

*Evaluative Orientation: Mr. Anderson’s Comments according to Subcategory*

EVALUATIVE ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Positive	87	16%
Negative	5	1%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 4 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

Mr. Anderson had many more of his total comments coded as Positive (16%) than Negative (1%). In “Easy Leads to Lazy,” a student illustrated the point that overuse of online reading causes people to skim rather than to read deeply. He wrote, FOR EXAMPLE, 971,486,254,173 PEOPLE ARE TOO LAZY TO READ THE NUMBER THAT IS STATED IN THIS FALSE FACT. BE HONEST, DID YOU READ IT OR DID YOU JUST GLANCE AT IT? FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, I KNOW YOU JUST GLANCED AT IT. Mr. Anderson wanted to let the writer know that the illustration worked for him, so he wrote “neat tactic” in the margin.

On many occasions, Mr. Anderson does not write any words to indicate that a student’s writing has worked for him. Instead, he underlines words, phrases, or sentences or he draws a star or a smiley face next to them. According to his proofreading key, such marks indicate that the writer did something that Mr. Anderson perceived as “good.” Each of the nine essays submitted included at least one underlined word, sentence, or phrase, and most had more than one.

Only 5 codings (1% of the total codings) counted as Negative. On a few occasions, Mr. Anderson let the writer know that the writing did not work for him. In the end note to a student's untitled essay, Mr. Anderson wrote, "The problem is, by the end, you just disagree with Carr instead of really pushing your own ideas." To another student, he commented, "How?" above the student's phrase, **HOWEVER, IF THESE ADDICTED PEOPLE LEARN TO CONTROL THEMSELVES**, signifying that he did not believe that the student proved his point, and therefore, the phrase did not work for Mr. Anderson.

Whether or not writing works for the reader is important to Mr. Anderson as reflected both in his comment analysis above and in other data sources. For example, when he was talking about what he considers to be best practices for written assessment of student writing, he said, "my comments aren't about you should have done this, you should have done this. It's, 'Here's what you've done, *here's how it's working*, here's what it maybe should be doing or could be doing, and this is kind of why we are where we are'" (emphasis mine). Furthermore, in one of the teaching sessions I observed, he talked to the students about their credibility as writers. He reminded them that their next essay would be "a big ethos argument—can we as readers trust you?" If writing does not work for the reader, then the writing lacks credibility.

**Pedagogical orientation.** Many times, teachers use the student's writing as a springboard for instruction. In the Pedagogical Orientation, teachers focus on the student writer's ideas and text. Through their comments, teachers instruct students to change or expand their text or ideas, or they use their comments to support the text or ideas of the student writer. Half of Mr. Anderson's codings (50%) fell into this orientation. Table 5 presents a breakdown of the codings in the specific subcategories in this orientation.

About 3% of Mr. Anderson’s codings fell in the Change/Correct Ideas subcategory. In this subcategory, the teacher uses comments to instruct the writer regarding incorrect or unclear ideas. In his end note to the student’s “Carr versus Johnson” essay, Mr. Anderson commented, “Be careful, in body ¶s, to try to explain your evidence as clearly as possible and to be specific→make sure we take the point without confusion.” Here, Mr. Anderson instructed the writer that the ideas presented are causing confusion for the reader, so the writer may want to make some changes to clarify or change the ideas he has presented. Another student wrote about Twitter, ARE WE SO CAUGHT UP IN THESE NETWORKS THAT WE CAN’T SIT STILL AND JUST ENJOY A SPECIAL MOMENT? I THINK SO. . . .WE PUT ON A SHOW FOR OTHERS AND WE END UP NOT BEING OURSELVES. Mr. Anderson commented, “What do you want to push w/ this?” He wanted to teach the student that the ideas lacked focus. This comment could function in other subcategories in this orientation as well.

Table 5

*Pedagogical Orientation: Mr. Anderson’s Comments according to Subcategory*

PEDAGOGICAL ORIENTATION		TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Change/Correct Ideas		18	3%
	Text	200	40%
Expand	Ideas	13	2%
	Text	10	2%
Support	Ideas	17	3%
	Text	12	2%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 5 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

Most of Mr. Anderson’s codings in this orientation fell in the Change/Correct Text subcategory, partially due to his use of proofreading marks. His proofreading marks act to teach students that their text needs to be corrected. For example, on seven on the nine essays’ Works

Cited pages, Mr. Anderson crossed out incorrectly cited information or drew arrows indicating that students needed to move around components of the citations. In the “Carr versus Johnson” essay, Mr. Anderson wrote an X through the first use of the word THE and replaced it with TO in the sentence THE INTERNET OR NOT IS THE QUESTIONS BOTH NICHOLAS CARR AND STEVEN JOHNSON OFFERED VERY DIFFERENT VIEWS ON. Here, he instructs the reader to change the word to clarify the meaning. In another student’s untitled essay, Mr. Anderson taught a student about text structure when he inserted the paragraph symbol (¶) into a long paragraph and then commented in the margin, “break to separate points into ¶s.”

About 2% of Mr. Anderson’s codings fell into the Expand Ideas subcategory. In “Technology and the Mind,” a student quoted an author and then wrote, HE IS STATING THAT UNLESS YOU’RE UP TO DATE AND CURRENT WITH TECHNOLOGY, YOU WILL NOT BE AS EMPLOYABLE IN THE JOB MARKET. Mr. Anderson stated, “I still think you could/should make more of this,” teaching the student to add more information as a follow-up to the quotation. In his end note to the student who wrote the essay “Interconnected,” Mr. Anderson wrote, “Proof and focus, focus and proof. Your essay takes a stand on the benefits of the network, but be careful to stay focused on individuals and on providing adequate proof.”

Similar to the Expand Ideas subcategory, 2% of Mr. Anderson’s codings fell into the Expand Text subcategory. Several times, Mr. Anderson questioned his student writers to expand not only their ideas but their structure. In “Interconnected,” the student ended a paragraph with a quotation. Mr. Anderson questioned, “No final explanation by you?” reminding the student to follow quotations with an explanation or clarification or justification. In “Yes, Google Is Making Us Stupid,” the student wrote, IT IS SAFE TO SAY THAT TECHNOLOGY HAS TAKEN OVER AND WE’RE PROGRESSIVELY LOSING OUR SENSE OF SELF.



Regarding this thesis statement, Mr. Anderson commented, “how to draw that out?” again teaching the student to expand both his ideas and his text.

When Mr. Anderson wrote comments reminding students to support their claims, the comments were coded in the Support Ideas subcategory (about 3%). His end notes contain many such references. In the end note of the essay “Technology and the Mind,” Mr. Anderson wrote, “A clearer thesis, more proof along the way, and more specific examples discussing individuals would enhance your working essay into an even more effective argument. . . . More development and evidence are the cocktail you need to reach excellence.” With this comment, Mr. Anderson supported the student’s attempts while encouraging him to support his claims. To the student who wrote the essay “Easy Leads to Lazy,” Mr. Anderson noted, “What we could use, however, is more specific evidence and more development. You give examples, but can you make them more specific?” With this comment, Mr. Anderson supports the writer’s use of examples while asking him to expand his text.

The final subcategory in the Pedagogical Orientation is Support Text. About 2% of Mr. Anderson’s codings fell into this category. Often, Mr. Anderson chose to reinforce classroom instruction through his comments. In “Thinking Fast Isn’t Thinking,” the student related a personal illustration of how he chose to reduce the time he spent connected to the Internet: I LIMIT MY INTERNET USE TO SOMETIMES LESS THAN AN HOUR A DAY, I USE A SIMPLE CELL PHONE—NONE OF THAT “SMART” STUFF. IN FACT, THE IPHONE I ONCE USED IS NOW MY MINI-COMPUTER FOR CHECKING EMAIL ONCE A DAY OR MY MP3 ON THE FEW OCCASIONS I LISTEN TO MUSIC. MY ACTUAL LAPTOP STAYS OFF UNLESS I AM USING IT TO TYPE A PAPER. In the margin next to this portion

of the paragraph, Mr. Anderson wrote, “the ethos argument→what is possible” to reinforce an important strategy he has discussed with students in class.

Other times, Mr. Anderson used his comments to remind students to proofread their texts and make sure that they were saying what they intended to say. In the essay “Carr versus Johnson,” the student quoted one author’s work but attributed it to another author. Above JOHNSON, Mr. Anderson wrote, “Did Johnson or Richtel find this?” In that same essay, next to the student’s thesis, Mr. Anderson wrote, “OK, but can you focus your thesis on connection and the individual?” to reinforce the importance of a thesis in providing structure for the essay.

The fact that fully half of Mr. Anderson’s codings fell into the Pedagogical Orientation is supported by data from other sources. For example, the proofreading chart that he gives each student when he returns their first essay would lend itself to this orientation. He needs the students to be able to know what the marks mean, but he also intends for the marks to teach the students about the types of errors he perceives that they are making. In his syllabus, he reminds students that they will revise their writing “based on comments . . . from me.” He intends his comments to instruct and to lead students toward revision, so it is no surprise that most of his codings were in the Pedagogical Orientation.

**Cognitive/Emotive orientation.** In the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation, Mr. Anderson’s comments reflect either an analytical response or an emotional response. Of the total number of codings, 11% of Mr. Anderson’s codings were Cognitive/Emotive. Table 6 presents the actual number of codings in the two subcategories.

Many of Mr. Anderson’s comments in the Analytical subcategory have also been coded into other subcategories. However, 11% of his total codings fell into the Analytical subcategory. Mr. Anderson often uses questions to show how he is analyzing student writing. One student

wrote, I THINK THAT STEVEN JOHNSON IS PRESSNG THE POINT THAT IT'S NOT THE COMPUTER'S FAULT OR THE DICTIONARY'S FAULT THAT I DON'T RETAIN KNOWLEDGE, BUT RATHER IT'S MY FAULT BECAUSE I DON'T PUT FORTH THE EFFORT TO RETAIN THE KNOWLEDGE WITH THE MENTALITY OF "WHY REMEMBER WHEN I CAN LOOKUP WHEN I NEED IT?" Mr. Anderson underlined BUT RATHER IT'S MY FAULT and wrote next to it, "Does he say this?" Mr. Anderson analyzed the writing and determined that the student misrepresented the author. In another instance, a student was reacting to an article he read about how people are too quick to cut-and-paste from websites rather than to think through issues. He wrote, THE POINT HE MAKES IS THAT IT WOULD BE OKAY TO DO THIS IF PEOPLE DIDN'T ONLY SKIM, COPY, AND PASTE. Mr. Anderson commented, "But does the Net make us more likely to do this? Or is it human—inate?" He wants the writer to think about the words in his essay to see if they mean what he thinks they mean.

Table 6

*Cognitive/Emotive Orientation: Mr. Anderson's Comments according to Subcategory*

COGNITIVE/EMOTIVE ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Analytical	60	11%
Emotional	25	0%


*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 6 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

On only two occasions did Mr. Anderson comment in an emotional way, and both times, his response was the word "Wow." In the first instance, he reacted to the student who argued that GOOGLE ISN'T MAKING US DUMB ITS ACTUALLY MAKING US SMART. To make her point, she told of how she went to Google to search for a website that could help her

understand some physical symptoms she was having. The information on one website helped her to determine that she was pregnant. Mr. Anderson's comment "Wow" showed his emotional response to her story. On the other occasion, a student wanted to make the point that people have quit thinking deeply because of their overreliance on the Internet. To illustrate his point, he told about his subtle slide into apathy and wrote, I QUIT COMING TO CONCLUSIONS; NOW I ONLY SPOUT OFF WHATEVER ANSWERS BING SUPPLIES ME WITH FIRST. Mr. Anderson again wrote "Wow" in the margin.

Data from other sources support that Mr. Anderson acts in an analytical capacity more than in an emotional capacity. For example, in one class session, he was reviewing with students the need to think about what they know on a certain topic. He wanted them to go beyond what they knew of the topic, so he wrote the following on the board:

What do I know  
vs.                                            Be practical  
What can I learn more about

Here, he pushed his students to analyze what they knew and to think more deeply about their writing. Additionally, he mentioned in one of his interviews that he phrases his written comments as questions so that his students will think about what they have written.

**Summary.** Half of Mr. Anderson's total codings were Pedagogical. Of the remaining half, the codings fell into the other orientations in the following descending order: Evaluative, Interpretive, Cognitive/Emotive, and Social. Because he had 1.3 times the numbers of codings (NC=542) as comments (N=398), clearly many of his comments were multiply coded. Results of the comment analysis are consistent with data from other sources to support that Mr. Anderson uses a variety of perspectives to respond to student writing. Not only do his written

comments reflect his varying perspectives, but his interview responses, classroom behaviors, and course documents support that he approaches student writing from various perspectives.

### **Individual Themes**

Three themes arose from the analysis of Mr. Anderson's interviews, observations, course documents, and comment analysis. These themes, specific to Mr. Anderson, show the relationship between Mr. Anderson's beliefs and practices.

**The importance of structure.** A primary theme evident in the data for Mr. Anderson is that successful college writing must have a coherent structure supporting a clear thesis with elaboration and evidence. To Mr. Anderson, successful student writing should have a clear thesis, should be organized into coherent paragraphs with solid supporting evidence, and should have few grammatical errors. He stated this idea of structure in both of his interviews, he taught structure in his classroom, he stressed it specifically in his syllabus, and he implied it through the types of comments he wrote on student essays.

In both of my interviews with Mr. Anderson, he repeated his belief that freshman writers need to be taught structure when they are learning to write. Because he sees ENGL 102 as primarily an argumentative writing class, he thinks that the more non-directed writing is not helpful to students: "I'm more focused on the argument side and less about this waffle-y creative essay, figure it out as you go. It's too unstructured for me, and I feel like students need structure if they're going to learn anything." He understands that writing can help students "figure out what [they] think," but he thinks that a final essay should have a certain structure.

One of the reasons for his belief in the importance of structure is that it helps prepare students for the types of college writing that they will be doing. He thinks that the emphasis on self-selected topics may work against the goals of the institution. He said that if students learn to

write only about topics they choose, “they’re not really being prepared for college challenges which is write about a subject you don’t know about, or try to learn something new about an area that may not be your favorite area.” Instead, he thinks that students can be taught how to have structure in their writing even as they are using their writing to help them think.

Observations supported that Mr. Anderson thinks strongly about structure. Even when students were participating in a peer review exercise, he provided structure for them by writing out questions for them to discuss rather than letting the discussions be open-ended. During one class period, he referred students to a certain page in their textbook which dealt with generating ideas for an essay. Generating ideas is part of structuring an argument, and after he discussed the strategy, he had students spend time in class practicing that strategy. In another class session, he spent the last ten minutes of class discussing how to write a conclusion to an essay. While the information was in their textbooks, he made sure that he discussed the information with the students, even telling them that one of the strategies in the book seemed “cheesy” and “almost never works.”

In his syllabus, he mentioned structure in several ways. In both the course description and the course goals, he reminded students about the “rules of Standard English grammar and the conventions of college writing,” thus implying the existence of some standardized structure and some standard for English grammar. He mentioned the various aspects of the process of writing, implying that certain tasks help a writer to structure an effective persuasive essay. He implied the importance of structure when he discussed the structure of the scaffolded assignments; Short Compositions (SC) and Process Work (PW) work together to culminate in a Long Composition (LC). Students must keep up with SC and PW and submit them with the LC so that they can self-reflect on the writing process.

Finally, his written comments imply the importance of structure. On each of the nine essays he submitted for this study, he identified the student writer's thesis by writing T in the margin next to what he perceived as the thesis. Elsewhere in many of the essays, he wrote C/A for "counter-argument" to indicate for students that he was able to identify their counter-argument in the essay. In five of the nine essays, he wrote the paragraph symbol (¶) either in the margin of the student essay or in his end note to remind students to break their work into paragraphs or to limit the information in the paragraphs to one specific topic. His focus on thesis statements, counter-arguments, and paragraph structure show that he values structure in student writing. Many of Mr. Anderson's end note comments directed students to focus their arguments, again indicative of his belief that structure is important in writing. In eight of the nine essays, he mentioned the word *focus*. In fact, he used the word *focus* a total of twenty-four times in this set of essays.

A look at Mr. Anderson's comment analysis revealed that structure is important. His codings in each of the five orientations support the theme that structure is necessary for successful college writing. For example, nearly all of his codings in the Interpretive Orientation fell into the subcategories of Reader's Text Knowledge or Writer's Text Knowledge. Because text knowledge deals with knowledge of both language and text structure, his high numbers in these subcategories make sense. As a reader interpreting student's writing, then, Mr. Anderson implied that structure is an important aspect of writing.

His numbers in the Social Orientation also support this theme of structure. Most of his codings in this orientation fell into the Expert subcategory. Many of his comments coded as Expert conveyed the importance of focus in an argument or emphasized where students' writing

deviated from Standard Edited American English. Students writing well-structured essays would attend to issues of focus and grammatical form.

In the Evaluative Orientation, both positive and negative comments of Mr. Anderson could point student writers toward structure. For example, positive comments would let the writer know that the writing worked for Mr. Anderson. Some of those positive comments dealt with issues of structure: “neat tactic,” “very effective job of taking on the topic, developing ideas, using examples, and pushing ethos,” or “a very useful story.” These comments indicate that the structure of the writing works for Mr. Anderson. Several of the comments coded as negative dealt with the issue of evidence. Providing evidence is important in structuring a solid argument. To one student, he wrote, “Have you actually proven that self-control is easy? even possible?”

As previously noted, fully half of Mr. Anderson’s comments were coded into the Pedagogical Orientation. Comments coded in this orientation are intended to instruct students regarding their use of text or ideas, both of which relate to structure. Many of the codings in the subcategory of Change/Correct Text were not actual words but were proofreading marks or abbreviations keyed to the proofreading key that students received with their marked essays. These marks or abbreviations largely deal with structural issues: subject/verb agreement, pronoun agreement, possession, spelling, parallel structure, fragments or run-on sentences, or word choice to name a few. In addition to the proofreading comments, other written comments coded into this orientation instructed students to attend to the structure of their writing.

In the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation, most of Mr. Anderson’s comments fell into the Analytical subcategory. While not all of his analytical comments focused on structure, some of them did. For example, several times he questioned student writers to think more deeply about



their evidence: “but how to push?” or “how did it help specifically?” By questioning them to think more deeply about their arguments, he asked them to focus on the deeper structure of their essays.

All of the data led to the development of the first theme specific to Mr. Anderson: college writing must have a coherent structure supporting a clear thesis with elaboration and evidence. While he mentioned the importance of structure in his interviews, he also taught specific elements of structure in the classroom, he stated the importance of structure in his syllabus, and he used his comments to reiterate its importance and model it for his students.

**Audience and purpose.** Another theme which developed from the data is that effective writing has purpose and considers the audience. Although this theme of audience and purpose did not come up until the end of the first interview, it was obviously very important to Mr. Anderson. In fact, he mentions audience and purpose at the very beginning of his syllabus, immediately following an opening quote by Murray. Mr. Anderson wrote, “In this course, we will address all aspects of the writing purpose with particular emphasis on how **audience and purpose** shape **the content, organization, tone, and style** of persuasive essays.” Elsewhere in course goals, he mentioned audience and purpose again. While the words *audience* and *purpose* are not interchangeable, they convey the same function to Mr. Anderson. If students understand their audience, then their writing has purpose.

As I observed Mr. Anderson in the classroom setting, I saw how he pushed students always to think of audience. When discussing a new writing assignment, he reminded them to think about their credibility so that the readers would trust them. As he discussed strategies for developing their ideas, he reminded them of the importance of point of view. When students participated in a peer review exercise, he reminded them that the point of the exercise was to

help each other clarify ideas. If ideas are unclear to the other students reading the essay, then the larger audience would likely have trouble as well.

Near the end of the first interview, Mr. Anderson was discussing how self-reflection helps students with structure when he said the phrase “on purpose.” This prompted him to begin discussing audience and purpose: “The two things we’re obsessed with [in ENGL 102] or the main two. . . are purpose and audience.” He mentioned that the focus on audience and purpose in ENGL 102 “helped bring [the instructors] together because we’re kind of all consistently telling students” to think about audience and purpose. In the second interview as I reviewed with Mr. Anderson the results of his comment analysis, I told him that the analysis revealed that he does tell students whether or not their writing worked for him. He said that he usually can understand what the student is trying to do, but he wants his comments to help students think about audience: “It’s almost never like, I have no idea what this is. It’s almost always, what else can we do with this if we think about audience to strengthen it?”

Many of the comments he wrote related to audience and purpose. Although he never mentioned the word *purpose* in his written comments and mentioned the word *audience* only twice, his comments imply the importance of purpose and audience. He reminded several students of the need to “get your point across,” implying that they should make a point to an audience. To other students, he mentioned the importance of “effective argument.” Implied in an argument is the presence of a reader or an audience. To five of his students, he wrote the word *we* either in the margin or in an endnote. The use of *we* implies more than just himself as the reader, reinforcing that presence of an audience and a purpose for the writing. Furthermore, in each of his end notes, he used the word *I*, indicating that he read the essays not just as a teacher but as a reader (audience).

Mr. Anderson's comment analysis also supports the theme that effective writing has purpose and considers audience. The Sperling framework assumes that the teacher is responding as a reader of text, a reader who assumes various perspectives during the reading of the text. Therefore, all of the orientations imply the presence of an audience. For example, the Interpretive Orientation focuses on how readers "[shape] meaning" (Sperling, 1994, p. 182) based on either their background and experiences or the writers' backgrounds and experiences. While all of the orientations imply the presence of a reader, this orientation requires the acknowledgement of a reader because of the mention of reader's experiences, text knowledge, and inner feelings. Thirteen percent of Mr. Anderson's codings fell into this orientation, indicating that he considered both his background and experiences and their backgrounds and experiences as he read their texts. Several of his comments in this orientation show how an interpretive reader thinks about audience. Furthermore, the comments help the writer think about the presence of an audience. Mr. Anderson wrote the following comment that was coded as Writer's Text Knowledge: "While your essay covers a lot of ground in the pursuit of answers and tries to give a nuanced reading of the Net, we finally need you to focus on what you aim to prove." This comment, because of the word *we*, indicated that the writing should work for a broader audience than just Mr. Anderson. Another comment, coded in the subcategory of Reader's Inner Feelings, indicated that the writer connected to him as the audience. To the student who wrote about researching some physical symptoms and learning that she could be pregnant, he wrote, "Wow!"

The Social Orientation likewise implies the presence of an audience, and certain comments in this orientation help the writer remember the importance of purpose and audience. In this orientation, teachers assume the role of Peer or Expert. Although he had the least amount

of codings in this orientation as compared to the other orientations, some of his comments coded in the subcategory of Peer support that Mr. Anderson believes that students should consider audience and purpose in their writing. When one student wrote about the benefits of Google, he wrote, “How to sell it to us?” indicating that he was reading it as an expert who realized that the writer needed to add more detail, but the use of *us* makes the comment audience-focused: the writer needs to convey more information to the audience in order to meet the purpose for the argument. When another student wrote about multitasking, Mr. Anderson responded, “So we all do it?” Here, the use of *us* signifies the presence of an audience, but he is also acting as an expert reader to get the writer to clarify his writing.

In the Evaluative Orientation, teachers-as-readers use their comments to let the writers know that the writing has worked or not worked for the readers. Most of the comments coded into this orientation fell into the Positive subcategory, meaning that the comments let the writers know that their writing worked for the reader (the audience). Not every comment coded into this orientation focused specifically on audience, but in general, if students know that their writing works for the teacher, then they understand the importance of writing with an audience in mind. Because 17% of all of his codings fell into this orientation, students had a strong sense that they should write with a purpose and with an audience in mind if they believe that their writing should in some way work for the reader.

Half of all of Mr. Anderson’s codings fell into the Pedagogical Orientation. Comments coded into this orientation are intended to instruct the reader to make changes to text or ideas. If Mr. Anderson is writing comments to instruct the writers to make changes to text or ideas, then the writers have some sense that their writing is not fulfilling its purpose. For example, the proofreading comments coded into this category let the writers know that their errors in grammar

can interfere with the audience's ability to understand the writing. In one of his end notes to a student, Mr. Anderson wrote about this issue: "Save time to edit, especially for comma and 'word form' issues, as they distract from your meaning/add confusion." To another student struggling to develop his ideas, Mr. Anderson wrote, "A clearer thesis, more proof along the way, and more specific examples discussing individuals would enhance your working essay into an ever more effective argument." The mention of "meaning" and "effective argument" in the two comments makes these comments about audience and help the writers understand the importance of audience and purpose in their writing.

The final orientation, Cognitive/Emotive, includes the subcategories of Analytical and Emotional. Less than 1% of Mr. Anderson's codings were in the Emotional subcategory, but 11% of his codings were in the Analytical subcategory. Some of those analytical comments were phrased as questions. Writing comments as questions creates a conversation between the reader (audience) and the writer. While questions push the writer to make decisions, they also help the reader to see the importance of considering audience. For example, one student listed several claims in his introduction, but he lacked a clear thesis. Mr. Anderson questioned him about his argument: "How could you forge these claims together to really lay out your argument?" Here, the question creates the conversation between the writer and the audience, it asks the writer to make choices about his writing, and the use of the word *you* indicates the importance of the writer remembering his purpose.

The second theme specific to Mr. Anderson is that effective writing has purpose and considers audience. He was adamant about this theme during the interview, and in his syllabus, he used bold font to highlight the importance of purpose and audience. In his classroom, he

structured assignments focused on audience. Finally, his commenting practices indicate that effective writing is purposeful and considers audience.

**Fairness and individuality with students.** The final theme developing from the data is that students should be treated with fairness and individuality. While classroom observations helped me to see that Mr. Anderson had a good rapport with students and that he saw them as individuals, the real evidence of his desire for fairness and individuality came from the actual comments he wrote. In the nine essays that Mr. Anderson submitted for this study, he worked hard to make sure that he saw each student's work as an individual text and that he gave equal time and space to the comments he wrote. For all students, the end notes were about the same length—between one to one and a half pages long. The number of comments in the text had no relationship to the grade that the student received on the essay. Mr. Anderson responded to each student's writing specifically and prolifically.

In addition to the amount of comments he wrote, the language in his written comments shows that he treats students individually. Many of his comments are specific to the writing he is reading. His use of the word *you* and his use of questions to create a conversation contribute to this theme of individuality. For example, he wrote, "Can you focus this through connection and the individual?" in response to a student who was struggling to find a thesis for his essay on how people's connections to each other are being replaced by their connections to technology. In his end notes especially, Mr. Anderson relates specific comments in the text and in the margins of the essays to specific issues in his students' writing. One of his students implied in the essay that he agreed with the author of an article, but he simply quoted the author without saying why he agreed. In the end note, Mr. Anderson wrote, "Why, in other words, do you really agree w/

Johnson?” Such comments show that he reads each essay individually and responds to each student based on the issues in the text.

The types of comments he wrote indicated that he treated each student fairly and individually. The fact that his comments were coded into all five orientations meant that he read each essay from various perspectives, perspectives which are specific to the essay being read. Additionally, each essay did not receive the same percentage of codings across orientations. For example, three of Mr. Anderson’s essays had 38 comments each. However, when those comments were coded into the various orientations, essay A5 had 33 codings in the Pedagogical Orientation, essay A7 had 34 codings in the Pedagogical Orientation, but essay A9 had 42 codings in the Pedagogical Orientation. If he were viewing every essay in the exact same manner, an expectation would be that the codings would be consistent. Conversely, essay A4, with 40 comments, had only 7 codings in the Pedagogical Orientation.

Specific codings in the various orientations also support the theme of treating students with fairness and individuality. In the Interpretive Orientation, when he responded based either on his own background and experiences or the writer’s background and experiences, he conveyed the importance of individuality. A student ended an essay writing about succumbing to technology or being left behind, and Mr. Anderson wrote, “Sounds dreary.” The word *dreary* is a word specific to the ideas conveyed by the writer. It is not a word used often as a “rubber stamped” comment.

In the Social Orientation, most of his codings fell into the Expert category. Comments in this category could be “rubber stamped” comments such as “fragment,” “source,” “spelling,” or “awkward.” Additionally, the use of proofreading marks, which Mr. Anderson uses frequently, could work against this theme of individuality. However, although Mr. Anderson uses

proofreading marks that expert readers might use, and although some of his comments might seem to be impersonal comments because of the underscores, stars, smiley faces, and proofreading marks, his specific end notes and his use of the proofreading key help his writers understand what he means by those marks.

In the Evaluative Orientation, Mr. Anderson responded positively more than negatively, indicating more often than not that students' writing worked for him. Many comments coded into the Positive subcategory were not words but symbols. In one essay which received a grade of 95, Mr. Anderson underscored, starred, or drew a smiley face 26 times. These marks, according to the proofreading key, mean that the writing works for Mr. Anderson. However, next to those comments or in the endnotes, he wrote specific comments like "So there remains some hope?" or "At the least, it would be hard to re-wire," comments which are specific to the items underscored or marked with a star or smiley face.

Comments in the Pedagogical Orientation instruct the student regarding text and ideas. Many of Mr. Anderson's codings in this orientation were also proofreading marks keyed to the proofreading key. However, while such marks may seem impersonal, his use of the key, which he has explained in class, and his end notes and marginal notes which relate to many of the marks, make the marks less impersonal. For example, to the student with the most proofreading marks related to grammar mistakes, Mr. Anderson reminded him to edit for comma splices so that the reader would not be confused. Other written comments in this orientation show the writer that Mr. Anderson is reading the text individually. To one student whose thesis seemed incomplete, he wrote, "Why not push 'flat, superficial information?'"

Mr. Anderson's use of questions as written comments accounts for the high number of codings in the Analytical subcategory of the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation. Many of the



questions asked by Mr. Anderson are specific to the text, supporting the theme of fairness and individuality. For example, when a student claimed that people who read books absorb information, he asked, “Would we, however?” Here, he has asked the student to think about his claim, but his response is specific to the student’s writing.

In the interviews, the idea of fairness and individuality arose near the end of the interview when I asked Mr. Anderson about his perception of his practices related to his beliefs. He said,

[My practices] reflect that I think I do feel like I need to value these people as individuals especially in the composition classroom where I can afford to. I like to know who these people are and then respond to them individually because that’s important to me.

He later admitted that though his style of commenting is “exhausting,” he wants to spend the time and energy to provide the help that his students need.

The importance of treating students with fairness and individuality is the third theme specific to Mr. Anderson’s data. In his interviews, he mentioned the importance of teachers treating students individually and fairly. In his commenting practices, he demonstrated fairness and individuality, and in the classroom, he treated each student with fairness and individuality.

### **Teacher Reaction**

After analyzing all of the data and finding individual themes, I met again with Mr. Anderson to discuss the results of the research. During this follow-up interview, I described in detail each of the five main orientations, showed Mr. Anderson how some of his comments fit into those orientations, and explained the numbers represented in Tables 1-6. After having explained those things in detail, I asked Mr. Anderson if he had any thoughts about the results.

His first comment related to the fact that 40% of his codings fell into the Change/Correct Text subcategory in the Pedagogical Orientation. After I explained that the word *text* referred

not just to word-level meaning but to sentence-level writing and to organization and structure as well, he said,

That makes sense to me where most of my stuff would be . . . because I'm sort of obsessed with paragraphs. . . . Most of what I do relates to, Why is this here? What is this order? What is the central idea of this? Where is the evidence? How does the evidence back up the point you're trying to make?

Since he had articulated in the initial interview that structure was a very important aspect of his writing class, he understood how his numbers would be higher in categories related to structure (Change/Correct Text, Reader's Text Knowledge, Writer's Text Knowledge, and Analytical).

One area that seemed a pleasant surprise to Mr. Anderson was the high number of Positive Evaluative comments (16%). He said, "That makes me happy" because such comments show the students, "What else can we do with this? It's not that you're wrong." We discussed how the Positive Evaluative comments were likely coded into other categories as well, but that the Positive Evaluative comments could be related to his belief in individuality and fairness. Each piece of writing gets assessed on its own merits, and he wants to be able to tell students what works in their writing. He also seemed pleased that "what [he] believe[s] . . . is coming through" in the comments and being reflected in the analysis.

For my last question of the interview, I asked Mr. Anderson if he would change anything about his response practices after pondering the results I showed him. He did indicate that he might try to work on responses in the Social Peer category, especially in the earlier assignments where students are writing based on a broad theme. However, he felt that overall, "this sounds about right for better or worse."

### **Summary: Mr. Anderson**

I can best describe Mr. Anderson as an instructor who is goal-oriented. He expects his students to be able to produce a certain type of writing—not a formulaic type of writing but a certain type of writing that will serve them as they continue their academic studies. His repetition of key ideas such as audience and purpose, fairness and individuality, and structure helps his students to know his expectations. His response practices are consistent with practices advocated by Sommers (1982) and Straub (2000), and his written comments in general reinforce his beliefs.

### **Case Study Two: Ms. Bowden**

*It's my job to ensure that when they leave my classroom that they have grown in their abilities to communicate, that they've grown in their abilities to think about ideas, and that they've realized the awesome responsibility that they have as users of language.*

Ms. Bowden completed her undergraduate studies in English at a large university in the southeastern United States. She completed her master's degree at different large university in the southern United States, graduating with her Master of Arts degree in English. She has been teaching freshman composition since 1997, teaching at least two but sometimes up to four sections of freshman English composition each semester, occasionally teaching undergraduate literature courses as well. As a member of the Freshman English Advisory Committee (FAC), Ms. Bowden played a large role in the revision of the freshman English writing program.

### **Teacher Beliefs**

Based on data gathered primarily from interviews, observations, and her course syllabus, I report Ms. Bowden's beliefs about teaching writing and responding to student writing.

**Beliefs about the purpose of freshman writing.** When I asked Ms. Bowden the purpose of freshman writing, she hesitated for a moment, said, “Hmmm,” and paused for another long moment. She then said that a freshman writing program serves a three-fold purpose. First, it should help prepare students for success in college. She said,

It is our job as the department that touches almost every single student who steps foot on our campus . . . to ensure that if they have not been made college-ready that they are college-ready by the time they complete our program.

She conveyed this idea in her syllabus when she outlined what good writers do: they “draw connections” between the reader and the writer, they use a “wide variety of source material” in their writing, they read, and they write. Such skills are necessary in order to be successful in college.

Ms. Bowden articulated that another key purpose of freshman writing is to help students gain the skills they will need to engage with and compete in a text-heavy world. Because she knows that students now write more than ever in various forms, she understands that successful writing will help students be successful in their careers and in their daily lives. This idea manifested itself in her classroom teaching and in her syllabus as she discussed the importance of interacting with a variety of sources and responding in various ways. In the classroom, she instructed students in how to navigate websites and to determine which websites would be credible for use in an academic paper. During one class session, Ms. Bowden asked students to find online articles pertinent to their topics, and then she reminded them to “consider the source” before using it in their papers. In her syllabus, she mentioned the importance of “using a wide variety of source material,” and she reminded students that “good writers write. Whether it is an

assignment for the *New York Times* or a Facebook status update, good writers consider their purpose and their audience.”

The third purpose of freshman writing, according to Ms. Bowden, is to introduce students to the academy. This purpose differs from helping students be college-ready. Instead, this purpose is “to teach them what we do inside the academy and very gently encourage them to cross the threshold and to participate in sort of micro ways what the larger purpose of the academy is.” She conveyed the importance of college-ready writing whenever she discussed the difference between the kinds of writing students may have done in high school or even in a previous iteration of the freshman writing program and the type of writing that is expected of students in college. When discussing the ubiquitous five-paragraph essay, she said that with the five-paragraph format, students are being asked to decide conclusions right from the start and then go out and find evidence to support their conclusions. In such writing,

They’re being asked to decide right from the start and then go out and find evidence to support the conclusion they’ve already drawn without information. Right? What’s your thesis? How are you going to support it? What’s your evidence? Which is not what we do in the academy at all, right? We ask a question, then we inform ourselves by gathering data, and then we draw a conclusion from the data that we have, right?

During one of my observations, I saw how Ms. Bowden taught her students this distinction. (Ms. Bowden’s classroom for this particular section of ENGL 102 is a computer lab.) On the white board at the front of the classroom, she drew a diagram of a typical five-paragraph essay and called it “a baby step to what we’re doing in the class.” She told students to explore more deeply perhaps one “leg” of what would normally be covered in one paragraph of a five-

paragraph essay so that they could ask questions such as, To what extent? How? and Why? in exploring that idea. To Ms. Bowden, such thinking is what happens in the academy.

To help students with these purposes, Ms. Bowden thinks that her role is to make sure that students have grown in their ability to communicate and to think about ideas, to help them realize the “awesome responsibility they have as users of language,” to give them confidence in their ability to participate in their college classrooms and in the world outside of the academy, and to respect their writing. The overarching idea in her discussion of roles was the idea that she must “love” her students, and in doing so, to help them grow.

**Knowledge of the specific writing program.** Ms. Bowden was active in all aspects of the overhaul of the freshman writing program. She believes that those who are teaching within the program are learning what it means to teach writing as inquiry: “I would like to believe that the future means we would all be more closely aligned in what we mean when we say [inquiry].” One of the things she perceived is that many of those instructors teaching are still

trying to figure out what [writing as inquiry] means and how we can do that effectively, especially if you’ve . . . been teaching for a decade and you have certain *schticks* that have always worked and it’s really hard to let go of those because you’ve got this lesson plan that you’ve already market-tested. You know the students can hear it but it yet doesn’t really quite interlock perfectly seamlessly with the ideas of the new program, so how do you come to terms with that?

She does believe the focus on writing as inquiry is just beginning to be understood, but she is hopeful that it will “blossom into something really beautiful” as teachers continue to learn the program.

Ms. Bowden never fully articulated what she meant by “inquiry” though she did consider writing as an act of inquiry as the main component of the freshman English writing program. She linked the term *inquiry* with the phrase *habits of mind*. She described habits of mind as “cognitive strategies or ways of thinking, and it’s things like curiosity, a willingness to find an answer, desire to know, a willingness to suspend judgment, to stay soft before you draw a conclusion.” She considers these habits of mind to be critical in a program that stresses writing as an act of inquiry. Other habits of mind include the willingness to accept the idea that writing is a process and a conversation and that writing is engaging in discourse. In short, she sees the habits of mind as a direct opposite of “thesis-driven writing” and the typical five-paragraph theme.

In the classroom, Ms. Bowden encouraged her students to develop the habits of mind that are necessary for the types of writing expected of them in her class. For example, during one class period when students had completed a series of peer review exercises, she asked them to return to their seats and complete a 3-minute “fast write” based on the following question: “What did you learn about your own draft from reading others’?” Thinking about their own work in light of others’ work encourages students to suspend judgment, to consider the possibility that good writing takes many different forms.

Ms. Bowden suggested that another essential component of the program is for students and teachers to see that writing is a process. To that end, ENGL 102 teachers now have students write two or three longer, sustained “projects” rather than five or six essays each semester. These projects culminate with the sustained piece of writing, but they are supported through scaffolded assignments, or “smaller exercises that lead them to bigger steps that lead them to this large piece that they produce.”

In her syllabus, Ms. Bowden specified for the students how each of the two projects will be graded, and broke down the percentages for the smaller assignments which lead to the larger piece of writing. She also indicated in her syllabus that good writers practice, implying that writing is a process: “And good writers know that the only way to nurture and cultivate a practice is to, well, practice.”

In her classroom, Ms. Bowden instructed her students in writing as a process. On one of the days that I observed, she was teaching students various strategies for writing solid introductions to their essays. She first had them use the computers to find articles related to their topics. They discussed the various strategies used in the introductions to those articles, and she then had them write three different introductions to their essay based on the strategies they discussed.

Ms. Bowden considers research to be a vital component of the new writing program. In her syllabus, she reminded students to use a wide variety of sources since a good writer “can draw connections among the most disparate sources. . . everything from Hamlet to Homer Simpson to the article he read yesterday in the *New York Times*.” Furthermore, the syllabus included a statement that good writers read the work of other writers in order to learn, among other things, “how other good writers interweave their ideas within a context of larger ideas; they take note of how other good writers integrate the ideas of others, of how they employ rhetorical strategies” and construct essays.

In the classroom, she had her students looking up articles on the computer, reminding them about the importance of good sources. When one student pulled up an article from *Huffington Post*, she asked, “Are you familiar with *Huffington Post*? It’s an extremely left-leaning website.” She then reminded the student to “consider the source” before using it in a



paper. She further reminded students that rather than rely on Google to search for them, they should go straight to specific sites online, like Time.com.

**Understanding of best practices for written response.** In her graduate studies in English, Ms. Bowden took a course in rhetoric and composition required of all teaching assistants. However, she said that she does not remember class discussion about assessment or commenting on student writing. Instead, the course focused on the background to rhetoric and composition and taught students how to “craft curriculum and pedagogy such that it reflected sort of your attitudes toward what a teacher was supposed to be.” However, the mentoring system in place at the university provided the support Ms. Bowden needed to develop as a teacher. As part of the mentoring program, she learned about assessment through regular calibration sessions and discussions. She did mention that the program, in which teaching assistants taught all of the freshman composition courses, seemed “more interested in consistency in grades than caring about comments.” Not until she began teaching in her current setting did she become aware that “there were best practices [or] that people had even written about it.”

When I asked her what authors or literature informed her understanding of best practices, she quickly mentioned Nancy Sommers. All teachers in the program are required to read Sommers’ 1982 article “Responding to Student Writing,” so the fact that she mentioned Sommers is not surprising. She did not mention other authors by name, indicating that she could not mention any off the top of her head. She mentioned “Take 20,” a DVD put out by Bedford/St. Martins of twenty “rock-star comp teachers talking about twenty topics and one of them is assessment.”

When I asked Ms. Bowden what she considered to be her best practices, she immediately went back to the Sommers article because “I think she’s right on the money.” In terms of best practices, Ms. Bowden thinks that teachers should contextualize comments so that the comments are not generic. The comment should be written to the student “rather than to another English teacher who may come across my comment one day.” She also believes that comments should be instructional rather than diagnostic. In other words, rather than tell a student a paragraph is underdeveloped, a teacher should tell students how to develop the paragraph. More than once, she mentioned the importance of comments being instructional, emphatically indicating that “I feel that my comments . . . have one purpose and that’s to instruct. I do not worry about justifying grades.” Finally, she wants her comments to compliment the student, so she tries to keep her comments focused on what they are doing well.

When Ms. Bowden actually assesses student writing, she comments as she read. She admitted that “it probably is a good thing to read the whole thing first and go back and comment” but that “[p]ragmatically, I do not feel like I have time for that.” Instead, she begins her commenting by saying something nice about the introduction. In succeeding paragraphs, she comments on how well she thinks that the writing “furthers whatever their purpose is,” often related to the concepts being covered in class. For example, after she has taught about purpose with students and has discussed with them the “golden ratio”—that 2/3 of the paper should be the voice of the writer with the remaining 1/3 being the evidence or support—she will comment regarding the golden ratio. If she finds it appropriate to mention things that have not been discussed in class, she will do so. She said that her focus is not on correctness, nor does she mark everything. Her goal is that her comments should be used to instruct students so that they can become better writers.

**Perspectives of her individual written response practices.** Ms. Bowden was honest when she discussed how she believes her practices line up with her beliefs. She admitted, “When I am responding best, I think they line up very well. When I am tired or lazy, I think that my types of comments are not in line with what I see my role as being.” She acknowledged that she finds it easier sometimes to tell a student to come to the office to talk with her about an issue rather than to write out how to do it. She conceded that putting the responsibility on a student to stop by the office is “lazy” on her part, even though she makes herself readily available.

Ms. Bowden offered great insight into her understanding of the relationship between her beliefs and her practices:

I believe that incontinence is the biggest sin. I mean, if you hold something to be true and evident and you don't do it, whatever that is, then to me that's a sin. That's how I define sin, and I don't want to lead a sinful life. And what more important thing am I doing in this lifetime than teaching these students? . . . And so I should take this really seriously and I should do it absolutely 100% to the best of my ability, but sometimes I don't.”

Ms. Bowden is passionate about her students and about her role in teaching them to become good writers.

### **Teacher Practices**

For this portion of the chapter, I used data gathered from the ten essays that Ms. Bowden submitted for the study. The emphasis for this portion of the study was not to see the types of comments that Ms. Bowden wrote; instead, the focus was on how her comments reflect her perspective as a reader of student writing. Where pertinent, I have included data from interviews, classroom observations, and course documents to support the information in the

comment analysis, though the integration of all the data will come in the section entitled “Individual Themes.”

Twelve students in Ms. Bowden’s ENGL 102 class gave written permission for her to submit blind copies of their work. However, two students failed to submit their assignments on time, so the total number of essays collected and submitted for the study was ten. Ms. Bowden required her students to submit all essays electronically via email, and she also commented electronically. Once she had added her marginal comments via the “Insert Comment” function of Microsoft Word, typed longer end notes to students at the end of their essays, and typed their grades on their essays, she saved the graded electronic essays and emailed them back to students. Via email, she submitted electronic copies of the essays of the ten consenting students to me.

Because Ms. Bowden’s comments were electronically submitted via the Review—New Comment function of Word, the comments already had numbers. I separated some of the longer comments and the end note by sentence level so that they could be analyzed individually. I then assigned each comment a number/letter combination (i.e. 7a). After I had numbered all of the comments, I typed them up in table form for the three individual raters to analyze. Ms. Bowden had a total of 170 (N=170) across all ten essays.

Many of Ms. Bowden’s comments were coded into multiple categories. Altogether, she had a total of 364 codings (NC = 364). In the tables and the narratives that follow, the percentages listed are based on the number of codings (NC) rather than the total number of comments (N). Table 7 presents the categorization of Ms. Bowden’s comments by teacher orientation. As Table 7 indicates, Ms. Bowden’s comments reflect her desire to instruct her students (Pedagogical Orientation). Almost as often, her comments reflect a social role (Social

Orientation). Less often does Ms. Bowden react analytically or emotionally (Cognitive/Emotive Orientation).

Table 7

*Categorization of Ms. Bowden's Comments according to Teacher Orientation*

TEACHER ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Interpretive	62	17%
Social	86	24%
Evaluative	71	20%
Pedagogical	107	29%
Cognitive/Emotive	38	10%
Other	0	0%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 7 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

In the narrative section that follows, student writing has been differentiated from teacher comments through the use of capitalization. Student writing has been typed using all capital letters, and teacher comments have been enclosed in quotation marks so as to avoid confusion. Additionally, students' words have been typed exactly as they wrote them in their essays.

**Interpretive orientation.** In the Interpretive Orientation, teachers interpret writers' words through their own background experiences, text knowledge, and inner feelings or through their perception of the writers' background experiences, text knowledge, or inner feelings. Seventeen percent of Ms. Bowden's codings fell under the Interpretive Orientation. Table 8 presents the breakdown of her comments in the Interpretive Orientation according to the specific subcategories. Because Ms. Bowden had no comments coded into the subcategory of Writer's Inner Feelings, I have not discussed this subcategory.

Table 8

*Interpretive Orientation: Ms. Bowden’s Comments according to Subcategory*

INTERPRETIVE ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Reader’s Experiences	6	2%
Text Knowledge	27	7%
Inner Feelings	7	2%
Writer’s Experiences	5	1%
Text Knowledge	17	5%
Inner Feelings	0	0%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 8 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

About 2% of Ms. Bowden’s total codings fell into the subcategory of Reader’s Experiences. Here, Ms. Bowden reacted to her student’s writing in light of her own background experiences. In “Dying to Be Thin,” a student wrote about young girls who starve themselves in order to be thin. In her end note to the student, Ms. Bowden relied on her own knowledge of topic when she wrote, “If you’re writing to an anorexic, I’m not sure simply saying that you’ve got to love yourself more will cut it. They obviously don’t, right?” Another student wrote about problems in America’s health care industry. In her end note, Ms. Bowden wrote, “If you develop this idea for your LC [long composition], you might consider connecting it to the important changes happening in health care as a result of Obamacare.” Here, Ms. Bowden connected her knowledge of the current state of affairs in the country with the student’s essay. Finally, another student wrote an essay on school lunches. The student wrote, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIFTEEN YEARS NEW RULES HAVE BEEN MADE TOWARDS THE HEALTHY HUNGER-FREE KIDS ACT and then the student cited Bittman. When Ms. Bowden commented, “Mark Bittman is the face of food issues right now,” she relied on her knowledge of

the topic. Her comments in this category also reflect her belief that research is an important component of writing.

The second subcategory is Reader's Text Knowledge. About 7% of Ms. Bowden's codings fell into this subcategory. In this subcategory, teacher-readers respond based on their understanding of how text (words, sentences, paragraphs, and essays) should function. For example, between two sentences in the essay "Hit the Net. . . Not the Streets," Ms. Bowden inserted, "Using a transition word or phrase here would help your readers anticipate a shift in ideas. What about 'Granted' or 'Of Course' or something like that?" Ms. Bowden implied to the reader that the text needed more in order to have better flow. Sometimes in praising a student's writing, Ms. Bowden showed that she knows how text should work. In responding to the student who wrote, SILK ROAD IS THE NEW ONLINE MARKETPLACE THAT ANY SELF-RESPECTING ANARCHIST SHOULD BE RAVING ABOUT, Ms. Bowden commented, "It's always a good idea to define your terms, or to say it another way, to answer your What? question. Nicely done." On other occasions, Ms. Bowden's comments focused on conventions of writing: "You still need to follow formal conventions on citing this interview," "Cite an author's name and paragraph #," or "Edit for little errors like this one." Her codings in this category reflect her belief that comments should be instructive.

The third subcategory is Reader's Inner Feelings. About 2% of Ms. Bowden's codings fell into this subcategory. In the essay "How Much Is Too Much?" a student questioned the safety of the excessive use of Botox. The student wrote, THOUGH SOME OF THE SIDE EFFECTS OF TOO MUCH BOTOX CAN BE DANGEROUS, EVEN FATAL, THERE SEEMS TO BE NO 'LIMIT' AS TO HOW MUCH A PERSON CAN RECEIVE. Ms. Bowden indicated her inner thoughts about this sentence when she commented, "Huh? Surely, fatality is

a limitation!” Another student quoted a health care worker regarding abuses of Medicaid: AS A WORKER, I’M NOT ALLOWED TO QUESTION THE RECIPIENTS. I DON’T FEEL THAT THAT IS RIGHT, BECAUSE THE PEOPLE WHO REALLY NEED IT, ARE SCREWED.” Ms. Bowden reacted to this comment by writing, “Weird.” When a student writing about the need for better guidance from high school counselors wrote, THERE COULD BE FEWER MISGUIDED COLLEGE STUDENTS IF EDUCATION COUNSELING WAS IMPROVED IN HIGH SCHOOL,” Ms. Bowden commented, “You put a face on this issue right from the start—and it’s yours!” Here, Ms. Bowden showed the student that not only did the sentence work for her as a reader, but it also showed the student that Ms. Bowden felt strongly that the student took a risk in using himself as the face for the essay.

The next three subcategories deal with the reader’s perspective of the writer’s experiences, text knowledge, and inner feelings. Just 1% of Ms. Bowden’s codings fell into the subcategory of Writer’s Experiences. In her end note to the student who wrote a complicated comparative essay, Ms. Bowden commented, “If this piece weren’t so coherent, so forward moving, and so humorous, it’d feel long. But it doesn’t. It reads so well, is so funny, and is definitely YOUR interpretation.” She indicated to the writer that his experiences and understanding of the subject were evident in the writing. She questioned another student about his experience with the topic of minimum wage and people’s health. The student wrote, NOW THE MORE HEALTHY FAST FOOD STORES SUCH AS CHIK FIL A AND RAISING CANES TEND TO PLACE THEIR STORES IN MORE PROFITABLE PLACES SUCH AS BY MALLS, OR IN MORE EXPENSIVE NEIGHBORHOODS BECAUSE THEY DON’T HAVE A DOLLAR MENU, AND THEIR PRICE MENU IS PARTICULARLY MORE EXPENSIVE. Ms. Bowden, questioning the student’s understanding of the topic, asked, “Is this



your personal observation or have you done demographic and geographic research? Also, will your audience agree with you that Chic-Fil-A and Raising Canes are healthier than other fast food chains?” One student wrote an essay about the Ketogenic Diet, a type of diet that may help control seizures in epileptics who may not want to use medication or who may have had no success with medications. The student told about her brother who has seen a reduction in seizures since going on the diet. Ms. Bowden commented, “Providing a face for the issue humanizes it and appeals to your readers’ emotions. That you know the face lends you credibility.”

About 5% of Ms. Bowden’s codings fell in the subcategory of Writer’s Text Knowledge. Here, Ms. Bowden responded to students regarding her perception of their use of syntax, organization, grammar, and other mechanics of writing. The student writing about minimum wage and health wrote, **THE EASY THING TO DO IS JUST TO TELL PEOPLE TO EAT HEALTHIER, BUT THE BIGGEST PROBLEM IS THAT YOU CAN’T AFFORD TO EAT HEALTHIER FOODS BECAUSE THERE MORE EXPENSIVE.** Ms. Bowden responded, “Me? or ‘poverty stricken families’? to let the reader know that his use of “you” could cause confusion for the reader. In that same essay, the student switched from third-person plural pronouns to first-person plural pronouns in one paragraph. Ms. Bowden wrote, “The shift from ‘they’ to ‘we’ makes this sentence hard to read Can you say it a different way, or maybe use quotation marks or italicize the question they’re asking?” In her end notes to students, Ms. Bowden often wrote comments directing the writers to rethink certain aspects of their writing. To the student writing about school lunches, she wrote, “For your LC [long composition], be sure to check paragraph coherence, intro sources more consistently, and make use of every body paragraph’s last few sentences to reiterate your main ideas.”

**Social orientation.** Writing instructors cannot escape their roles as teachers, but sometimes, they respond to student writing as if they were part of the same social group as the writer. In the social orientation, the teacher can respond as a peer (someone who has no more knowledge than the student regarding a particular subject) or as an expert (someone whose role can be as an expert reader, a literary scholar, or an instructor). Twenty-four percent (24%) of Ms. Bowden’s codings fell into the category of social orientation, more as an expert than as a peer. Perhaps this is related to Ms. Bowden’s desire to “love” her students even if that means that she has to be harsh sometimes based on her ten years of teaching experience. Table 9 presents the breakdown of her comments in the Social Orientation according to the specific subcategories.

Table 9

*Social Orientation: Ms. Bowden’s Comments according to Subcategory*

SOCIAL ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Peer	21	6%
Expert	65	18%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 9 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

About 6% of Ms. Bowden’s codings fell in the Social Peer subcategory. In her end note to the student writing about the Ketogenic diet, Ms. Bowden wrote, “This is an important issue. . . I’m sure that there are other NOLA folks who would like to know this info.” Here, she identifies herself as a literate member of the New Orleans community, the same community in which the writer lives. Another student, writing about teachers who are judged by their students’ test scored, wrote about standardized tests, WHO WOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT THESE TESTS YOUR CHILDREN TAKE EVERY YEAR IS MADE FOR THEM TO ANSWER

INCORRECTLY? Ms. Bowden responded, “I’m curious about this issue.” This comment reflects that Ms. Bowden is an interested reader, a person interested in the issue being raised by the student.

Some of Ms. Bowden’s comments (18% of the total codings) reflected her role as Social Expert (expert reader or literary scholar), one who knows what to expect of good writing. In comparing John DeLorean to the Roman general Coriolanus, a student wrote, “SO, LIKE CORIOLANUS, HE [DELOREAN] CHANGES HIS MIND.” Ms. Bowden wrote, “I’m impressed that you’re maintaining this extended comparison” revealing not only that the comparison is working for her (the positive evaluative orientation—see below) but that she recognizes the difficulty of sustaining such a comparison in an essay. The student writing about teachers and standardized test scores told a story about Holly, a high school student whose test scores prevented her from being initially admitted to her college of choice. The student then wrote, THERE ARE SO MANY CASES, LIKE WHAT HAPPENED TO HOLLY, THAT PEOPLE DO NOT EVEN KNOW EXIST. Ms. Bowden commented, “Excellent rhetorical strategy. When we provide a face, it doesn’t mean much unless we can claim that the face represents a larger group.” Her comments in this category reflect her belief that freshman writing should prepare students not only for college writing but for the types of thinking that they will need in order to be successful in college.

Other comments were very didactic in nature. The student writing about minimum wage and health wrote a short counter-argument to a claim made by fast food restaurants. Ms. Bowden responded, “A good rule of thumb is to make your counterpoint at least twice as long as your concession.” On several occasions, her comments instructed writers to “Check your grammar” or “Check your punctuation” or “Cite para #.” In her end note to the student writing

about anorexia, Ms. Bowden wrote, “Don’t forget to alphabetize [citations].” In her end note to the student writing about problems with the current healthcare system, Ms. Bowden reminded the writer, “Finally, for your LC [long composition], you MUST remember to cite your sources internally.”

**Evaluative orientation.** At times, teachers’ comments reflect that the writing has or has not worked for them. In the evaluative orientation, the teacher responds either positively (the writing has worked) or negatively (the writing has not worked). About 20% of Ms. Bowden’s comments were coded as evaluative. Table 10 presents the breakdown of her comments in the Evaluative Orientation according to the specific subcategories.

Table 10

*Evaluative Orientation: Ms. Bowden’s Comments according to Subcategory*

EVALUATIVE ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Positive	54	15%
Negative	17	5%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 10 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

About 5% of Ms. Bowden’s codings were considered Positive Evaluative. In this subcategory, the teacher indicates that the writing has worked. Many of Ms. Bowden’s comments coded as positive dealt with issues of strategies that she had discussed in class with students. For example, in “Post-Tarquin Rome meets Bedminster, New Jersey,” the student began the essay with a story about DeLorean and his wife. Ms. Bowden commented, “awesome use of scene!” Several times she mentioned the strategy of putting a “face” on the essay:

“You put a face on this issue right from the start—and it’s yours! This lends yours essay humanity and lends you credibility. Nicely done!”

“Nice face.”

“excellent rhetorical strategy. When we provide a face, it doesn’t mean much unless we can claim that the face represents a larger group.”

“excellent use of anecdote to put a face on this issue!”

Other times, Ms. Bowden’s comments indicate that she “got” what the writer intended.

When the student writing about school lunches wrote, I BELIEVE THAT WITHIN A FEW YEARS MORE AND MORE SCHOOLS WILL BE SERVING HEALTHIER FOODS. WITH THAT BEING SAID, CHILDHOOD OBESITY SHOULD START TO SUBSIDE, Ms. Bowden commented, “Uplifting prediction.” In her end note to the student writing about the Ketogenic diet, Ms. Bowden wrote, “This essay is MUCH MORE you than your last, and is FAR more interesting as a result. Kudos!” In her end note to the student writing about the online marketplace for illegal narcotics, Ms. Bowden commented, “You don’t confuse your reader by spending too much time conceding, and when you do, you effectively reclaim the topic. Nicely done.”

About 5% of the codings fell into this subcategory of Negative Evaluative. Here, Ms. Bowden let the writer know that his writing did not work, though the way in which she wrote the comment was not always negative in tone. In writing about the Ketogenic diet, a student ended a paragraph by citing facts from a website. Ms. Bowden commented, “So, take this paragraph to its logical conclusion. . . . You set up an opportunity to make this move, but don’t,” indicating that the way the student ended the paragraph did not work. Another student ended a paragraph with the sentence IN THE PAST COUPLE OF MONTHS SEVERAL GUIDELINES HAVE BEEN MADE TO HELP IMPROVE LUNCHES NATIONWIDE. Ms. Bowden commented,

“This closing sentence gives the impression that this paragraph is about lunches, but it seems to be mostly about PE. What’s up?”

At times when the writing does not work for her, Ms. Bowden questions the writer to push him to think more deeply. One student wrote about the “frozen look” caused by botulism, but the student also implied that Botox can cause botulism. Ms. Bowden wrote, “But the ‘frozen look’ is not caused by the botulism? I’m confused. Can you distinguish between the two (if it’s important) or reshape all of this so that it doesn’t feel so important to understand the distinctions?” When dealing with the student who used both “we” and “they” in the same sentence causing confusion for the reader, Ms. Bowden wrote, “Can you say it in a different way, or maybe use quotation marks or italicize the question they’re asking?”

**Pedagogical orientation.** Many times, a teacher uses students’ writing as a springboard for instruction. In this orientation, the teacher focuses on the student writer’s ideas and text. She tries to teach the writer through changing the writer’s ideas and text, expanding his ideas and text, and supporting his ideas and text. About 29% of Ms. Bowden’s codings fell into this category. The fact that this orientation received the most codings is expected since Ms. Bowden believes that comments are intended to instruct. Although comments coded in all of the orientations could be instructive, the comments in this orientation are focused on specific instructions dealing with text and ideas. I have reported the numerical results for this orientation in Table 11.

Only 1% of Ms. Bowden’s codings fell into the Change/Correct Ideas subcategories. Ms. Bowden’s comments coded in this subcategory related to audience. In an end note to a student who wrote about the lack of guidance for high school students, Ms. Bowden commented, “My only question, then, is, ‘Who is your audience?’ Are you writing to counselors? students?”

parents? It's not clear, but if you had a clear audience in mind, you could better appeal to their emotions and desires." She is directing the student to rethink the intended readers which will perhaps provide more clarity to the essay. For other students, Ms. Bowden's comment served to help them rethink parts of their essays. To the student who seemed to conflate the overuse of Botox with botulism, she wrote, "Can you distinguish between the two (if it's important) or reshape all of this so that it doesn't feel so important to understand the distinction?" In her end note to this same student, she wrote, "The one real body paragraph has the potential to be exploded into three (at least): 1-explaining what botox is, 2-explaining what botulism is and why it's serious but not a serious concern, and 3-explaining what that 'frozen' look is and how to avoid it." Through such comments, Ms. Bowden is teaching students to rethink their ideas and to think about the structures of their essays.

Table 11

*Pedagogical Orientation: Ms. Bowden's Comments according to Subcategory*

PEDAGOGICAL ORIENTATION		TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Change/Correct Ideas		4	1%
	Text	46	13%
Expand	Ideas	16	4%
	Text	7	2%
Support	Ideas	20	5%
	Text	13	4%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 11 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

The subcategory of Change/Correct Text had the highest percentage (13%) of Ms. Bowden's codings in this orientation. Ms. Bowden uses very few traditional proofreading marks, but she does point students toward errors in language and structure. For example, in her end note to the student who wrote about teachers and standardized tests, she noted that the

student had a lack of clear focus and added, “When does the shift occur and what changes can you make to get your main idea back in the driver’s seat?” She is not telling the student what to fix; she instead uses the comment to remind the student of the importance of the main idea to drive the entire essay. When a student used both “they” and “we” in the same sentence, Ms. Bowden commented, “Can you say it a different way, or maybe use quotation marks or italicize the question they’re asking?” Again, without marking up the student’s work, she instructs the student to rethink the sentence structure. When this student wrote, **THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM IS VERY DIFFICULT. . .**, Ms. Bowden highlighted **THIS PROBLEM** and commented, “Is the problem the minimum wage or . . . ? At some point the focus on minimum wage was overshadowed. Can you tie it back to your original focus, or should you recast your focus from the beginning?” Here, she teaches the student to rethink his focus without telling him what to do or doing it for him. Aside from a few comments to students to “Check your punctuation” or “Watch your grammar” or cite sources correctly, she does not do much editing of student work.

The next subcategory is Expand Ideas. Because many of Ms. Bowden’s comments received multiple codings, many of the comments included here were included in other subcategories as well. However, the comments served more than one purpose. For example, when the student writing about school lunches wrote, **FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIFTEEN YEARS NEW RULES HAVE BEEN MADE TOWARDS THE HEALTHY HUNGER-FREE KIDS ACT**, A asked, “If this info is important enough to mention, should you take the time to explain what it is and what impact it will have?” Through this question, she teaches the student the importance of explaining facts gathered from sources, but the comment also shows how Ms.



Bowden acts as an expert reader (Evaluative Orientation) and as an analytical reader (Cognitive/Emotive Orientation).

In the end note to the reader writing about healthcare, Ms. Bowden wrote, "If you develop this idea for your LC, you might consider connecting it to the important changes happening in healthcare as a result of Obamacare." This comment has already been included in other subcategories, but it also functions here to teach the student to think about his writing in another way if he chooses to revise it. To another student who wrote about the overuse of botox, Ms. Bowden wrote, "The one real body paragraph has the potential to exploded into three (at least): 1-explaining what botox is, 2-explaining what botulism is and why it's serious but not a serious concern, and 3-explaining what that 'frozen' look is and how to avoid it." In writing this comment, Ms. Bowden not only directed the student to think about the lack of focus (change ideas subcategory), she also wanted the student to expand ("explode") her ideas.

About 7% of her codings fell in the Expand Text subcategory. In teaching her students the importance of clarity, she often directed them to revise their work. In her end note to the student who wrote about minimum wage and health, she wrote, "The shift to the idea of Fat Tax provides a potential tie-in or tie-back, but you don't take it up. Maybe you could?" By asking the student to consider a "tie-in or tie-back," she directs him to think about ways to deepen his textual structure. When a student introduced a source known to be a voice in the school lunch debate, Ms. Bowden wrote, "Mark Bittman is the face of food issues right now. You would gain some cred points by introducing him." In the same manner, she wrote the following comment to a student who cited an author: "Is she an expert on this topic? Can you say anything about her that would allow us to trust her numbers?" In both of these cases, Ms. Bowden is teaching the students not to add to their ideas but to explain or justify the authors they cited in their papers.

About 5% of Ms. Bowden's codings fell in the Support Ideas subcategory. In this subcategory, the teacher both reminds students to provide support for their ideas and supports students' ideas. In many instances, Ms. Bowden wrote comments reminding students to support their claims. To the student who claimed that some fast food restaurants are healthier than others and are more likely to PLACE THEIR STORES IN MORE PROFITABLE PLACES, Ms. Bowden wrote, "Is this your personal observation or have you done demographic and geographic research?" She did not argue the student's claim, but instead she pushed the student to add support. To the student who wrote about minimum wage and health, she pushed him to support his ideas by doing further research: "If you continue this topic for your LC, do some research: find a hardworking, likable family who suffers from the minimum wage diet and tell us about them. Maybe even include a pic!"

In other instances, Ms. Bowden supported the students' ideas, thereby teaching them that their ideas had merit and worked for her on some level. In the end note to the student writing about the lack of guidance for high school students, Ms. Bowden wrote, "This is a solid argument in favor of providing stronger high school counseling." The student who wrote about the Ketogenic diet conceded that THERE ARE SOME DIFFICULTIES WITH THE DIET, SUCH AS THE STRICTNESS OF IT AND THE CAREFUL WEIGHING OF FOOD. Ms. Bowden supported her use of counter argument by writing, "Acknowledging the counter argument and making concessions (like you are doing here) is important to maintaining your credibility."

The final subcategory of the Pedagogical Orientation is Support Text. About 4% of Ms. Bowden's codings fell in this subcategory. Sometimes, Ms. Bowden chose to reinforce classroom instruction through her comments. Ms. Bowden spent a portion of one class period

reminding students of the importance of putting a face on their argument. When a student claimed that THERE COULD BE FEWER MISGUIDED STUDENTS IF EDUCATION COUNSELING WAS IMPROVED IN HIGH SCHOOL, Ms. Bowden wrote, “You put a face on this issue right from the start—and it’s yours!” Another student, writing about teachers and standardized test scores, wrote, THERE ARE SO MANY CASES, LIKE WHAT HAPPENED TO HOLLY, THAT PEOPLE DO NOT EVEN KNOW EXIST. Ms. Bowden affirmed her use of face when she wrote, “excellent rhetorical strategy. When we provide a face, it doesn’t mean much unless we can claim that the face represents a larger group.” In both cases, she reminded the student of something that had been discussed in class, and she affirmed the students’ correct use of the strategy.

**Cognitive/Emotive orientation.** In responding to student writing, teachers often analyze the writing or express their feeling about the writing. In the cognitive/emotive orientation, teachers’ comments reflect either an analytical response or an emotional response. Ten percent of Ms. Bowden’s codings were cognitive/emotive, with more being analytical and emotional. Results in this orientation are reported in Table 12.

Table 12

*Cognitive/Emotive Orientation: Ms. Bowden’s Comments according to Subcategory*

COGNITIVE/EMOTIVE ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Analytical	30	8%
Emotional	8	2%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 12 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

About 8% of Ms. Bowden’s codings were analytical. Many of the comments that appear in this subcategory have also been coded into other subcategories. However, Ms. Bowden often

uses questions to show that she is analyzing a student's writing. When writing about school lunches, one student introduced an author. Ms. Bowden asked, "Can you tell us who this guy is?" Another student writing about anorexia wrote that ANY ANOREXIC PERSONS BODY REJECTED FOOD BECAUSE IT WAS USED TO NOT EATING ANYTHING MORE THAN 2 PIECES OF CHOCOLATE AND 5 TINY PIECES OF CORN FLAKES. Ms. Bowden questioned, "Really? Is this a common diet for anorexics?" The student writing about teachers and standardized tests claimed that THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD TRUST THE TEACHERS THEY HIRE. Ms. Bowden commented, "But what if the hiring process doesn't weed out the bad ones? or what if they go bad during their tenure? Shouldn't the DOE have some means to safeguard against teachers?" The use of such questions showed Ms. Bowden's analysis of the text and in many cases pushed the writers to rethink their work.

Other comments showed Ms. Bowden's analysis of the writing though they were not written as questions. When the student writing about school lunches wrote, IN THE PAST COUPLE OF MONTHS SEVERAL GUIDELINES HAVE BEEN MADE TO HELP IMPROVE LUNCHES NATIONWIDE, A commented, "This closing sentence gives the impression that this paragraph is about lunches, but it seems to be mostly about PE." Ms. Bowden has read the writing analytically, and her comments in this category push the readers to think more deeply, a skill important to her in writing as inquiry.

Just 2% of her codings fell into the Emotional subcategory. On only eight occasions did Ms. Bowden comment in an emotional way. In one instance, a student cited some statistics on the rise of popularity of Botox: FROM THE YEAR 2000 TO THE YEAR 2010 THE POPULARITY OF BOTOX ROSE 584 PERCENT, AND IN 2010 A TOTAL OF ABOUT 5.4 MILLION BOTOX PROCEDURES WERE PERFORMED. Ms. Bowden responded, "Wow.

These numbers are mind-boggling.” Another student interviewed a health-care worker who said about Medicaid, WORKING FOR MEDICAID, IT’S SICKENING TO SEE PEOPLE COME IN AND ABUSE THE SYSTEM. AS A WORKER, I’M NOT ALLOWED TO QUESTION THE RECIPIENTS.” Ms. Bowden responded, “Weird.” The student writing the comparison of DeLorean to Coriolanus wrote, HISTORY IS USUALLY MORE BORING THAN WE LIKE TO REMEMBER. A responded, “Ha! Funny.” In writing about DeLorean’s quiet acceptance of his arrest, that same student wrote, THIS WOULD BE THE SAME AS IF CORIOLANUS HAD SIMPLY SAID “WELL, THAT’S ENOUGH OF THAT, I’M TIRED,” AND WALKED AWAY IN THE THIRD ACT OF THE PLAY –NOT VERY GOOD BY HOLLYWOOD STANDARDS. Ms. Bowden responded, “I’m loving this voice. So droll!”

**Summary.** Ms. Bowden had good variety in her comments, leading to a broad spread of the types of codings she received. Because she had more than twice the number of codings (NC = 364) as comments (N = 170), the assumption is that most of the comments were multiply coded. In fact, one of her comments was coded into five subcategories. Her comments reflect her overall beliefs that freshman writing should prepare students for the types of writing and thinking they will do in college and that her comments should be instructive.

### **Individual Themes**

Three themes specific to Ms. Bowden emerged from the analysis of Ms. Bowden’s interviews, observations, course documents, and comment analysis. One theme relates to the goals of the new program. Other themes relate to her desire to provide her students instruction and love.

**Writing as inquiry.** One primary theme emerging from the data is that freshman composition courses should be based on the idea that writing is an act of inquiry. Ms. Bowden

stated this important concept in her syllabus: “The idea that writing is an act of inquiry is the driving force [behind the teaching of composition], and that’s absolutely critical.” The entire first page of her syllabus builds on the idea that writing is inquiry. In the first full paragraph, she wrote,

Good writing makes writing seem easy. It is compelling, purposeful, articulate. It is often the result of a plan, a formula, but it never thinks formulaic. It clarifies and elucidates, shining a light onto an issue or idea that was previously shadowed; it draws connections between that which the reader already understands and that which the writer is communicating.

As stated earlier, Ms. Bowden did not clearly define what she meant by inquiry, but she did mention some characteristics of inquiry. The rest of the syllabus further develop the idea that students in her section of ENGL 102 will be expected to be curious, to read critically, and to write copiously, all hallmarks of writing as inquiry.

Her classroom practices demonstrate her belief that writing is inquiry. The writing prompt for the first project was purposefully vague and unstructured, forcing students to think deeply about what they would choose as a topic. When I asked Ms. Bowden for the writing prompt, I received the following email reply:

The writing assignment is something like this:

Choose a topic or issue that intrigues you. Do research. Read everything you can; watch every documentary on the subject; talk to people. Figure out what you have to say on the topic and to whom. Compose a thoughtful and provocative response that is geared to a specific audience and that does more than simply informs. Cite your sources. Include fancy stuff like pictures or special formatting. Make it no less than 800 words. Go!

Because of her unstructured writing prompt, students had to think about a topic interesting to them, narrow it down based on careful research, and support the writing with credible sources.

In class, she taught students strategies for organizing the writing, and she made them practice those strategies so that they could determine what worked best for them. For example, when they were discussing strategies for writing introductions, she explained that one strategy is to give the topic a “face.” Rather than just telling them to use “face,” she questioned them to think about the difference between face as a strategy and personal experience as a strategy: “What is the value to the reader of the face or the personal experience? How is it different?” Rather than tell them the difference, she asked them to make decisions about the strategies. During this particular class session, she had students write three different introductions for their essays, forcing them to inquire as to the best strategy for their particular essay. In formally assessing her students’ writing, she complemented class instruction by asking questions or making suggestions related to content taught in the classroom. For example, to one student, she commented, “[P]utting a face on this issue would humanize it.” She did not tell the writer what to do, but her suggestion allowed the student to make choices about his writing, all part of writing as inquiry.

Other commenting practices also reflect her belief in using the act of inquiry in the teaching of writing. In phrasing many of her comments as questions, she not only modeled inquiry, but she forced them to think more deeply about their writing. For example, to one student, she wrote, “How are the tests made? Does this ranking tell us something important?” To another student, she not only modeled inquiry, but she reminded the writer of the importance of pointing the reader towards further inquiry. She wrote, “Can you offer a source where we can read more about this issue? Be nice to your readers.”

The analysis of Ms. Bowden's specific comments reveals her belief that the act of inquiry is an essential component in the teaching of writing. Specific comments coded into each of the orientations support this theme. For example, in the Interpretive Orientation, readers respond to writing and make interpretive decisions as to meaning based on both the reader's background and experiences and the writer's background and experience. In making meaning of students' writing, Ms. Bowden used either her knowledge of text structure or her students' knowledge of text structure to require them to think about their writing. For example, to the student whose introduction seemed weak, she wrote a comment suggesting that he move some statistics from the body of his essay into the introduction: "Maybe you should consider recasting this intro to start with these amazing stats." Not only was she asking the student to think about his writing, she also recognized that the suggested change could require the readers of the introduction to practice inquiry as they read it and ponder the statistics.

Nearly one-fourth of Ms. Bowden's codings fell into the Social Orientation, with more codings in the Expert subcategory than in the Peer subcategory. The comments in the Expert subcategory often pointed her students to question their choices in their writing and to make changes based on her suggestions, important aspects in writing as inquiry. Even comments dealing with in-text citations were written to help the writers think about their choices: "Let's talk about the ethics of placing this citation after the last cite rather than the first." She is not telling the student what to do, but as an expert reader, she is pushing the writer to consider the placement of a citation. With 18% of the total codings falling into this Expert subcategory, and with many of those comments pointing students to make choices, Ms. Bowden reinforced her belief in the importance on inquiry in the teaching of writing.



When Ms. Bowden let the writers know whether or not their writing “worked” for her, she was often stressing the importance of inquiry. Such comments would have been coded into the Evaluative Orientation. Twenty percent of her total codings fell into the Evaluative Orientation. Often she let the writer know that the writing did work (Positive subcategory), and in doing so, she confirmed the writers’ use of inquiry. For example, she often commented to the reader about the importance of putting a “face” on the issue, a face which would help the reader identify with the topic. To one student, Ms. Bowden wrote, “Using yourself as a face for the issue makes the problem real for your readers—nicely done!” In contrast, she also let the writers know that their writing did not work for her, suggesting that they needed to rethink their writing. In one case, she focused on the structure of a student’s essay to ask her to rethink her organization in light of her audience: “Supporting these assumptions here would help you to make a convincing argument and would also prove to your audience that you understand the issue and argument fully.”

Nearly 30% of Ms. Bowden’s codings fell in the Pedagogical Orientation. An assumption cannot be made that all pedagogical comments reflect her belief in the importance of inquiry, but comments coded into the subcategories of Expand Ideas and Support Ideas do support the importance of inquiry in the writing process. Nine percent of her codings fell into those two subcategories. For example, when one student’s ideas were weak, she wrote, “If you were to develop this idea for your LC [Long Composition], you could go into specifically HOW this idea could be implemented.” With this comment, she wants the writer to inquire further about his topic, but she wants the longer composition to cause the readers to inquire how they might be able to use the information.

Comments coded into the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation could be either Analytical or Emotional codings. Analytical comments often point both the reader and the writer toward inquiry. When Ms. Bowden wrote, “Is there anything your readers can do to help make sure this happens?” she reminded the writer of the importance of providing information for the reader so the reader can make use of the material. In another of her analytical comments, Ms. Bowden modeled inquiry while directing the reader to inquire more about the topic: “How are these tests made? Does this ranking tell us something important?”

As indicated by all of the data, the first theme specific to Ms. Bowden is that writing as inquiry is a fundamental component in the teaching of freshman composition. Not only does she state its importance, her written responses model inquiry and direct students toward inquiry. Additionally, she expects her students’ writing to consider how the audience will read and understand the writing.

**Comments as instruction.** Another theme which emerged from the data is that comments should instruct students rather than justify grades. In fact, she asserted, “My comments . . . have one purpose and that’s to instruct.” She reasoned, “I think that the best approach to commenting is teaching students how to, using it as an instructional opportunity. Assessment should be instructional.” In the second interview, after Ms. Bowden had seen the results of her comment analysis, she asked, “If we’re not using our comments to instruct, then, what do we use them as?” When she saw the numbers for the Pedagogical Orientation (see section on Instructor Practices), she said, “I’m not surprised that nearly 30% is Pedagogical, because I feel like I do try to instruct in my comments. If anything I would have thought that this number would have been higher.”

Her syllabus does not specifically mention that comments should be instructive, but she does mention that revision is important in the writing process. When she told students that they could “revise an essay after it has been graded,” she implied that such revisions would take into consideration the comments on the graded essay: “revisions must reflect re-vision—a new seeing—of the topic. . . . Essays that have simply been edited for correctness will be lauded, but not graded.”

In the classroom, she did not specifically mention that comments should be used for instruction, though she did mention the importance of getting feedback before submitting final drafts of essays. While she was not referring to written comments, she conveyed to students the importance of using feedback to make writing stronger. At the very end of one class period, she reminded students of her office hours and told them she was available to help with their drafts by giving them direct feedback up until the due date of the final draft. Two students approached her after class to schedule meetings with her to review their writing. At the end of the second class period I observed, she reminded students, “Some of you need to do some work, . . . so come see me before the papers are due on Friday.” After class dismissed, one student stayed behind to talk with her about a conference.

Although Ms. Bowden had the fewest comments (N=170) of all of the instructors, her students still received plenty of instruction through those comments. The comment analysis revealed how comments across all of the orientations focused on instruction. The most obvious orientation showing the instructional value of comments is the Pedagogical Orientation. The primary focus of this orientation is on instruction related to ideas and text. The Pedagogical Orientation received the highest number of Ms. Bowden’s codings, supporting Ms. Bowden’s

contention that comments should instruct. In this orientation, many of her comments focused on issues of textural structure or citation format:

“How much of this paragraph came from this source?”

“Nice quote integration.”

“Edit for little errors like this one.”

“You lose a bit of credibility when you don’t cite sources where you could and when you rely on observation rather than hard facts.”

“This is one long sentence!”

By writing such comments, Ms. Bowden intends the writers to make changes or to continue doing what works well.

Other comments in the Pedagogical Orientation focus on instructing the writers to think about their ideas in relation to the audience. On eight of the ten essays she submitted, she reminded the writer to think about the audience or the readers.

Some of her comments intended to instruct came in the Social Category, specifically in the Expert subcategory. When she commented as an expert reader, she instructed the writers on what good writing should do or, in the case of writing that works, what good writing does. For example, to the student who wrote about school lunches, she acted as expert in instructing him to continue doing what worked: “You definitely are the voice of this essay, and it makes it far more fun to read than a bunch of stats and figures. Awesome.” She also instructed this student to provide further information: “You would gain some cred points by introducing [the author of the article].”

The orientation receiving the third highest number of codings for Ms. Bowden was the Evaluative Orientation. While she had more comments coded into the Positive subcategory than

the Negative subcategory, she used both positive and negative comments to instruct. For example, to the student who received a grade of 100 on his essay, she wrote, “Kudos for maintaining the comparative analysis all the way through.” Although this comment may not seem instructional, the implication is that the student did something that worked (thus, the positive coding) but that he should keep doing this strategy as he writes. To another student, she asked who his audience was, then she wrote, “[Your audience] is not clear, but if you had a clear audience in mind, you could better appeal to their emotions and desires.” By letting students know what works in their writing (positive) and what does not work in their writing (negative), she instructs them to make their writing stronger.

In some of her instructional comments, Ms. Bowden relies on either her background and experiences or the writers’ backgrounds and experiences as she makes meaning of the writing and then responds. Such comments are coded in the Interpretive Orientation. While not every interpretive comment instructs, many do. For example, to the student who wrote about problems with standardized tests, she wrote, “For example, here, I’m dying to know more about the IOWA test, and I’m interested in your ideas for how we can ethically evaluate teachers’ performances.” With this comment, she interpreted meaning based on her background experience with standardized testing, but she also subtly instructed the reader to add further information. To another student, she wrote, “A good rule of thumb is to make your counterpoint at least twice as long as your concession. Give your ideas more time and space than the other guy’s.” Here, she made meaning of the writing given her knowledge of text structure and she instructed the reader how to construct an effective argument.

The Cognitive/Emotive Orientation received the least amount of codings for Ms. Bowden. However, the majority of comments coded in this orientation fell into the Analytical

subcategory rather than the Emotional subcategory. She phrased many of her analytical comments as questions, questions designed to instruct the students either to make changes, to add information, to think about their ideas, or to clarify their writing. For example, one student made some unsubstantiated claims, so she asked, “Is this your personal observation or have you done demographic and geographic research?” By phrasing her comment in this manner, she analyzed the student’s writing then instructed her to add support or change the claim. The instruction is implied rather than overt, but the intent of the question is to instruct the writer to think about the claim and make necessary changes.

Ms. Bowden clearly believes that comments should instruct students rather than justify grades. Not only did she state her belief that comments should instruct rather than justify grades, she practiced the belief in the way that she wrote comments on students’ papers. The majority of comments she wrote to each student would be considered instructional, regardless of the grade the student received on the essay. Thus, the data support the theme that teachers’ written comments should be instructional.

**Loving students.** Perhaps the strongest theme revealed through the data is that the role of freshman composition teachers is to love their students. Although the syllabus did not mention this idea, Ms. Bowden conveyed it adamantly during the interviews and passionately during the two class periods that I observed. When I asked her about her role as a teacher of freshman writing, she quickly said, “I think that I need to love [students] and sometimes loving them means harsh love. It means honesty. It means being willing to tell them things that are sometimes going to hurt their feelings if it’s going to encourage their growth.”

At the end of the one of the class sessions I observed, she told her students, “I love you all, and I’ll see you on Wednesday.” At the beginning of the next class period, she acted towards

her students much like a loving mother would toward her children. She asked the students to face her because “if I look you in eye, I know you’ll be hearing me.” At the end of that same class period, she reminded students that she was available for them to come see her about their writing assignment: “Some of you . . . need some ‘special loving’ so come see me before the papers are due on Friday.”

She backs up her words with actions in the classroom, showing her students great respect. She calls each student by his or her last name, such as Mr. Smith or Miss Washington. Every time she addressed a student, she did so in this manner. During one of our interviews when a student left a paper in her box, she called him “Mr. Jones.” When one student put her head down on the desk during the time students were supposed to be writing on the computers, Ms. Bowden went to the student, asked if she was well, encouraged her to participate, talked to her gently, and patted her on the back.

When she discussed her commenting practices, she expressed the importance of loving students. Even though she said that sometimes loving students meant that she might have to tell them things that would hurt them, she also realized that loving students could mean pain to her. When she was discussing the difference between teaching in the classroom and teaching via comments, she said about having to sit down and grade papers,

It is more of a test of me I think than of them. I mean, when I find shortcomings in their writing, what I really see are shortcomings in my teaching. Because obviously I didn’t reach the student with that particular concept or idea. . . .I have shortcomings and so it’s painful. I see my students’ essays as mirrors of my own teaching.

She further indicated that when students continue to have the same problems in their writing, “[I]t’s really easy to want to be angry at that person. . . but I try to keep in mind that they are my mirrors and so that helps me be a little more compassionate . . . in my writing style.”

While her classroom pedagogy conveys this theme of loving students, her commenting practices reveal this theme of loving students as well, specifically in regards to telling them what she thinks regardless of their feelings if telling them will encourage their growth as writers. Comments coded into each of the five orientations support this theme of loving students. At times, her comments encourage students; at other times, her comments challenge students; and at other times, her comments remind students of what they should already know. Some of her comments in the Interpretive Orientation focus on text structure, and often, her comments pointed out areas in which the students failed to do what they knew to do. For example, to a student who received a D on the essay, she wrote, “Essays should maintain a single, clear focus throughout—a fact that I know you know. What happened?” This comment suggests that she expects more of the student, much like a parent would expect more of child who knew what to do in a situation but failed to do it. Other comments coded into the Interpretive Orientation are very direct: “The shift from ‘they’ to ‘we’ makes this sentence hard to read.” She did not try to soften the comment; instead, she pointed out where the student made a mistake.

In the Evaluative Orientation, Ms. Bowden had more codings in the Expert subcategory than in the Peer subcategory. This may seem to contradict this theme of loving students since a peer might seem to be more loving than not. However, the intent behind loving students is not to make them feel like they and she are best friends; instead, the intent is to challenge, provoke, and push students much like a parent would do. Therefore, the higher codings in the Expert subcategory make sense. She complimented one student on her use of direct quotations, but then



she wrote, “Next time, let me see you also use paraphrase.” As a literary scholar, Ms. Bowden’s comment indicates that she knows successful college writers must use paraphrase, yet she also challenged the writer to do it on the next essay. Another student, who received a failing grade on his essay, had difficulty organizing his ideas. She wrote, “Your essay, unfortunately, doesn’t feel done.” Here, she does not hide her disappointment, but she also follows that comment with clear direction for a revision, thus encouraging the writer and challenging him to revise the essay.

Comments coded into the Evaluative Orientation fell more often into the Positive subcategory than into the Negative subcategory. When she is telling a writer what work, she is encouraging the writer, thus showing the writer that she cares. For example, she told one student, “What you do very well is to offer necessary concessions. These concessions suggest that you are able to view the issue very clearly. As a result, you seem a trustworthy source.” Other comments, coded as negative, help the writer see where the writing does not work. Although such comments are coded into the Negative subcategory, they can indicate to the student that Ms. Bowden cares. For example, to a student who received a D+ on an essay, Ms. Bowden wrote, “If you want to revise this essay for a new grade—and I hope you do—you’ll want to spend most of your time working on grammar and punctuation, internal citations and smoothing out that one weird transition between the two distinct causes of anorexia.” By focusing on how the writing did not work, she keeps the comment about the writing rather than the student. In other words, she does not put down the student but she also is very clear to articulate her expectations, something that a caring person would do.

Comments coded in the Pedagogical Orientation are intended to instruct, but instructional comments can also be comments which reflect Ms. Bowden’s contention that her role is to love

her students. Someone who loves students desires for them to do well, so it makes sense that the orientation receiving the most codings would be the Pedagogical Orientation. Even comments such as “I’m confused” can both instruct and challenge a student. Many times when Ms. Bowden was supporting what her students did in their writing (codings which fell into the Support Text or Support Ideas subcategories), she used words like “kudos,” “double bonus points,” “amazing,” or “nicely done.” Such words encourage students to keep doing what works. At other times, her comments guide students to make necessary changes in their ideas. As a teacher who loves her students, guiding them through comments would be important. For example, to encourage one student to make changes leading to a strong Long Composition (LC), she wrote, “I’m sure that there are other NOLA folks who would like to know this info. Maybe for your LC, you could do a bit of research on the local level to help you cater this piece to a local audience.”

Comments coded into the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation would fall into the Analytical subcategory or the Emotional subcategory. Some of her analytical comments show the writers that Ms. Bowden cares about them as people. For example, she recognized improvement in a student’s writing when she wrote, “This paper is much more about you and your input to the conversation than it is about simply summarizing the conversation others are having. EXCELLENT.” Although this student received a D+ on the essay, Ms. Bowden analyzed the student’s writing and commended her for what worked. She then followed this comment with clear instruction on how to organize the LC so that it will be stronger. Her comments coded in the Emotional subcategory show that she cares for her students as they show that she is carefully reading their work for more than just grammar errors or logic errors; instead, she is connecting with the students through their writing. When a student cited statistics on the number of Botox

procedures performed in 2010, she commented, “Wow. These numbers are mind-boggling.” To another student writing about standardized testing, she commented, “I’m curious about this issue.” As a caveat, not only is Ms. Bowden letting the writer know that she read his essay, she is also modeling inquiry by letting the writer know that he piqued her interest.

The third theme, supported by data, is that the role of freshman composition teachers is to love their students. Through her statements of the fact to her classroom pedagogy to her written commenting practices, she conveys to students that they are important and she wants them to know it.

### **Teacher Reaction**

As part of the second interview, I showed Ms. Bowden the results of the comment analysis, presented both in table form and in narrative form. After explaining the meanings of the various orientations and their subcategories, and after reviewing with her the percentages in each orientation and subcategory, I asked Ms. Bowden if she understood the results. She asked for some clarification regarding the Pedagogical Orientation, perhaps because I seemed to spend more time explaining it than the other orientations. She said, “I feel like when you keep talking about the pedagogical ones that you’re, that the implication is that these kinds of comments . . . should be avoided.” I explained to her that one of the other teachers thought that “pedagogical” meant “bad,” and I wanted her to realize that “pedagogical” meant “instructive.” She then asked, “If we’re not using our comments to instruct, then what do we use them as?” Because Ms. Bowden thinks so strongly that comments are intended as instruction, her questions regarding the Pedagogical Orientation made sense in the context of the interview.

When I asked Ms. Bowden her impressions of the results, she said, “I don’t know that they were what I had hoped for, but . . . if you were to say, ‘Do you think this is an accurate

representation of who you are as an assessor?’ I would say, ‘yes.’” She seemed surprised that her Social Orientation percentage was as high as it was, though she did not elaborate on her thoughts. However, her Pedagogical Orientation percentage “pleased” her. She suggested,

I am pleased to see that it’s that high because . . . what we may want to be doing or be perceived as doing maybe is not what we do. . . . I’m not surprised that nearly 30% is Pedagogical because I feel like I do try to instruct in my comments. If anything, I would have thought that this number would have been higher.

Ms. Bowden had no other specific questions regarding her individual results, though she did say she would read the narrative presentation of results in order to get a better grasp on the numbers in the table.

### **Summary: Ms. Bowden**

As an active participant in the revision of the writing program, Ms. Bowden had high interest in the study. A confident teacher, Ms. Bowden wants her students to know that she loves them. She wants her students to use writing as a means of empowering them to function both in the academy and in their daily lives. Her writing practices are consistent with the principles suggested by Sommers (1984), Straub (2000), and Elbow (1999), and these principles are consistent with her expressed beliefs.

### **Case Three: Ms. Cato**

*How do I know what I think until I see what I say?*

Ms. Cato, who comes from a “long line of English teachers on [her] mom’s side,” earned a BA in English with an emphasis in creative writing from a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. She earned her Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in creative writing with an emphasis in fiction from the university at which this study was conducted. She has been teaching freshman

English composition courses, along with a few expository writing courses, since 2002, first as a teaching assistant then as a part-time instructor or adjunct. She became a full-time instructor in the fall of 2005. At the time of the study, Ms. Cato had been on the Freshman English Advisory Committee (FAC) for six years, though terms are only two years in length, so she was instrumental in the overhaul of the freshman writing program. She said that she was willing to stay for the six years because she “wanted to see it through.”

### **Teacher Beliefs**

Based on data gathered primarily from interviews, observations, and her syllabus, I report Ms. Cato’s beliefs about teaching writing and responding to student writing.

**Beliefs about the purpose of freshman writing.** When I asked Ms. Cato about the purpose of freshman English composition, she paused before replying, “It’s harder to answer than I would like to admit . . . because I think sometimes I think differently about its purpose than my colleagues or even the way the program might want me to think.” However, despite the hesitation, Ms. Cato was able to articulate several beliefs about the purpose of freshman writing, beliefs which were supported through her classroom instruction and her syllabus. To Ms. Cato, one purpose of freshman writing is to prepare students to think and write at the college level. She does not simply give this idea lip service. In one of the class sessions I observed, she wanted the students to focus on writing an academic argument, so she spent nearly 45 minutes of class time engaging students in writing about and discussing the difference between argument and academic argument.

In her syllabus, she told students that the course has a twofold purpose: “First, it’s a place where we can focus on using writing and reading for serious (and fun) academic inquiry. Second, it’s a place where we can look at, think about, and reflect on just what ‘academic

inquiry' means." She also told students that their writing will "increasingly ask you to think, read, and write in ways you may not have before."

Not only should freshman English help students think and write for the academy, it should also help students think and write in everyday life. Ms. Cato thinks that students need to understand an awareness of the rhetorical situation so that they can respond appropriately in writing to any situation. She also thinks students needed to be aware of the different types of writing "so that when they leave, no matter what kind of writing they're doing, they'll be able to do it more successfully." In the first interview, she gave the example of how writing on the same topic would look very different if a person wrote to his grandmother versus writing to his boss. In the first class session I observed, she was teaching the importance of thesis. She asked students to imagine that they were writing on a certain topic but to pretend they were addressing different types of people about that same topic. She asked them to think how their writing would change based on the audience reading the writing. Inherent in this awareness of the rhetorical situation is the idea of audience and purpose. Students who know the relationship between the reader, the writer, and the audience are able to communicate more effectively.

Freshman English composition should also help students understand that writing helps them think. During the first interview, she paraphrased Donald Murray who said writing is the most disciplined form of thinking. By this, she means that students need to learn that "writing helps [them] explain what [they're] thinking and therefore it helps them [think] more clearly." In her syllabus, she promoted this idea by discussing the types of in-class activities that are designed to help students think more deeply about the topics they have chosen for their longer projects. Certainly during class, I observed Ms. Cato requiring students to participate in freewriting activities. In the debriefing of the freewriting, she showed students how the writing

helped them think more thoroughly about a given topic. Finally, she believes that among the many academic purposes of freshman English, such courses should help prepare students for everyday life: job preparation, relationships, family, and the like.

Ms. Cato approaches her role as a writing teacher in two categories: being “beside” students and being “in front of” students. In terms of coming alongside students, Ms. Cato sees herself as a facilitator of learning rather than as the “bestower of all knowledge.” While she acknowledged that she does sometimes have to stand in the front of the classroom, she prefers to see herself as a guide. She said that the objective of “the things that I do in class, the activities that I assign, the assignments that I give” is to help students find out what they know. She refers to herself as a “guide” and a “facilitator” in the syllabus, and she told students that the workshop-style course is designed as “a cooperative venture that I’ll guide.” When she holds mandatory conferences with students, she asks them to sit beside her rather than across the desk from her. By coming beside students, she hopes to “humanize the work of an academic” so that students lose the “mythologized” idea that teachers all “wear patches on [their] elbows or live in ivory towers” while “wielding the red pen.”

According to Ms. Cato, the strongest demonstration of her role as facilitator is in her use of portfolio grading. She does not grade any student work until the end of the semester when students submit their final portfolio. She does collect their shorter essays and longer essays along with all process work leading to the longer essays, and she does provide plenty of feedback for students so that they can revise their work prior to submitting the final portfolio, but she does not grade their papers until the final portfolio submission. She wants the classroom to “be a space where it’s possible to think and do in ways other than what happens outside.”

She also sees her role as a performance role, being in front of students. She sees her work in front of the classroom as “staging a desire” for knowledge or enthusiasm for writing. If she can make learning contagious so that students will catch the passion for writing. In the syllabus, she tells students that they can expect her “to be supportive, enthusiastic, helpful, and understanding” in addition to being “pushy” at times. This performance aspect played itself out in the classroom as well. In one of the sessions I observed, she began the class period by singing the lyrics to the song “It’s a New Day,” lyrics which she had written on the board. Then, she asked students to move themselves and their belongings to a new seat since “we’re moving to something that may seem the same but will really be different.” She suggested to students that a new perspective could help them move toward practices and strategies that would help them write more successful second projects. After all students had settled, she discussed the concept of revision. By teaching beside students and in front of students, Ms. Cato hopes to help students see the teacher as more than The Teacher and see the expectations of academia.

**Knowledge of the specific writing program.** Ms. Cato confidently articulated her beliefs regarding the direction, components, and expectations of the new freshman English writing program. I did not assume that she had a better knowledge of the program, just that she was able to express that knowledge more confidently. This confidence may be due to the fact that she was so heavily involved in the Freshman English Advisory Committee (FAC) during the overhaul of the program.

Ms. Cato believes the program is moving in a positive direction as evidenced by the fact that her job is more enjoyable. What aspects of the program contribute to this enjoyment? First, she believes that students are writing better essays. For example, the number of essays in contention for the university’s freshman writing award has increased, and choosing the winning



essay is more difficult. She believes the move toward student-generated topics creates more curiosity among students. Additionally, the shift to teaching them how to write texts for other media—content for websites or reviews on YouTube, for example—makes the program more interactive.

When discussing the components of the writing program, Ms. Cato easily repeated the terminology of the new program, knowledge which revealed itself when she was discussing what she believes to be the essential components of the program. Most of the components she mentioned fall under the concept of “habits of mind,”—ways of thinking about text that are foundation to the program’s emphasis on writing as inquiry. The habits of mind Ms. Cato sees as critical are suspending judgment, tolerating ambiguity, valuing complexity, and working from abundance. While these exact terms are not mentioned in the syllabus, she does allude to them in various ways. For example, in the section of the syllabus where she discussed the types of process writing assignments, she told students that their “goal is to ‘search, circle around, and explore,’ to engage in dialogue within yourself, your peers, your resources, and your audience/reader. It’s about taking risks, trying things out, and stretching your brain. That focused, disciplined bravery is what I’ll be reading for.”

Through various exercises in the classroom, Ms. Cato teaches the habits of mind even if she does not use that terminology. She forces students to work from abundance when she engages them in lots of in class writing such as freewrites. She reminds them of tolerating ambiguity when she and the students wrestle with the difference between an “argument” and a “fight.” She reminds them that in academic writing, in writing as inquiry, they should resist the thought that every story has only two sides. She discusses the idea of suspending judgment when she cautions them to be careful about choosing topics that they are passionate about if

those feelings make them “unwilling to investigate the truths about this topic.” She reminds them that they have to be willing to change their minds about topics.

To Ms. Cato, another key component is that the program allows for lots of non-evaluated (which she sees as non-graded) writing. She does evaluate much of the writing and comment on it, but she believes that students will take more risks if they are not going to be graded. In her syllabus, she tells students that they will do lots of writing every day and that it will not all be graded. In the class sessions I observed, students participated in many types of non-graded work, though she informally assessed some of the writing through the debriefing process.

A component of the program Ms. Cato sees as critical is the need to let students generate their own ideas. She said that if they want students “to be successful thinkers and writers, then we need to expose them to the idea of invention . . . and curiosity.” The new program allows teachers autonomy in their classrooms, but the language of the program says that students *should* be allowed to choose their own topics. When I asked Ms. Cato for a prompt for the writing assignment that went with the essays I would be reviewing, she emailed me telling me that she does not use a structured writing prompt. Instead, she refers them to the textbook which explains the type of essay expected of ENGL 102 students. Though she does not give students a specific prompt, she does require them to meet with her for formal conferences where she reviews their work with them. By doing so, she is able to ensure that students are on track with their writing. Ms. Cato did say that she fought for this component as part of the overhaul of the new program.

**Understanding of best practices for written response.** During Ms. Cato’s graduate work, she received a “little bit” of training in assessing student writing. Some of that training came during the orientation for teaching assistants. Each TA received copies of the same student essays and had to grade them and comment on them. Once they had done the grading, the broke

into small groups to discuss what they had done and to calibrate their grades. She attended required calibration sessions when she was a TA and an adjunct. She did say that during her TA orientation, the discussion on assessment had little to do with kinds of comments. Instead, the training consisted of surface level things like aiming to comment on each paragraph or writing straight rather than diagonally on a page.

Not until she took a required composition and rhetoric course did she realize that composition/rhetoric existed as a field. Then, she worked as a writing tutor in the writing lab, and she said she learned more in that capacity than she did in the TA orientation. In working with the then-chair of the writing center, Ms. Cato learned several strategies that helped inform her response practices: not appropriating student text, having students read their work aloud, having students sit alongside the teacher, and commenting on strengths and weaknesses. These strategies complement Ms. Cato's belief that teachers should come alongside students to guide their writing. She reiterated that during her time in graduate school, "There was no explicit training that I recall other than that one [orientation] session in responding."

Ms. Cato listed many best practices when asked to discuss them. Some of the best practices relate to commenting in person or in conference rather than on paper, and I have chosen not to discuss those. Ms. Cato did explain what she thinks are best practices related to assessment:

- Assessment (in this case, grading) should happen only after a long time.
- Use portfolio grading to encourage risk taking.
- Teachers should comment in a reader-response manner by using first person, asking questions about the text, and owning their comments.
- Make sure comments are couched in context.

- Avoid correcting, but point out large error patterns and ask students to look for those error patterns in their own writing.
- Read as a reader not just the teacher.
- Use end comments to “give [students] a sense of what they might do next.”
- Comments should be supportive of students.
- Comments should not appropriate student text.
- Comments should give students ideas for revision.
- Comments should never be used as a means to justify a grade.

As she discussed what she thinks are best practices, Ms. Cato described how she implements those strategies. In the “Teacher Practices” section to follow, I describe how her written comments reflect what she believes are best practices.

When Ms. Cato sits down to mark a set of papers, she begins by trying to read an essay once through without a pen, though she admitted that doing so is difficult. She then fills out a rubric that she adapted from a Peter Elbow article. The rubric has boxes that she checks. After she has completed the rubric, she writes a lengthy end note. Finally, she comments on three to four error patterns and she will “comment on those error patterns in the paper to reinforce this broader view of the big problems that I’m seeing or the big strengths that I’m seeing.” She follows a “praise, question, polish” model when evaluating so that she highlights something that is working in the writing, points out something that is not working, and then gives them some idea of what they should do next. One other thing she does when commenting is to contextualize the comments, not just in terms of the paper but “contextual in terms of our relationship and [in reference] to things that happened in class or a conference.” She tries to write comments that are questions, but she also writes “supportive comments” and “mechanical commands” as well as

long as they are specific to the student's writing. In her syllabus, she expressed to her students, "In my comments, you can expect me to be supportive, and to provide you with the kind of feedback that helps you think about how you'd like to develop your work."

Ms. Cato easily listed literature or authors who have informed her practices. She mentioned Nancy Sommers, Brian Huot, Ed White, and Kathleen Blake Yancey as authors who have contributed to the field of assessment and to her own understanding of assessment. She also mentioned Don Murray and Peter Elbow, specifically an Elbow (1993) article, "Ranking, Evaluating, Liking." She also referred to several books that have impacted her assessment practices: *St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing*, *The Elements of Teaching Writing* (though unsure of exact title), *An Approach to Avoid Reading Student Writing with Grading as a Goal*, and *What Can You Do with Student Writing?* She discussed other people whose names she could not remember but whose ideas intrigued her, such as a couple who have written about what to do when a student confesses trauma in their writing, or the author of the NCTE book on the history of writing assessment. Also, when I met Ms. Cato for the initial interview, a copy of *Cross Talk in Comp Theory* (Villanueva, 2003) was on her desk. Ms. Cato had a working knowledge of specific authors, books, and articles related to assessment. She remarked, "I'm always trying to try new things" related to assessment.

**Perspectives of her individual written practices.** When I asked Ms. Cato how her responses reflect her beliefs, she paused before responding. She came back to her belief that teachers have to be both beside students and in front of students. Regarding being "beside" students, for example, she thinks that her end notes which refer to conference comments or classroom instruction indicate an ongoing discussion with students. The use of first person, which "reinforces the idea of the academic as a person and the teacher as a person," also

reinforces her “beside” role, as does her attempt to assess work as both a teacher and a reader. Her use of questions reinforces her belief in the importance of critical thinking. Because she believes strongly in the importance of purpose, she thinks that her gut reactions help students understand the need to articulate their purpose clearly.

In terms of how her responses align with program requirements, Ms. Cato laughed. She said, “Well, it’s interesting because suspending judgment and tolerating ambiguity—they gotta tolerate ambiguity in my comments!” She did say, though, that her comments reinforce the habits of mind. For example, she will not tell a student how to do something, but she will question him to make him think more deeply. She believes that her use of questions and her method of reader response help with the teaching of writing as inquiry as it reinforces critical thinking.

### **Teacher Practices**

For this portion of the chapter, I used data gathered from the eight essays that Ms. Cato submitted for the study. The emphasis for this portion of the study was not to see the types of comments that Ms. Cato wrote; instead, the focus was on how her comments reflect her perspective as a reader of student writing. Where pertinent, I have included data from interviews, classroom observations, and course documents to support the information in the comment analysis, though the integration of all of the data will come in the section entitled “Individual Themes.”

Thirteen students in one of Ms. Cato’s English 102 sections gave written permission for her to submit blind copies of their work on which she had written comments. However, between the time when they signed consent forms and I collected data, Ms. Cato gave her students the option of receiving audio comments rather than written comments. Once students had decided

whether to receive audio or written comments, the number of students agreeing to participate was reduced to eight.

In order to determine Ms. Cato's written response practices, her written comments had to be analyzed. Any comment or mark that Ms. Cato made on a student's paper was assigned a number. Some of the longer comments, specifically the end notes on the last page(s) of each essay, were broken down by sentence level so that they could be analyzed individually. After all of the comments were numbered, they were typed onto a table for the raters to analyze. Ms. Cato had a total of 302 comments ( $N = 302$ ) across all eight essays.

Altogether, Ms. Cato had a total of 547 codings ( $NC = 547$ ), indicating that many of her comments were multiply coded. In the tables which follow, the percentages are based on the total number of codings ( $NC$ ) rather than the total number of comments ( $N$ ). Table 13 presents the categorization of Ms. Cato's comments by teacher orientation. As indicated by Table 13, the majority of Ms. Cato's comments reflect her desire to instruct her students (Pedagogical Orientation). Somewhat as often, Ms. Cato's comments indicate that she is trying to make meaning of student writing based both on her and the writer's experiences, text and language, and feelings (Interpretive Orientation). The remaining comments were spread between the other three orientations.

In the narrative section that follows, student writing has been differentiated from teacher comment through the use of capitalization. Student writing has been typed using all capital letters, and teacher comments have been enclosed in quotation marks so as to avoid confusion. Additionally, student comments have been typed exactly as written.

Table 13

*Ms. Cato's Comments according to Teacher Orientation*

TEACHER ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Interpretive	128	23%
Social	85	16%
Evaluative	77	14%
Pedagogical	155	28%
Cognitive/Emotive	102	19%
Other	0	00%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 13 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

**Interpretive orientation.** In the Interpretive Orientation, teachers interpret the writers' words through their own background experiences and knowledge or through their perceptions of the writers' background experiences and knowledge. Twenty-three percent of Ms. Cato's codings fell under the interpretive category. Table 14 presents a breakdown of Ms. Cato's codings by subcategory. Since Ms. Cato had no codings in the subcategory of Reader's Experiences or Writer's Experiences, I have not discussed those subcategories.

Table 14

*Interpretive Orientation: Ms. Cato's Comments according to Subcategory*

INTERPRETIVE ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Reader's Experiences	0	0%
Text Knowledge	35	6%
Inner Feelings	22	4%
Writer's Experiences	0	0%
Text Knowledge	62	11%
Inner Feelings	9	2%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 14 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.



About 6% of Ms. Cato's codings fell into the subcategory of Reader's Text Knowledge. For example, one student wrote the following sentences in his essay "How Has Apple Changed the Way We Listen to Music and Have These Changes Been Good?": APPLE AND ITUNES HAVE CHANGED THE WAY WE BUY AND LISTEN TO OUR MUSIC FOREVER. THEY HAVE CHANGED THE WAY WE PURCHASE OUR MUSIC. Ms. Cato underlined HAVE CHANGED THE WAY WE BUY in the first sentence and HAVE CHANGED THE WAY WE PURCHASE in the second sentence, and she wrote, "Can you see that this is repetitive?" In doing so, she indicated her knowledge of text language and the effect, negative in this case, of repetition. In that same essay, the student wrote, JUST A FEW DAYS BEFORE STEVE JOBS PASSED AWAY APPLE'S NEW CEO TIM COOK STATED THAT OVER 300 MILLION IPODS HAVE BEEN SOLD SINCE THEIR RELEASE IN 2001. Above this sentence, Ms. Cato wrote, "This sentence shifts abruptly to a new idea. Can you see that shift?" While her comment seems to focus on ideas, she indicates that the text of an essay has structure. Finally, in "Fat Cat," a student wrote AT THAT TIME HE WEIGHED 18 POUNDS. UNFORTUNATELY, RASCAL'S WEIGHT WAS TWICE AS MUCH AS IT SHOULD BE FOR A CAT. Next to those two sentences, Ms. Cato wrote, "Could you combine these two sentences?"

About 4% of Ms. Cato's codings fell in the subcategory of Reader's Inner Feelings. One student's essay, "Fat Cat," prompted Ms. Cato to write a comment revealing her own feelings about the subject matter in the essay. The student wrote, I KNEW MY CAT WELL ENOUGH, THAT WHENEVER HE ACTUALLY COULD SEE ANY PART OF THE BOTTOM OF HIS BOWL, HE BEGAN HIS LOUD AND OBNOXIOUS WHINING. HE'D END UP DRIVING

US ALL CRAZY IN THE HOUSE, INCLUDING THE PUPPY. In reaction, Ms. Cato wrote, “So you fed him endlessly to keep him happy? Do other owners do this?”

In the subcategory of Writer’s Text Knowledge, Ms. Cato had a coding percentage of 11%. In “The Truth behind the Supplement!” a student relayed some statistics about weight loss supplements and wrote, THE AMOUNT OF SUPPLEMENTS NOW BEING ADVERTISED AND SOLD IS OVERWHELMING! Ms. Cato commented, “OKAY!!! (I’m wondering if this exclamation mark is necessary. ☺)” indicating that the student might want to think about the use of punctuation in text. Other times, Ms. Cato questioned writers about various aspects of their language use. One student wrote, WITH THE UNITED STATES LABELED THE FATTEST COUNTRY IN THE NATION, I TOOK IT UPON MYSELF TO TRY AND FIND OUT SOME REASONS BEHIND THE EFFECTS IT TAKES UPON OUR TEENAGERS. Ms. Cato underlined IT in the sentence and wrote, “What do you think of? I expect you to define the terms of what ‘it’ is.”

Just 2% of Ms. Cato’s codings fell into the Writer’s Inner Feelings subcategory. When one student wrote, BECAUSE OF THIS MANY PEOPLE CHOSE TO PIRATE MUSIC AND ONLY DOWNLOADING THE SINGLES THEY WANTED INSTEAD OF PURCHASING THE ENTIRE ALBUM, Ms. Cato commented, “Interesting. So a case for iTunes was ending piracy? I’m not quite sure what you’re saying here.” She reflected her understanding of the student’s feelings about the iTunes monopoly of music licensing, but she also let the student know that the writing did not work for her (a cognitive/emotive comment as well).

**Social orientation.** Writing instructors cannot escape their roles as teachers, but sometimes, they respond to student writing as if they were part of the same social group as the writer. In the social orientation, the teacher can respond as a peer (someone who has no more

knowledge than the student regarding a particular subject) or as an expert (someone whose role can be as an expert reader, a literary scholar, or an instructor). Sixteen percent of Ms. Cato’s codings fell into the category of social orientation, and Table 15 presents the results by subcategory.

Table 15

*Social Orientation: Ms. Cato’s Comments according to Subcategory*

SOCIAL ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Peer	18	3%
Expert	67	12%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 15 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

About 3% of Ms. Cato’s codings fell into the Peer subcategory. In “Fat Cat,” the student wrote, AT THAT TIME HE WEIGHTED 18 POUNDS. UNFORTUNATELY, RASCAL’S WEIGHT WAS TWICE AS MUCH AS IT SHOULD BE FOR A CAT. Ms. Cato wrote, “How did you react to this news? Did you feel at fault?” Here, she took on the role of social peer, perhaps as a fellow pet owner. In another student’s essay, she reacted to a question posed by the writer. The student wrote, VIDEO GAMES “IN” THESE DAYS ARE A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IN TEEN LIFESTYLE AND THIS MEASURE SUPPORTS BEING SEDENTARY, AND HONESTLY THINK ABOUT IT WHEN DO YOU EVER SEEN GROWN ADULTS PLAYING GAMES? Above this question, Ms. Cato wrote, “Well, a lot, actually,” reacting as one who knows that adults play video games.

Ms. Cato had more codings in the Expert subcategory than in the Peer subcategory. Some of Ms. Cato’s comments reflected her role as expert reader, one who knows what to expect of good writing. When one student cited from YouTube, Ms. Cato wrote, “Is YouTube an

authoritative source for information on nuclear energy?” Here, she demonstrated that she knows what sources should be in an essay, and she pointed the reader away from a less credible source. Such comments echoed what she taught in class. During one class session I observed, she and the students discussed what makes an essay an argumentative essay. By the end of the class period, Ms. Cato had discussed with students the importance of making claims through the use of credible evidence.

Other comments were very didactic in nature. After inserting commas into two sentences in the same paragraph, Ms. Cato wrote, “See p. 452, ‘Nonrestrictive and Parenthetical Elements,’ and watch for other similar errors elsewhere in your essay.” She tells the writer what error to fix, and then she directs the student to a particular page in the text. On another student’s essay, Ms. Cato underlined SIGNIFICANT LOVER in the phrase MY ADVICE WOULD BE IS IF YOUR SIGNIFICANT LOVER IS THIS WAY. Ms. Cato wrote, “Do you mean ‘significant other?’” Here, she acted didactically but also as a reader responding to text knowledge.

**Evaluative orientation.** At times, teachers’ comments reflect that the writing has or has not worked for them. In the evaluative orientation, the teacher responds either positively (the writing has worked) or negatively (the writing has not worked). About 14% of Ms. Cato’s comments were evaluative. Table 16 reports the results of the codings by subcategory.

Table 16

*Evaluative Orientation: Ms. Cato’s Comments according to Subcategory*

EVALUATIVE ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Positive	28	5%
Negative	49	9%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 16 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

About 5% of Ms. Cato's codings fell into the subcategory of Positive Evaluative. In "The Truth behind the Supplement," a student told a story of a friend who was taking a weight loss supplement. In the margin next to that story, Ms. Cato wrote, "I like the casual, conversational tone here," indicating that the writer's tone works for Ms. Cato. In her end note to that student, Ms. Cato wrote, "I've enjoyed watching this piece grow and strengthen over the course of this unit. Today, you've got a well-reasoned, well-supportive, and largely well-written research essay on your hand. Good job!" This end note not only reflects that the writing worked for Ms. Cato but it also reflects Ms. Cato's knowledge of text and shows her role as an expert reader. It received multiple codings.

About 9% of Ms. Cato's codings fell in the Negative Evaluative subcategory. On many occasions, Ms. Cato let the writer know that his writing did not work, though the way in which she wrote the comment was not always negative in tone. In reaction to a student's comment that IN GENERAL AND REALITY, NUCLEAR POWER SEEMS TO BE SAFE FOR HUMANS, Ms. Cato wrote, "All of them? Everywhere? I don't feel convinced of this, nor do I think you're REALLY making this case." In the end note to this student, Ms. Cato wrote, "The result is that your point—your argument—remains unconvincing. It continues to feel a bit like a report on the pros & cons of nuclear energy."

At times when the writing does not work for her, Ms. Cato questions the writer to push him to think more deeply. One student wrote, COMMERCIALS USE FAMOUS PEOPLE TO PROMOTE THEIR PRODUCT WHICH IS PRETTY DEADLY TO THE TEEN POPULATION IF YOU ASK ME BECAUSE WHO DOESN'T LIKE SOMEONE WHO IS FAMOUS? Ms. Cato wrote, "I don't understand how a famous person could be responsible for obesity."

**Pedagogical orientation.** Many times, a teacher uses the students’ writing as a springboard for instruction. In this orientation, the teacher focuses on the student writer’s ideas and text. She tries to teach the writer through changing, expanding, and supporting those ideas and text. About 28% of Ms. Cato’s codings fell into this category. Table 17 presents the breakdown of her comments in the Pedagogical Orientation according to the specific subcategories.

Table 17

*Pedagogical Orientation: Ms. Cato’s Comments according to Subcategory*

PEDAGOGICAL ORIENTATION		TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Change/Correct	Ideas	11	.02
	Text	92	.17
Expand	Ideas	19	.03
	Text	7	.01
Support	Ideas	25	.05
	Text	1	.00

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 17 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

Just 2% of Ms. Cato’s codings fell in the subcategory of Change/Correct Ideas. In “An Argument against Evolution,” the writer had one very long paragraph. At the end, Ms. Cato wanted the student to focus his paragraph on one idea, so she wrote, “Is this ¶ about one main idea?” Another student wrote, WHAT CONCERNS ME ABOUT USING A PERSON’S BMI TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE, IS THAT THE BMI DOES NOT TAKE INTO COUNT HOW MUCH MUSCLE A PERSON HAS. Ms. Cato responded, “Could a revision focus on an argument about the best way to measure obesity?” Here, she pointed the student toward a more coherent argument, echoing an earlier

class discussion about argument, which she defined for students as “making a major claim via evidence, warrants, and claims to persuade an audience to believe us.”

Seventeen percent of Ms. Cato’s total codings fell into the subcategory of Change/Correct Text. Ms. Cato uses very few traditional proofreading marks, but she does point students toward errors in language and structure. Several times, she directed students to handouts or to specific pages or chapters in the course text: “Review MLA format,” “Also, see ch. 7’s revision strategies for purpose & meaning,” or “These two semi-colon errors suggest you need to ‘bone up’ on semi-colons. See p. 451, then hunt for other possible errors.”

In other cases, she will “fix” sentences for students to show them what they should do. One student wrote, I PERSONALLY FEEL THAT THE CHANGES APPLE HAS MADE TO THE MUSTIC INDUSTRY HAVE BEEN GOOD.” Ms. Cato inserted words into the sentence so that it became “I personally feel that the changes Apple has made to the music industry have been more good than bad.” She’s teaching the student the strategy of comparing and contrasting, and she’s letting the student know that the original structure did not work for her.

About 3% of Ms. Cato’s codings fell into the Expand Ideas subcategory. In her end note to the student who wrote “An Argument against Evolution,” Ms. Cato commented, “Now you need to work on helping your readers understand. More specifically, you need to show me the side that you’re arguing against. I see your interpretation of the theory of evolution, but what does your opposition say about it?” Ms. Cato is teaching the student that he should have a balanced argument in order to be effective.

Elsewhere, she directs the students to expand their ideas when she writes “Evidence?” or “Show me” to get the students to add to their argument.

Only 1% of Ms. Cato’s codings fell into the Expand Text subcategory. In teaching her students the importance of clarity, she often directed them to revise their work. In the end note to the student who wrote about nuclear power, she commented, “If you made a case for [the use of nuclear power] in Vietnam, you would draw on other plants and places for meaningful comparisons while making a focused and more reasonable case.” In directing this student to narrow his focus, she in essence gave him room to expand his text.

In the Support Ideas subcategory, Ms. Cato had 25 codings (5% of all codings). In many instances, Ms. Cato wrote comments reminding students to support their claims. When one student wrote the phrase, ALL THIS ATTENTION BEING PAID TO EARBUDS, Ms. Cato commented, “What attention? Could you illustrate this—supply evidence of it?” She did not argue the student’s claim, but instead she pushed the student to add support. Another student questioned whether iTunes is RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DECLINE IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS. Ms. Cato wrote, “Is there a decline? Have you got credible evidence to illustrate it?” She was not arguing with the student; rather, she was teaching the student the importance of supporting claims.

In the subcategory of Support Text, Ms. Cato had just 1 coding (0%). In this one instance, Ms. Cato chose to reinforce classroom instruction through her comments. In “Losing the Music,” the student wrote, TO FULLY UNDERSTAND WHAT IS AT STAKE at the beginning of a new paragraph. In the margin next to this portion of the paragraph, Ms. Cato wrote, “I like this transition. I feel like you’re guiding me artfully from one idea to another—anticipating my questions and then addressing them.” Here, Ms. Cato reinforced what good text does and reminds the student of the importance of audience, a major theme in the course.



**Cognitive/Emotive orientation.** In responding to student writing, teachers often analyze the writing or express their feeling about the writing. In the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation, teachers’ comments reflect either an analytical response or an emotional response. Nineteen percent of Ms. Cato’s codings were cognitive/emotive, with most of the comments being Analytical. Table 18 presents the breakdown of Ms. Cato’s codings by subcategory in the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation.

Table 18

*Cognitive/Emotive Orientation: Ms. Cato’s Comments according to Subcategory*

COGNITIVE/EMOTIVE ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Analytical	97	18%
Emotional	5	1%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 18 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

A large number of Ms. Cato’s total codings (18%) fell into the Analytical subcategory. Many of the comments that appear in this subcategory have also been coded into other subcategories. However, Ms. Cato often uses questions to show how she is analyzing a student’s writing. Regarding the use of a weight loss supplement which her friend was taking, one student wrote, I IMMEDIATELY ASKED HER IF THIS SUPPLMENT WAS SAFE. Ms. Cato asked, “What made you question its safety?” In “Fat Cat,” the writer wrote, I’D LIKE TO POINT OUT THAT THEY [BLOGGERS] SURE DON’T SEEM TO FEEL GUILTY ABOUT THEIR CATS’ WEIGHT PROBLEM. Ms. Cato commented, “Hmm. . . does that lack of guilt make them right? You seem to be saying so.” Here, she has analyzed what the student wrote and has questioned it.

Just 1% of Ms. Cato’s codings fell into the Emotional subcategory. In one instance, a student wrote about a lawsuit filed against Apple. The student wrote, OUT OF CURIOSITY I DECIDED TO LOOK UP WHAT WARNINGS DO COME WITH AN APPLE PRODUCT BECAUSE SO FAR, THE WARNINGS ARE FALLING ON DEAF EARS (PUN INTENDED). Above the phrase FALLING ON DEAF EARS, Ms. Cato wrote, “Clever! 😊” to convey that not only did the pun work for her but that it resonated with her.

Another student, for whom English is not his first language, wrote the following sentence: THE WAS ONLY A FEW PROBLEMS. Next to the sentence, Ms. Cato wrote, “Yikes! Another read-alouder” to convey her emotional response to the poor sentence structure. When one student included in his essay a quotation full of technical language, Ms. Cato wrote, “Whoa. This scientific jargon leaves me confused. Can you translate this?” Not only did the writer lack clarity, he also provoked an emotional response in the reader.

**Summary.** Ms. Cato had good representation across all categories, with Pedagogical Orientation (28%) and Interpretive Orientation (23%) receiving slightly more than half of all the codings. With almost twice as many codings (NC=547) as comments (N=302), Ms. Cato clearly had many of her comments multiply coded. Results of the comment analysis are consistent with data from other sources to support that Ms. Cato uses a variety of perspectives to respond to student writing. Not only do her written comments reflect her varying perspectives, but her interview responses, classroom behaviors, and course documents support that she approaches the reading of student writing from varying perspectives.

### **Individual Themes**

Ms. Cato is a very passionate teacher with very passionate ideas about the teaching and assessing of writing. Three themes, specific to Ms. Cato, emerged from the analysis of her

interviews, observations, course documents, and comment analysis. These themes show the relationship between Ms. Cato's beliefs and practices.

**The connection between thinking and writing.** One theme emerging from Ms. Cato's data is that writing and thinking are interconnected processes since writing helps students think about what they want to say. This theme came up several times in the interview and was clearly presented in her syllabus, in her classroom teaching, and in the types of comments she wrote. Early in the interview, she quoted Donald Murray, whom she credited as saying, "Writing is the most disciplined form of thinking." She reflected on the writing-thinking connection when she talked about why she wants students to use writing as a means to think. During the first interview, she said, "Writing helps me explain what I'm thinking and therefore helps me think more effectively. And so I hope it helps them think better." Indeed, in the two class sessions I observed, she required her students to think through writing. For example, during one class session, the students participated in what she called a "public fast write" on the topic of revision. After they had written for the allotted amount of time, she asked students to share something from their writing. She wrote on the board key words and phrases they shared, and then she used their responses to formulate a working definition of revision. Additionally, whenever she required them to write in class, she wrote also. She modeled for them what she was asking them to do, and she shared her written thoughts about revision just as she asked them to share what they had written. Her purpose in the in-class writing exercises was to help her students think about topics for class discussion.

When she discussed portfolio grading during one of the class sessions, she mentioned that some students struggle with the fact that they are not going to receive grades until the end of the

semester. She said that she would be willing to put a grade on an essay if the student is willing to explore through writing his reasons for needing a grade:

I want you first to think through writing about whether or not [a grade] really is serving you. You may think that it's serving you, you know, but when you really think through writing about it, when you write about it and you really . . . talk about it and it becomes something outside of here, a belief that it becomes something else, then is it serving you?

One thing she requires of students when they submit their projects is a reflection or self-evaluation about the essay. This reflection is intended to help students process what they learned through the process of writing the longer essay. Even on her syllabus, she has students list several goals that they have for themselves over the course of the semester. The writing of such goals is a means for the students to think about what they expect from the course.

Ms. Cato talked about the writing-thinking connection in relation to the purpose of freshman English composition. She wants them to be prepared “for the kind of thinking and the kind of writing they'll be doing in their other classes,” but she also believes the course should help students “to think about the broader context of thinking and writing in life.”

Even her writing prompt suggests the importance of thinking through writing. When I emailed her for a copy of the specific writing prompt for the assignment that I would be assessing, she sent me the following reply:

I don't give my students a formal written prompt. I have told them they are writing an informal research essay 5-8 double spaced pages in length. The informal research essay is explained in-depth in *The Curious Researcher* and we discuss it at length in class. My decision not to give them a written assignment was based largely on 1) not wanting to type up an assignment that would be redundant after our discussions and textbook

readings, 2) not wanting to print out another handout they'd likely ignore, and 3) being too consumed with life's duties to be bothered with it, anyway.

The open-ended prompt is designed to make students think through writing. As they research and write about their self-selected topics, they think about what they want to say about the topic.

Furthermore, her syllabus supports that writing helps people think. One of her purposes, as stated in the syllabus, is that the course is “a place where we can focus on using writing and reading for serious (and fun) academic inquiry.” When she mentioned specific course goals, she wrote that students would “discuss (in speech and writing) why [they] made the choices [they] did.” This phrase suggests that students will reflect through writing what they have learned. The syllabus also indicates that students will submit “a reflection/self-evaluation” of each Long Essay submitted, indicating that they will use writing as a means for reflection. Additionally, she stated that students would participate in a variety of in-class and out-of-class activities that would “help guide [them] to a deeper understanding of the LE [Long Essay],” and understanding that comes as they think about what they are writing.

Her written comments also support the theme of the connection between writing and thinking. Of the four participants, Ms. Cato had the highest number of codings in the Interpretive Orientation. Because comments in this orientation reflect meaning-making, her higher percentage in this orientation makes sense. As she makes meaning, based on her background and experiences and their background and experiences, she writes comments reflecting that thinking process. For example, in reacting to a student's statement about an overweight cat, Ms. Cato wrote, “How did you react to this news? Did you feel at fault?” Here, Ms. Cato focused on the writer's inner feelings to make meaning, and her comment reflected her thought process as she was reading. To another student who wrote that famous people on

commercials cause teens to be overweight, Ms. Cato wrote, “I don’t understand how a famous person could be responsible for obesity.” With this comment, Ms. Cato relied on her background knowledge to make meaning of the writing, and her comment reflected how she processed what she had read.

The orientation in which Ms. Cato received the highest percentage of codings was the Pedagogical Orientation at 28% of the total codings. Comments in this orientation are designed to instruct writers to change, expand, or support their text or ideas. Many of Ms. Cato’s comments coded as pedagogical dealt with issues of mechanics (issues like grammar or spelling) or organization (essay structure), and such comments coded as pedagogical demonstrated how Ms. Cato instructed students through thinking about what she was reading. For example, when she tried to understand the structure of one student’s sentence, she wrote, “The subject of this sentence is your mom, right? Could this sentence be made stronger?” With this comment, she demonstrated what she was thinking then instructed the student to make changes to the text structure. To another student who used some strong language, she wrote, “You seem to be writing to peers, not teachers. How do you think some readers will react to the ‘douche bagging’”? Here, she expressed what she thought about the student’s intended audience, and her comment directed the writer to consider the word choice. Finally, to help a writer think about his ideas related to his thesis, she wrote, “Interesting. Is this a good or bad thing? How does this factor into the primary claim you want to make?” Ms. Cato considered the student’s writing, revealed her thought process through writing, and concluded that the student should ponder revising what he had written.

In the Social Orientation, Ms. Cato acted as an expert (12% of the total codings fell into the Expert subcategory) more than as a peer (3% of the total codings fell into the Peer

subcategory). Although Ms. Cato believes that her role as a teacher is to come alongside students, which might imply a higher percentage in the Peer subcategory, her expert comments actually facilitate the “besideness” she affirms since she explains so carefully how and why she arrives at her opinion. Not all of her comments in this orientation demonstrated how Ms. Cato thinks through writing, but many of her end note comments expressed her role as expert while demonstrating how she arrived at her expert opinion. For example, when she was suggesting that a student revise an essay, she wrote, “Strengthen your opening ¶. Right now, you begin by mentioning a ‘new found interest,’ but we don’t know what you thought before, so this ‘newness’ feels out of the blue. I wonder if you wouldn’t try to ‘multiple leads’ exercise again.” Not only has she shown her thought processes that led her conclude that the student should revise, she also commented on her perception of the student’s thought process, thus modeling thinking through writing and showing that the student should think more through writing. When another student made a claim without supporting it, she wrote, “This is compelling evidence, but who generates it?” As an expert reader, Ms. Cato understands the importance of support, but rather than write an impersonal comment like “source” next to the student’s writing, she demonstrated how she arrived at her conclusion that the evidence was unsubstantiated.

Ms. Cato was the only one of the four participants who had more comments coded negative (9% of the total codings) than positive (5% of the total codings) in the Evaluative Orientation. Negative comments indicate to the writer that the writing does not work for the reader. However, the fact that Ms. Cato is careful to let the writers know why she concluded that the writing did not work for her supports the theme of thinking through writing. In the essays she submitted for the study, rather than write non-specific comments like “no” or “wrong,” Ms. Cato often told the reader her thought process in rejecting the writing. For example, when she

had trouble with the flow of one student's writing, she commented, "I'm a little confused about chronology here. Were those 'few years' before that vet visit?" She did not tell the writer to use better transitions or insert certain words; instead, she expressed why she was confused. In another instance, her comment showed how she went from being unsure of something the student wrote to being sure that the writing did not work for her. She wrote, "I don't think I get this. Nope, I don't."

Ms. Cato's comments coded as positive also demonstrated why she thought the writing worked for her. For example, rather than write "good" in the margin of a student's essay, she wrote why she liked the writing: "Yes! Here I feel like you really begin to think critically about your research question—and yourself." To another student, she wrote, "I like this transition. I feel like you're guiding me artfully from one idea to another—anticipating my questions and then addressing them." She told the student first that the writing worked for her then explained through writing how she arrived at the conclusion.

Of all the subcategories in all five orientations, the subcategory which had the highest percentage of Ms. Cato's total codings is the Analytical subcategory of the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation. Eighteen percent of her total codings fell into the Analytical subcategory. This high number of analytical comments supports the idea that writing and thinking are connected and that writing facilitates thinking. While comments coded as analytical were likely coded into other orientations as well, many of Ms. Cato's comments in this orientation demonstrated how she thinks through her writing. For example, to a student writing about listening to music, she wrote, "Weeelll. . . do you mean listening to it too LOUDLY through headphones? (I don't think this overstatement will help with your credibility.)" With the comment, Ms. Cato analyzed the writing to conclude that the student had an issue with credibility. She showed, however, how



she arrived at the conclusion. In an end note to a student who wrote about nuclear power, she demonstrated her analysis of his writing:

You acknowledge the complexity of the issues regarding nuclear safety, and you seem (wisely) to suggest nuclear power would be safe in some contexts and not others. But the result is that your point—your argument—remains unconvincing. It continues to feel a bit like a report on the pros & cons of nuclear energy.

Her analysis revealed how she concluded that his argument did not work for her. By modeling this for her students, she encourages them to use their writing as a means to express their thinking.

All of the data sources support the theme of thinking through writing. Not only did she indicate in the interviews that she herself uses writing to help her discover what she wants to say, she also told students in the syllabus that they would participate in activities to help them think through writing. She followed through on this promise in the classroom, asking students to use their writing as a springboard for thinking, and she modeled it both in the classroom and in her written comments to students.

**The importance of reader response.** Another theme that emerged from the writing is that teachers should assess writing using reader-response methods. By this, Ms. Cato meant that teachers' comments should reflect a specific reaction to the text rather than an unfair comparison to a non-existent ideal text. Ms. Cato mentioned reader response often during her interview. She said that her interest in reader response theory had been piqued since she began thinking about how teachers should assess writing when both the writer and the reader have experienced a similar trauma: "And so I started thinking about this idea of reader response and how you can

the The Reader capital T capital R with the red pen when you are reading about something that affected you and hurting from it.”

When discussing her methods of commenting, Ms. Cato talked about how to assess “within a reader response way, like, ‘I’m really confused here. I’m not sure what you’re trying to say.’” She suggested that the use of questions and the use of first person characterize reader response comments. When discussing her practices related to program expectations, Ms. Cato observed,

I think the program in terms of writing as an act of inquiry and the role in terms of our objective of . . . helping them be critical thinkers, I think the questioning method that I’m using and the reader response techniques helps reinforce both of those things.

Ms. Cato indicated how her response practice supports the writing program’s objectives.

Ms. Cato’s course syllabus does not use the phrase *reader response*, but she implied it when she discussed with students the course expectations. After telling the students that she cannot make them “be curious,” she wrote,

You can expect me to be supportive, enthusiastic, helpful, and understanding; you can also expect me to be pushy when I want you to develop the great ideas in your writing. In my comments, you can expect me to be supportive, and to provide you with the kind of feedback that helps you to think about how you’d like to develop your work. There will be no lectures here; instead, we’ll work together on activities that will help you develop your ideas and analyses and collect evidence from a variety of sources for them.

With these words, Ms. Cato indicated to her students that she would use a variety of strategies to help them develop their writing, among which are comments that are specific to the writing.

Even though she did not use the phrase *reader response* in the class sessions I observed, she taught students how to self-edit in a reader response manner. When she was discussing how to write an appropriate thesis statement, she asked them to phrase their thesis statements as an assertions and then to generate a list of three or four questions that emerge from the thesis, questions that challenge the assertion. She then asked them to rewrite their thesis three different ways: “Imagine you are Batman or your little sister rewriting your thesis. How would Xena the Warrior Princess see your thesis? Your grandma? A church member?” By asking students to question their own writing and to think about their theses from different perspectives, she is teaching them reader response techniques.

Her freewriting exercises during class also demonstrated her belief that teachers should respond in a reader response manner. While she was not writing comments on student papers during class time, she was commenting orally about their writing. For example, when she and the students completed a freewriting exercise on argument, she elicited responses from students regarding what they had written. As they told her what they had written, she wrote their responses on the board and showed how their responses related to the other responses she had already written on the board. She considered each of their responses individually and put the responses in the context of the other responses.

In terms of written responses, Ms. Cato’s comment analysis demonstrates her contention that teachers should react in a reader-response manner. Her range of difference between the orientation with the most codings (Pedagogical Orientation) and the orientation with the least codings (Evaluative Orientation) was 14%, the smallest range of the four participants. This smaller range demonstrates that she approaches the reading of text from various perspectives, which is consistent with a reader-response model of teacher commenting. Such a variety of

responses indicates that she approaches each text individually and reacts specifically to what she is reading.

Within the Interpretive Orientation, readers' comments reflect how readers make meaning of the text based on their background and experiences or the writers' backgrounds and experiences. The focus on meaning-making is consistent with a reader-response approach to assessment. Twenty-three percent of Ms. Cato's codings fell into the Interpretive Orientation. When responding from her own knowledge of text, Ms. Cato wrote comments specific to the text. For example, to one student struggling with the flow of his writing, she wrote, "This transition feels a little too offhanded and forced. Can you do better?" Her response was specific to the writing, phrased as a question, and written to the student using *you*, three strategies which Ms. Cato identified as critical in a reader-response model of commenting. She could have written "transition," but her response indicates attention to the text. When another student wrote about not feeling guilty because her cat was overweight, Ms. Cato responded based on her understanding of the writer's inner feelings: "Hmmm. . . does that lack of guilt here make them right? You seem to be saying so." Other comments in this orientation focus on the writers' knowledge of text. When a student intentionally wrote a pun, Ms. Cato commented, "Clever!☺" A one-word response may not seem like a reader-response comment, but the word *clever* is more specific than a non-descript term like *good* or *nice*. It indicates that Ms. Cato recognizes the strategy the writer used, and the smiley face conveys the reader's feelings about the writing.

In the Social Orientation, the teacher responds either as a peer or as an expert. Ms. Cato responded both as a peer and as an expert, suggesting that she responds based on her initial reaction to the text. When a student referred to WebMD in his paper, she indicated that she was familiar with the source: "An easy-to-access resource with some credibility but is there a more

authoritative source available?” This comment let the writer know that Ms. Cato had probably used the website herself since she knew that it was user-friendly, so in that sense, the comment would have been coded in the Peer subcategory. However, the last part of comment deals with the best use of sources for a research paper, indicating that she also read the comment as someone who knows the types of sources that should be used. In that sense, then, the comment would have been coded into the Expert subcategory. The complexity of Ms. Cato’s comments suggests her reader-response approach to written comments.

The orientation in which Ms. Cato had the lowest percentage of total codings was the Evaluative Orientation. However, she had 14% of her total codings in this category, indicating that her comments did let the writers know how their writing worked for her. When a student used an exclamation point that did not need to be included, Ms. Cato responded, “OKAY!!! (I’m wondering if this exclamation mark is necessary. 😊).” She could have used a proofreading mark to delete the exclamation point, but this comment shows that she wants the writer to know that she was reading the text closely. Other times, her evaluative comments were more direct. For example, when a student used scientific language without explaining it, Ms. Cato wrote, “Whoa. This scientific jargon leaves me confused.” Again, Ms. Cato’s responses demonstrate a specific attention to the writing, consistent with what she sees as a tenet of a reader-response model.

In the Pedagogical Orientation, comments are intended to instruct writers regarding their textual structure and their ideas. While the Pedagogical Orientation was highest for all participants in terms of the percentage of total codings, Ms. Cato’s percentage (28%) was lower than the percentages of the other four participants (50% for Mr. Anderson, 29% for Ms. Bowden, and 53% for Mr. Drake). She had a more even distribution of comments than the other four participants. Some of Ms. Cato’s comments in the Pedagogical Orientation were specific

instructions: “Review MLA format,” “Review Appendix b,” or “See p. 452, ‘Nonrestrictive and Parenthetical Elements,’ and watch for other similar errors elsewhere in your essay.” Such comments instruct the writer to make changes, and they can be considered a reader reaction to specific patterns of error in the text. However, other comments show how Ms. Cato instructed through specific reaction to what she was reading. For example, Ms. Cato reacted to a direct quotation in one student’s paper. She drew a line from the quotation and wrote, “However, I wonder if [this] compelling, historical context would better serve you if it appeared earlier in your essay.” She instructed the reader to consider moving the quotation, but she placed the instruction in the context of a specific comment focused on the specific information in the text.

The data support the emerging theme, specific to Ms. Cato, that teachers should respond to student text using a reader-response model of written response. Not only does she state the importance of reader response, but her classroom activities and written response practices confirm her statement.

**Purpose and audience.** The final theme emerging from the data is that student writing should take into consideration the purpose and audience for the writing. Purpose and audience are critical components of the revised writing program, and the two concepts work in conjunction with each other. In the front cover of the textbook, purpose and audience are the focus of the first two course objectives. While Ms. Cato did not list the course objectives in her syllabus (instead referring students to the book), she mentioned audience as part of her specific course goals. Her last course goal is that students will “make decisions about editing [their] writing that take into account the expectations of [the] audience. Additionally, because she was part of the committee tasked with overhauling the writing program, she is obviously aware of the

importance of purpose and audience since those concepts feature prominently in program documents.

When asked about purposes for freshman writing, Ms. Cato mentioned helping students understand the “relationship between the writer, the audience, and the subject.” To help prepare students for writing in the academy, she tries

to get them to think about the way we communicate differently given the genre in which we’re writing and the person to whom we’re writing and the subject about which we’re writing. So that when they leave, no matter what kind of writing they’re doing, they’re able to do it more successfully. Um, and they’re thinking, hopefully, more carefully about, alright what am I trying to write? What is my objective here? What do I want to communicate here? What are the expectations of my audience? Who are these people? How can I, how can I get across to them? So really thinking a lot about purpose and audience.

In some of her assignments, she will require students to write an audience description so that she can “position” herself as a reader. She reminds students to remember the purposes for their writing so that they can consider what they really want to write. On the essays submitted for this project, she required the students to write a purpose statement and indicate the specific audience for whom they were writing the essay.

In the classroom, she taught purpose and audience in several ways. When teaching students that revision is really re-seeing, she asked them, “Can we agree that revision is re-seeing and thinking about how to make it clearer for our audience?” She then reminded students that the audience is not always the teachers. She asked them to “re-see” their writing from other viewpoints, giving them a handout with instructions to read as a reader, read as a writer, and read

as an editor. When they did a self-editing exercise, she asked students to rewrite their thesis three times in light of different audiences, relating different audiences to Facebook posts: “Have you ever written a post, then someone likes it and you reread your post thinking of that person? Why did they like it? What did they see that made them want to like it?” By relating audience to something students would recognize, Facebook posts, she taught students the importance of the purpose and audience for their writing.

Her comment analysis supports the emerging theme that students should consider audience and purpose in their writing. Comments coded into the Interpretive Orientation focus on how the reader makes meaning of the writing based on the reader’s or writer’s background and experiences. One student made a statement that teens would rather go to fast food restaurants rather than do something active. Ms. Cato wrote, “This is quite a condemnation of your teenaged peers—many of whom are in your audience,” showing that she interpreted the statement based on her own understanding of the behavior of teenagers and of the writer’s intent. By using the word *audience* in the comment, she also reiterated to the writer to think about audience since the readers in the audience will interpret the writing based on their own background and experiences.

Other comments coded as interpretive, specifically those comments coded into the subcategories of writer’s text knowledge or reader’s text knowledge, dealt with the importance of purpose. When she interpreted a student’s writing based on the student’s knowledge of text, she wrote, “Here you return to the narrative. . . your writing feels purposeful again.” This comment confirmed that writers should focus on purpose even when making choices about the rhetorical moves they will make. Another time, she asked a student, “Okay, but how does this relate to



your overall purpose for writing, and to your research question?” when she wanted the writer to think about his knowledge of text structure.

Comments coded in the Social Orientation also support the importance of writing with an audience and a purpose in mind. Most of the comments related to audience and purpose that would fall into this orientation would be coded into the Expert subcategory. For example, Ms. Cato acted as an expert reader, one who knows how an essay should be structured, when she asked a student, “Could you find a way of ‘hooking’ your readers? This opening line feels flat and it assumes readers are already aware that ‘old plants’ need substituting.” She reacted as an expert, but her comment directed the student to think about the reader when reorganizing the writing. To another student, she acted as an expert reader when she told a student, “If you choose to revise this, I’d like you to begin by focusing on your purpose for writing.” In fact, in the end notes to five of the eight essays submitted, she suggested that students revise their work based on either the purpose for the writing or for the intended audience.

Within the Evaluative Orientation, Ms. Cato let the writers know how their writing worked for her. Many of her comments coded into this category dealt with purpose and audience. In fact, in letting students know how the writing worked or did not work for her, she implied to the writer that audience is important: if she as the reader did not get what the writer said, then would the actual audience get it, either? Several students used the word *we* or *us* in their essays, assuming that the reader would understand the audience. However, Ms. Cato often had to remind the writers that not every reader would associate with *we* or *us*. For example, to the student writing about physical attraction, Ms. Cato wrote, “Who is this ‘us’? I think I need some context here. Are you focusing on a certain population as your use of ‘college students’ implies?” Her comment indicated that the writing did not work for her, and the reason it did not

work was because of an issue with audience. In another case, not only did she let the writer know that the writing worked for her, she also identified herself as part of the audience: “I like that you show us that you have been willing to change your mind based on evidence.”

Comments coded in the Pedagogical Orientation are intended to instruct the writer regarding text or ideas. In a subtle way, instructional comments imply audience and purpose: if the teachers instruct writers to change, expand, or support text or ideas, teachers understand that the writing needs to change in order to align with the purpose for the writing and the needs of the audience. Certainly, not all of Ms. Cato’s comments coded as pedagogical dealt with issues of audience or purpose, but several did. One student used *we* in his essay but with no clear understanding of *we*. In her instructional comment to the student, Ms. Cato wrote, “Perhaps you need to first make the case that ‘we’ need nuclear power. (or new power sources in general). I see you trying to do that in this ¶. Shouldn’t the need be established earlier in your essay?” She helped the student understand the need to clarify who the audience is and what his purpose is, and she instructed him to change his ideas so that his argument would be convincing. Even when she directed a student to correct a sentence fragment, she did so by having him think in terms of the audience (reader): “Could you walk up to someone, say this sentence, and have the ‘get’ you?”

In the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation, most of Ms. Cato’s comments were coded into the Analytical subcategory rather than the Emotional subcategory. In some of her comments, Ms. Cato analyzed student writing in light of audience and purpose. To the student who wrote about Apple and the music industry, she wrote, “There seem to be several topics floating around and no clear purpose behind your writing about them.” Earlier in that essay, she analyzed the writing to determine that the writer needed to focus more on convincing the reader: “Could you begin your

revision by focusing on persuading the reader to agree with you?” Such analytical comments direct the reader to think about audience and purpose.

All sources of data confirm the theme that writers should consider audience and purpose when writing their essays. She stated the importance of audience and purpose in her interviews, she mentioned audience in her syllabus, she taught audience and purpose in the classroom, and she focused on audience and purpose in the comments that she wrote.

### **Teacher Reaction**

After I described the various orientations, explained the difference between comments and codings, and discussed the numbers with Ms. Cato, I asked if she had any questions. She asked me to explain the difference between Change/Correct Ideas and Change/Correct Text. She seemed surprised by the spread between the two subcategories, though she did concede that “maybe I’m not surprised because I think it’s something I’m still working on, focusing more on ideas, but then some of that textual stuff is really important.” I explained again that Change/Correct Text could be dealing with issues of structure and organization, but I also reminded her that many comments were multiply coded, which means that a comment that could have been coded as Change/Correct Ideas many have been coded in the Interpretive Orientation as Reader’s Text Knowledge.

Overall, Ms. Cato was “pleasantly surprised” at the analysis, admitting to having been anxious about having someone to analyze her comments. She said,

I’m pleasantly surprised to see that what I want to do is reflected in what I’m actually doing, which is really exciting . . . and reinforcing to me and . . . I like knowing that the way that I’m thinking about teaching is reflected in what I’m actually doing.

### **Summary: Ms. Cato**

Confident and well-informed, Ms. Cato works hard to help her students see that writing serves many purposes. Because she does not assign grades until the end of the semester, she pushes her students to think about their writing for writing's sake. She is energetic in the classroom and respectful to her students. Her emphasis on thinking through writing is evident in the in-class writing she and her students do. Her comments reflect a teacher who responds to writing as more than just an authority figure with all of the answers. Additionally, her written response practices are consistent with the principles suggested by Sommers (1982) and Elbow (1999), whom she mentioned specifically during the first interview.

### **Case Study Four: Mr. Drake**

*As English teachers, we get really focused in our writing . . . and it's easy to miss the real world connections to people like those engineering majors and science majors and political science majors that take the course.*

Entering college as an older student, Mr. Drake “came to the university late” after having had a successful career in engineering. When he made the decision to start college, he started taking English courses. Eventually he graduated with both his undergraduate and graduate degrees in English from the university at which this study is being conducted. After he graduated with his Master of Arts degree, the English department chair offered him a teaching job, and he has been teaching there since 2001. He teaches freshman English composition courses, technical writing courses, some literature courses, and a course on film as literature. As part of the team working on the overhaul of the writing program, Mr. Drake piloted writing as inquiry in his composition classes prior to the switch to the new program.

## **Teacher Beliefs**

Based on data gathered primarily from interviews, observations, and his syllabus, I report Mr. Drake's beliefs about teaching writing and responding to student writing.

**Beliefs about the purpose of freshman writing.** When I asked Mr. Drake what he believed to be the purpose of freshman writing, he hesitated for a minute then said "Boy, that's a great question, one that a lot of people talk about. Let me think about that for a minute." He then repeated the question and paused for a few seconds before answering. According to Mr. Drake, freshman English writing programs are multifaceted, serving academic purposes, professional purposes, and general purposes. In his syllabus, he broadly communicated to students his belief in the importance of freshman writing:

This course is an inquiry-based college level writing course. As such, it will focus on your process of being an active participant in asking questions, investigating subjects and discovering information and how you might position yourself in these issues. This course will aim to develop inquiry, discovery and writing skills that you will use in your college career and beyond.

He further suggested that the course will prepare students for academic success, effective communication, and successful engagement in "an increasingly text-heavy world."

First, Mr. Drake believes that freshman writing helps students with certain academic goals. He stated that freshman writing plays a definite "part in the university. We are, you know, . . . freshman comp." By that, he means that in freshman writing courses, students have the opportunity to develop certain analytical and rhetorical skills that they will need for college success. He said that freshman writing "exercises those muscles for other courses because they're going to be doing moves like that in their other courses. . . . It gives them that experience

at the university level.” Finally, Mr. Drake believes that students learn how to do research, to inquire, in freshman English courses.

Mr. Drake also expressed his belief that freshman English prepares students for life beyond college. As an integral part of a liberal arts education, freshman writing programs get students to think how to think, and thinking students become a “thinking citizenry” and “functioning members of society.” The skills they learn in freshman writing programs help them confront the issues “in the word that [they are] being bombarded with” since they are able to “step back and think about it.” The thinking and writing skills they learn will be “part of their lives afterward, no matter what profession they go into.” To help student understand the importance of those skills, Mr. Drake structures certain course assignments so that students will think about the implications of the assignment for their chosen careers. For example, early writing assignments in his section of the course deal with the broad topic of food. He tells students to focus on their majors in choosing topics: “Science majors, focus on what artificial sweeteners are and look at the effects of those chemicals. Business majors, [look at] franchising . . . and why some franchises fail and some don’t.” By asking students to write in their fields, he is helping them see the importance of writing and thinking in a professional context.

Mr. Drake also wants students to understand that they are already writing all of the time. He tries to help them realize that they are already writing through their texts and tweets, but he wants them to “expand their horizons beyond the 140 characters and the text abbreviations.” He does recognize the importance of media text, and he has integrated other text forms into his course syllabus by requiring students to prepare a final presentation that incorporates “some form of media text.”

To help students achieve the goals of freshman English writing, Mr. Drake believes his role is to be accessible and available to students. He does not want to be seen solely as the authority figure, the teacher wielding the “royal scepter.” He does recognize that some students do look to the teacher for answers because they have always been given the answer, but he tries to help those students find the answers for themselves. Rather than tell them what to think, he tries “to give them the keys to find it out themselves, to make them think.”

As a teacher of writing, he wants to help students realize that they can write. He admits that sometimes his role is to “try to correct” the misperceptions of some students who think, “I’m not a good writer, I can’t write, and I’m not good at writing.” He said that he tries to point out what a student is doing well in his writing: “Even in the most egregious paper, you can find a person in there, and you can find them trying to peek out amidst all the trauma that they’ve been trying to write and find something to hook onto.” Building their confidence is an important part of his role as a teacher.

**Knowledge about the specific writing program.** Mr. Drake helped pilot the writing-as-inquiry program (as outlined in *The Curious Writer*, 2011), so he has a solid understanding of the program. He thinks that the new program is moving in a good direction, especially in reaction to “this horrible proficiency exam [that we had] for so long. Timed, high stakes, artificial writing, and how can you help but not be going in the right direction once you leave that behind?” Instead, the new program is less teacher-centered and more individual student-centered. The program helps students see themselves as writers who have something to say.

He believes that the program fits in with the mission of the university. The university expects freshman writing programs to help students achieve a certain level of proficiency in

writing and thinking so that they can “thrive in their other classes and thus in society,” and the focus on inquiry and thinking helps students achieve that proficiency.

He also believes that the new program fosters a “useful type of persuasion.” Rather than the rigid, five-paragraph argument of some writing programs, the inquiry-based program helps students craft writing that is more nuanced. Instead of students writing three reasons why they believe something, they research something about which they have a question, and as they answer their question, they persuade the reader in a “subtle” way.

Mr. Drake noted many components of the new program. The primary component is inquiry. Mr. Drake said that inquiry helps students have a connection with what they are writing. They have to figure out, for example, “how to connect with the history of the French Revolution . . . or think about things that they have questions about.” Such curiosity is foundational in the new program.

Another component of inquiry-based writing, which builds on the curiosity of the student, is reflection. Mr. Drake argues that reflection forces students to think about their writing process. In his sections of ENGL 102, Mr. Drake has students reflect on each individual essay and then again in their portfolios. For the individual essays, he requires students to submit letters of introduction in which they reflect on the process of writing the essay. He also has them reflect on the entire semester as part of their end-of-the-semester portfolios. For their final exam, students bring their portfolios to class and write about how they improved as a writer.

The student portfolio is an important component of the inquiry-based program. Not only does it satisfy the university requirement for assessment of the program, the portfolio also becomes a student’s record of his individual inquiry process. Mr. Drake said that the portfolio emphasizes the drafting process, reinforcing to students that writing is a process. Because the



portfolios contain all of the writing students have done over the semester—the low-stakes, non-graded writing, the drafts that have been both peer-reviewed and teacher-reviewed, and the final graded work—students can see their own process of writing.

Another component, which is implied in the drafting process, is the scaffolding of assignments. Mr. Drake believes that “building on the small, the shorter small stakes assignments to the larger assignments” reinforces to students that “writing is a continual process.” In Mr. Drake’s class, the first larger assignment must be loosely based on the topic of food, but the smaller assignments that have led to that larger assignment have helped students think and write more critically about narrower topics so that when they write the larger piece that is more open-ended, they have had a chance to practice some of those rhetorical skills already. The second research project at the end of the semester is “completely on your own” in terms of topics, so students are free to research self-selected topics. However, because Mr. Drake has provided guidance “up to this point,” students have the necessary skills to handle the assignment.

In his syllabus, Mr. Drake alluded to many of these components. He mentioned inquiry several times, in reference to the program being “inquiry-based” and to a student’s responsibility for “individual inquiry.” He discussed scaffolded assignments clearly, explaining how the daily responses and shorter assignments lead to the longer assignments. When discussing the portfolio, Mr. Drake indicated that it would be used not only as a means for organizing and storing all of their work but also for grading purposes and for the purpose of the final reflection.

When I asked Mr. Drake about expectations related to the new program, he answered from two different perspectives. He first discussed the expectations related to the classroom. He thinks he is expected to keep students engaged since they are “customers of the university.” To engage them is to connect with them. He also does not feel any pressure to perform in any

certain way in the classroom: “I don’t feel like I’m performing for the department or the college or the people’s perception of what I’m supposed to be doing or should be doing.”

In terms of expectations of the program on curriculum, he said that the main expectation is that he is teaching inquiry. He said that his “syllabus” and “curriculum” should “focus on student inquiry in some way” but that it could manifest itself “in a broad range of things.” For example, he is not mandated to teach certain topics or assign certain assignments as long as he meets the criteria of at least two longer, sustained pieces of writing. He also recognizes the expectation that students should produce a certain number of words rather than a certain number of essays.

**Understanding of best practices for written response.** As part of his graduate coursework, Mr. Drake took the course required of all students wishing to be teaching assistants. He remembered that part of the coursework involved grading sample papers and discussing them with a group. He received directions from the instructor so that by then end of the course, he was “very clear . . . that this is definitely a C paper. This is definitely a B paper and here’s why.” Also in that course, he was required to research theories of response and assessment. He believes that he received “what [he] would call effective training in grading.”

When I asked Mr. Drake about best practices, he quickly replied, “With comments, you’ve got to connect, . . . to show that you understand what [students] are trying to say and where they’re coming from.” To achieve that trust, Mr. Drake said that you cannot simply “blindly” count errors; instead, you have to find what works in a piece of writing and recognize those successful aspects, even if it is just one thing,

He said that teachers must work hard not to appropriate student text. One way to do this is to phrase the comments as questions when possible. For example, he said that rather than

write, “I don’t understand what’s going on here,” he would write, “What are you trying to say here.” Mr. Drake connected the use of questions to inquiry. He said that if teachers want students to use questions as part of their individual inquiry, then teachers can model that inquiry through the use of comments as questions. Another way not to appropriate student text is to key comments to a longer final statement—end note—at the end of the paper. Teachers can write numbers on the paper, numbers which are keyed to a page at the end of the paper. On that page, teachers can address the issues in the writing.

Another key practice, specifically related to grammar, is not to point out every deviation from Standard Edited American English. Instead, teachers should look for patterns of error and refer to those patterns in the final statement or end note. Also, in addition to teaching grammar in class, teachers can refer students to the writing center or the tutoring center or they can deal with grammar in a conference. Mr. Drake admitted that he struggles with best practices related to grammar because “it’s hard to step back” from marking everything.

In terms of practical matters related to best practices, Mr. Drake mentioned things like calling students by name as a way of connecting with them. Doing so makes the student feel like he is an individual. He also believes that he should “give them a final sign off at the end” related to what he sees as the “important thing” in the essay. Other practical matters include not using red pen and not writing all of the comments in the margin.

Mr. Drake explained how he grades papers, remarking that he takes a “long time” to grade papers. He has a system whereby he writes many of his comments on a separate page which he staples to the back of the essay. When he gets a set of papers, he first staples the blank page to the back of all of the essays, and if the paper is a revision, he also staples the draft to it. When he picks up the first paper, he reads the letter of introduction and writes a positive note to

the student. When he begins reading the essay, he annotates as he reads. While he recognizes that some teachers read once without marking things, he marks as he reads “because I find that I am The Reader capital T capital R . . . and if I’m reading the paper, then . . . I have reactions as a first-time reader that I think are important.” He then reads the paper again.

He uses pencil rather than pen because sometimes when he reads the essay again, something will be clearer and he may need to change what he wrote. As he reads through the paper, he writes his key notes, the notes on the separate paper keyed to numbers he has written in the text. He may also circle a few issues related to grammar. After he has read the paper, he puts a grade on it. However, “by no means are the first grades the final ones sometimes.” By this he means that he may realize when he is grading his twelfth paper that he was a bit too lenient or too harsh on the first few papers.

When I asked Mr. Drake about people or philosophies that have influenced his assessment practices, he was reluctant to give specific names or theories. He said, “I remember all of the big names, the Peter Elbows, the Bartholomae, and all that stuff.” However, he asserted that many of the theories are “totally incompatible” with one another. Instead, he suggested that good writing teachers will pay attention to what others have to say but that they have to figure out what works best for themselves and for their students. He contended that good writing teachers “pick and choose . . . what best reflects . . . [their] philosophy and what [they’re] trying to do with [their] students. Regarding specific theories or philosophies, he mentioned the importance of a student-centered classroom.

**Perspectives of his individual written response practices.** Mr. Drake said he does not think about whether or not his practices reflect his beliefs. He said that a person’s practices naturally reflect their beliefs. He suggested that during the time teachers are in graduate school,

they should be open to learning new things. In the same way, as professionals, teachers should continue that process of learning, of “being a functioning member of the profession.” Regarding whether or not his response practices align with program expectations, Mr. Drake laughed and said, “I’d like to think that they do.” He mentioned his practice of using questions rather than declarative statements since questions reinforce inquiry. He acknowledged that he is intrigued by the possibility of not assigning grades until the final portfolio since “it is a natural reflection of the inquiry process in a way.”

### **Teacher Practices**

For this portion of the chapter, I used data gathered from the thirteen essays that Mr. Drake submitted for the study. The emphasis for this portion of the study was not to see the types of comments that Mr. Drake wrote; instead, the focus was on how his comments reflect his perspective as a reader of student writing. Where pertinent, data from other sources will be used to support the analysis, though the full integration of all the data will come in the section entitled “Individual Themes.”

Sixteen students in one of Mr. Drake’s English 102 sections gave written permission for him to submit blind copies of their work on which Mr. Drake had written comments. However, several students did not get their drafts submitted on time, so the total number of essays collected and submitted for the study was thirteen. After Mr. Drake had written his comments on the drafts, he submitted blind copies to me.

Mr. Drake has his students write a letter of introduction to their essays. The introduction serves to focus students on the purpose and audience of their writing in addition to helping them think about the process of writing. Mr. Drake typically writes a short note to each student in

response to their letter of introduction. His response generally affirms what the student has noted about the process of writing the essay.

One strategy that Mr. Drake uses when reviewing student writing is to look for patterns of error and give each error pattern a number. This number is keyed to a longer explanation that he writes to students. As he reads the essay, he writes a number in the margin of the essay, and then on a blank piece of paper which he has stapled to the back of the essay, he will explain in detail what the error pattern is and how the student might want to address it. Mr. Drake also uses in-text markings and other side-margin notations in addition to the longer end note explanations of the numbered comments in the essay.

In order to determine Mr. Drake's written response practices, his written comments had to be analyzed. Any comment or mark that Mr. Drake made on a student's paper was assigned a number. Some of the longer comments, specifically the end notes on the last page(s) of each essay, were broken down by sentence level so that they could be analyzed individually. After all of the comments were numbered, they were typed onto a table for the raters to analyze. Mr. Drake had a total of 557 comments ( $N = 557$ ) across all nine essays, the highest number of comments of the four subjects.

Based on the work of Melanie Sperling (1994), I categorized Mr. Drake's written comments according to five frameworks or orientations. These frameworks are intended to show how teachers respond as readers to student writing. The five orientations are explained in detail in the following sections. The orientations are not exclusive; in other words, the raters may have coded the same comment into two or three different orientations. In fact, many comments were multiply coded, meaning that one comment could show more than one perspective.

Altogether, Mr. Drake had a total of 902 codings (NC = 902), indicating that many of his comments were multiply coded. In the tables which follow, the percentages are based on the total number of codings (NC) rather than the total number of comments (N). Table 19 presents the categorization of Mr. Drake's comments by teacher orientation. As show in Table 19, more than half of Mr. Drake's comments fell into the Pedagogical Orientation, reflecting his intent for those comments to be used for instruction. The remaining comments are fairly evenly divided across the remaining four orientations, with the least number of comments reflecting an analytical or emotional response (Cognitive/Emotive Orientation).

Table 19

*Categorization of Mr. Drake's Comments according to Teacher Orientation*

TEACHER ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Interpretive	103	11%
Social	130	14%
Evaluative	74	12%
Pedagogical	479	53%
Cognitive/Emotive	86	10%
Other	0	0%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 19 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

In the narrative section that follows, student writing has been differentiated from teacher comment through the use of capitalization. Student writing has been typed using all capital letters, and teacher comments have been enclosed in quotation marks so as to avoid confusion.

**Interpretive orientation.** In the Interpretive Orientation, teachers interpret writers' words through their own background experiences, text knowledge, and inner feelings or through their perception of the writers' background experiences, text knowledge, or inner feelings.

Eleven percent of Mr. Drake’s codings fell under the interpretive category. Table 20 presents a breakdown of the specific codings of Mr. Drake’s comments per subcategory.

Less than 1% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the subcategory of Reader’s Experiences. In fact, only one of his codings was marked in this subcategory. In “More Than Just Noodles,” a student explained in his letter of introduction why he chose to review a movie about food rather than to review an actual restaurant. The student wrote, I’M GOING BACK AND WATCHING *TAMPOPO* FOR A SECOND TIME.” Mr. Drake commented, “I’m glad you’re going back to the film to take a close “reading.” That process is rewarding & allows you [to] discover some of the depth of the piece.” Here, he relies on his own experiences as a consumer of film to encourage the student-writer about the benefits of re-watching a film for a specific reason.

Table 20

*Interpretive Orientation: Mr. Drake’s Comments according to Subcategory*

INTERPRETIVE ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Reader’s Experiences	1	0%
Text Knowledge	18	2%
Inner Feelings	15	2%
Writer’s Experiences	8	1%
Text Knowledge	56	6%
Inner Feelings	5	1%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 20 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

About 2% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the subcategory of Reader’s Text Knowledge. In this subcategory, teacher-readers respond based on their understanding of how text (words, sentences, paragraphs, and essays) should function. For example, in “Review of Zydeco’s Cajun Kitchen,” a student wrote a long paragraph. Mr. Drake inserted the paragraph symbol (¶) and wrote, “See how this is a natural paragraph break?” To the student who wrote “Liuzza’s by the



Track,” Mr. Drake reminds the writer about the importance of description in a review when he wrote, “What I’m missing here is a real sense of how this food tastes. You ‘name check’ the BBQ shrimp po-boy, but I don’t have a sense of how it tastes.” In another essay, a student wrote, THE WOOD IS PAINTED PASTEL YELLOW, WITH PASTEL GREEN TRIM AND AN EMERALD GREEN FRENCH DOOR. Mr. Drake underlines the last phrase of the sentence and referred the student to end note 1 in which Mr. Drake wrote, “See how it seems that the wood has a door when you read this?” Mr. Drake relies on his knowledge of modifiers to help the student see how the sentence might be rewritten.

About 2% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the subcategory of Reader’s Inner Feelings. In “Jocko’s,” a student wrote, OVER THE MANY YEARS I’VE BEEN DOING THIS WITH THIS GROUP OF GENTLEMEN I’VE COME ACROSS MANY GREAT PLACES TO GET A STEAK. Mr. Drake, referring the student to end note 1, wrote, “Good voice here. Seems authentic.” Here, Mr. Drake let the student know that he connected with experience of meeting with others. In another instance, a student wrote in his letter of introduction that not only did he review the restaurant and the food, he also interviewed one of the owners. Mr. Drake wrote, “I appreciate the interview—shows a lot of work & engagement with the assignment.” The word “appreciate” conveys his feelings.

Just 1% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the subcategory of Writer’s Experience. In his end note the student who reviewed Parkway Bakery and Tavern, Mr. Drake commented on the writer’s ability to show how food and family complement each other: “You did a good job evoking the atmosphere and connecting it to family & New Orleans.” In his letter of introduction to his review of Lager’s International Ale House, a student expressed how the assignment helped him to OPEN HIS EYES TO HIS SURROUNDINGS and see his favorite

restaurant WITH A DIFFERENT SET OF EYES. Mr. Drake commented, “Glad you experienced something you were familiar with an open & fresh eye.” Mr. Drake chose to comment on the experience of the student and how that experience will be beneficial. Finally, one student reviewed the food eaten by the host of the television show *Bizarre Foods*. The student wrote about the host’s ability to describe the smell of the food he eats: FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN HE DESCRIBES THE SMELL OF A FERMENTED FRESHWATER BASS IN THAILAND HE SAID, “IT SMELLS LIKE A CROSS BETWEEN A CHEESE FACTORY, A SAUERKRAUT DRUM, AND HULK HOGAN’S OLD SWEATY GYM SOCKS.” THE WAY HE DESCRIBES THE SMELL SOUNDS ABSOLUTELY AWFUL BUT HE STILL ATE A SMALL PIECE FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT OF THE AUDIENCE. Mr. Drake wanted the student to describe in more detail his experience of watching the show, so he offered the student a series of questions: “Bring this to the next level—what makes this so entertaining? Why is eating something that smells so nasty entertaining? Does the audience feel above him? Is it like a freak show?” Clearly, Mr. Drake is appealing to the student’s experience of watching the show by asking the student to describe it further.

About 6% of Mr. Drake’s codings came under the subcategory of Writer’s Text Knowledge. Here, Mr. Drake responded to students regarding his perception of their use of syntax, organization, grammar, and other mechanics of writing. When a student wrote, THE SALAD CAME ON A PLATE SINCE I WAS DINING IN, Mr. Drake placed parentheses around and underlined the phrase CAME ON A PLATE SINCE I WAS DINING IN and commented, “This is obvious, don’t you think?” In other words, Mr. Drake directed the writer to rethink his use of words. Another student used third person pronouns to appeal to the audience: WHILE ENJOYING THEIR DISH and ITS LEATHER SEATS INVITE THE CUSTOMER.

Mr. Drake reacted to the impersonal tone of the words THEIR and THE CUSTOMER by crossing them out and replacing it with “you.” He then commented, “Do you see how you can better connect to your reader with direct address rather than vague nouns?”

Less than 1% of Mr. Drake’s comments fell in the subcategory of Writer’s Inner Feelings. When a student wrote, THIS ANALYSIS SHOULD HAVE AT LEAST CONVINCED SOMEONE TO WATCH [THE SHOW] OR AT LEAST SPARKED SOME INTEREST IN THE SHOW, Mr. Drake wrote, “Avoid this self-conscious writing about the writing.” Mr. Drake recognized that the writer may be feeling a bit insecure about his writing. Another student expressed how she felt the restaurant review was a “unique” experience when she discussed how she felt about taking notes in the restaurant. Mr. Drake wrote, “How difficult was it translating those notes into an essay?” Mr. Drake validated her feelings about the experience.

**Social orientation.** Writing instructors cannot escape their roles as teachers, but sometimes, they respond to student writing as if they were part of the same social group as the writer. In the social orientation, the teacher can respond as a peer (someone who has no more knowledge than the student regarding a particular subject) or as an expert (someone whose role can be as an expert reader, a literary scholar, or an instructor). Fourteen percent of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the category of social orientation. Table 21 presents the breakdown of the specific codings of Mr. Drake’s comments per subcategory.

Just 1% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the subcategory of Social Peer. As a peer, Mr. Drake used comments to show student writers that he was on the same playing field as they regarding their writing. For example, one student chose to review the show *Man vs. Food*. In his introductory reflection letter, the student wrote about how much he enjoyed being able to

review one of his favorite shows. Mr. Drake wrote, “Glad that you enjoyed it. Of course, I’m a fan of the show too.” He offered a similar comment to a student who reviewed *Bizarre Foods*: “As I mentioned in class, I’m a fan of the show, so I’m curious as to your thoughts.” Another student decided to include photographs of the restaurant he reviewed, to which Mr. Drake replied, “Thanks for including the photos!” and, “Very nice.” Several times, Mr. Drake wrote “obvious” to students to show that as a reader, he already inferred what the writer was conveying so there was no need to include that information.

Table 21

*Social Orientation: Mr. Drake’s Comments according to Subcategory*

SOCIAL ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Peer	13	1%
Expert	117	13%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 21 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

About 13% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the subcategory of Social Expert. Some of Mr. Drake’s comments reflected his role as expert reader or literary scholar, one who knows what to expect of good writing. To the student who wrote a very long paragraph in “Review of Zydeco’s Cajun Kitchen,” Mr. Drake inserted the paragraph symbol (¶) and wrote, “See how this is a natural paragraph break?” On another student’s essay, he inserted the words “of these” in the student’s phrase, A FEW POPULAR CHINESE RESTAURANTS INCLUDE . . . so that the phrase became A FEW OF THESE POPULAR CHINESE RESTAURANTS INCLUDE. Mr. Drake then commented, “See how this helps with flow?” Another student wrote, . . . I WILL BE FOCUSING ENTIRELY ON . . . in explanation of how he chose to review a movie. Mr. Drake commented, “Avoid this self-conscious ‘This is what I will be telling you’ style. Instead,

say something about that, like, ‘The most successful section of the film was. . . .’” Another student used the word CHECK three times for emphasis: THE ATMOSPHERE HAS A WHIMSICAL CARIBBEAN FEEL CORRUGATED STEEL AWNING AND CHRISTMAS LIGHTS OVER THE BAR? CHECK. REGGAE ON THE SOUND SYSTEM? CHECK. RUM COCKTAILS TOPPED WITH MORE FRUIT THAN A BRAZILIAN WOMEN’S HAT? CHECK. Mr. Drake responded, “I understand the effect you are going for here, but I would cut it down. It’s a bit too much.” He is reading the student’s writing as a piece of literature, and his comments reflect such a reading.

Other comments were very didactic in nature. The student reviewing Lager’s International Ale House write, LAGER’S HAS MORE OF AN UNDERGROUND FEEL TO IT, to which Mr. Drake responded, “Show us how. Perhaps refer back to some of the details you gave earlier.” The student reviewing P.F. Chang’s ended his essay with an incomplete sentence: P.F. CHANG’S IS BY FAR THE BEST with no period at the end. Mr. Drake drew a line after the word BES and wrote, “Need to finish sentence.” Many of Mr. Drake’s codings were circles around words, phrases, or punctuation marks, directing the student to make changes to those circled elements: CONNIE’S IS NEIGHBORHOOD RESTAURANT or IS NOW RESIDING IN IS MORE or WHEN YOU TASTE EAT IT IS A DIFFERENT STORY. Mr. Drake made no written comments beyond circling the phrases, but he clearly intended for the writer to make changes to the phrasing.

**Evaluative orientation.** At times, teachers’ comments reflect that the writing has or has not worked for them. In the evaluative orientation, the teacher responds either positively (the writing has worked) or negatively (the writing has not worked). About 12% of Mr. Drake’s

comments were coded as evaluative. Table 22 presents the breakdown of the specific codings of Mr. Drake’s comments per subcategory.

Table 22

*Evaluative Orientation: Mr. Drake’s Comments according to Subcategory*

EVALUATIVE ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Positive	81	9%
Negative	23	3%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 22 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

About 9% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the subcategory of Positive Evaluative. In this subcategory, the teacher indicates that the writing has worked. Many of Mr. Drake’s comments coded as positive dealt with issues of strategies that he had discussed in class with students. For example, in response to a student’s introductory reflection letter, Mr. Drake wrote, “Your voice & passion comes through here,” with voice being an important component of writing discussed in class. Other times, he commented on students’ use of detail, an important element of writing a review:

“Nice details overall!”

“Some good details here.”

“Good descriptive details of the tacos.”

“This is a very good description of this character.”

Other times, Mr. Drake’s comments indicate that he “got” what the writer intended. When one student described having to wait for an hour to get his food at a restaurant, Mr. Drake commented, “Wow! That is a very, very long time.” One student who interviewed a restaurant’s owner inserted a lot of quotes into the review. Mr. Drake commented, “Using the extensive

quotes is an interesting idea, and you did a lot of work on that.” The use of positive evaluative comments is consistent with Mr. Drake’s belief in connecting with students.

About 3% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the subcategory of Negative Evaluative. On these occasions, Mr. Drake let the writer know that his writing did not work. To the writer who used a lot of quotes in his review, Mr. Drake acknowledged that the quotes were “an interesting idea. . . , but don’t you think there is too much emphasis on the owner for a fair review?” In this particular comment, Mr. Drake showed both a positive orientation (the use of quotes worked) and a negative orientation (too many quotes are excessive), illustrating that many of a teacher’s comments can be multiply coded.

At times when the writing does not work for him, Mr. Drake questions the writer to push him to think more deeply. One student wrote about Connie’s, a neighborhood restaurant. He wrote, THEY WERE BUSY, WITH LINES OF PEOPLE OF TWENTY. Mr. Drake asked, “Can you reword?” That same student inserted the following sentence into a paragraph about the wait time to order his food: THE ATMOSPHERE OF CONNIE’S IS FRIENDLY AND ENERGETIC. Mr. Drake asked, “Does [this] seem out of place & interrupting the flow? Can you find a better, more appropriate place for this sentence?”

**Pedagogical orientation.** Many times, a teacher uses the students’ writing as a springboard for instruction. In this orientation, the teacher focuses on the student writer’s ideas and text. He tries to teach the writer through changing the writer’s ideas and text, expanding his ideas and text, and supporting his ideas and text. About 53% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into this category, with most of the codings (45%) coming in the “change/correct text” subcategory. Table 23 presents the breakdown of the specific codings of Mr. Drake’s comments per subcategory.

Table 23

*Pedagogical Orientation: Mr. Drake’s Comments according to Subcategory*

PEDAGOGICAL ORIENTATION		TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Change/Correct Ideas		9	1%
	Text	409	45%
Expand	Ideas	20	2%
	Text	24	3%
Support	Ideas	6	1%
	Text	11	1%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 23 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

Just 1% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the Change/Correct Ideas subcategory. Many of Mr. Drake’s comments coded in this subcategory related to the purpose of the assignment. In “Tasty Chinese Cuisine,” Mr. Drake wrote in an end note, “You need some ‘show not tell’ with a favorite dish or two for the audience of this review.” Here, Mr. Drake reminded the student of the need for better description. In that same essay, the student wrote a long paragraph about the spicy food at P.F. Chang’s. Mr. Drake referred the student to a numbered end note, where Mr. Drake had written, “Edit down & discuss some of the other flavors—Describe flavors & textures (see handout for ideas to lead you to the thesaurus).” Not only did Mr. Drake ask the student to rethink his writing, he referred him to a handout for further information. In his end note to the student writing about Zydeco’s Cajun Kitchen, Mr. Drake wrote, “You need a bit of balance—streamlining the description of the setting & expanding & elaborating on the dishes.” This comment functions both here in the Change/Correct Ideas subcategory and in the Expand Idea category since he has asked the student both to streamline (change) and expand his ideas. Through such comments, Mr. Drake is teaching students to rethink their ideas and to think about the structures of their essays.



Nearly half (45%) of Mr. Drake's total codings fell into the Change/Correct Text subcategory. Mr. Drake believes that part of his job is to help students write correctly, which for him means helping students identify their grammar errors. Because he will sometimes insert punctuation marks or circle phrases with syntax errors or write comments in the margins related to grammar, nearly half of his codings fell into this subcategory. For example, when a student wrote, FOR INSTANCE, SOMETIMES THE SHRIMP FRIED RICE IS FILLED TO THE TOP OF THE SERVING BOWL, OTHER TIMES IT IS ONLY FILLED THREE FOURTHS OF THE WAY OR LESS, Mr. Drake wrote, "Comma splice—are you familiar with how to identify & correct this?" Another student wrote, CONNIE'S IS NEIGHBORHOOD RESTAURANT IN RESERVE. IT IS LOCATED AT . . ." Mr. Drake commented, "Can you combine?" One student had trouble with repetition of phrases: OSAKA IS A VERY EXPENSIVE RESTAURANT AND IS VERY WELL KNOWN BECAUSE FOR A LONG TIME IT WAS THE ONLY HIBACHI RESTAURANT IN SLIDELL FOR A LONG TIME. In a numbered end note, Mr. Drake commented, "I would suggest reading your paper out loud to catch little things like this—repeating phrases. You will pick up these easier." However, most of Mr. Drake's codings that fell into this category were not written comments but were circles or punctuation insertions in the essays.

About 2% of Mr. Drake's codings fell into the Expand Ideas category. Because many of Mr. Drake's comments received multiple codings, many of the comments included here were included in other subcategories as well. The comments served more than one purpose. About 2% of Mr. Drake's codings fell into this subcategory. One student made an assumption that the reader would know what he meant by the phrase NEIGHBORHOOD RESTAURANT. Mr. Drake wrote, "I'm not familiar with this, so perhaps a description of what you feel a

neighborhood restaurant should be.” Here, Mr. Drake also lets the reader know that the writing is not working for him, so it was also coded in the Evaluative category as a Negative comment. To the student who wrote about a food show being entertaining, Mr. Drake wrote, “Bring this to the next level—what makes it entertaining? Why is eating something that smells so nasty entertaining? Does the audience feel above him? Is it like a freak show? Think about that. Your comment about curiosity in the next paragraph is a good place to start.” This comment shows that Mr. Drake wants an expansion of ideas, but the comment was also coded under the Interpretive orientation in the Writer’s Experiences subcategory as Mr. Drake reacted to the writer’s experience of being entertained by the show.

About 3% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the subcategory of Expand Text. Because Mr. Drake assigned students to review a restaurant or a television show or movie about food, he instructed them to provide rich description. Many of his comments instructed students to add more descriptive words. When a student wrote about a dish SAUTEED IN A NEW ORLEANS BARBEQUE SAUCE, Mr. Drake wrote, “Can you describe what this is and how it tastes?” He was not telling the student that his ideas were wrong, only that he needed to add more description. Another student wrote that a restaurant had A NAKED TIMBER STRUCTURE. Mr. Drake underlined that phrase and wrote, “Could you explain/describe this better? I can’t quite picture it.”

Just 1% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the Support Ideas subcategory. In this subcategory, the teacher both reminds students to provide support for their ideas and supports students’ ideas. In many instances, Mr. Drake wrote comments reminding students to support their claims. When a student wrote about the movie *Tampopo* and described a montage scene, Mr. Drake wrote, “Writing about the montage is a good way to talk about this theme. Use this

detail and rewrite the opening. Good intuition here.” Mr. Drake supported the writer’s use of montage to illustrate his overall theme, but he also wanted the writer to add further support for the theme. In his end note to the student who wrote about a Hibachi restaurant, Mr. Drake wrote, “A good description of this restaurant. You do need more details of the taste of the food & how the hibachi method works.” In both of these examples, Mr. Drake supported the students’ efforts but asked them to add support for their writing.

Just 1% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the Support Text subcategory. Sometimes, Mr. Drake chose to reinforce classroom instruction through his comments. The student who reviewed *Tampopo* wrote a paragraph with dialogue from the movie. Mr. Drake commented, “This is a nice illustrative detail that you can keep.” To the student who reviewed the movie *No Reservations*, Mr. Drake wrote, “Generally, a good opening paragraph. You told the reader the basic premise, identified the main characters and gave your non-recommendation.” Here, Mr. Drake commented on the writer’s ability to structure a solid opening paragraph. Another writer described how one restaurant prepared food: BUT THAT FACT THAT HIBACHI IS COOKED IN FRONT OF YOU PUT THE SERVICE AND ATMOSPHERE OVER THE TOP. Mr. Drake supported the writer’s use of detail when he wrote, “Here’s a great visual detail that can really connect with the reader.”

**Cognitive/Emotive orientation.** In responding to student writing, teachers often analyze the writing or express their feeling about the writing. In the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation, teachers’ comments reflect either an analytical response or an emotional response. Ten percent of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into this orientation with more codings being analytical than emotional. Table 24 presents the breakdown of the specific codings of Mr. Drake’s comments per subcategory.

Table 24

*Cognitive/Emotive Orientation: Mr. Drake’s Comments according to Subcategory*

COGNITIVE/EMOTIVE ORIENTATION	TOTAL CODINGS	PERCENTAGES
Analytical	78	9%
Emotional	8	1%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 24 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

About 9% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into the Analytical subcategory. Many of the comments that appear in this subcategory have also been coded into other subcategories. However, Mr. Drake often uses questions to show that he is analyzing a student’s writing. When one student wrote, A FRIENDLY HOSTESS WILL ALWAYS GREET THE CUSTOMER IN AND SHOW THEM WHERE TO SIT, Mr. Drake underlined AND SHOW THEM WHERE TO SIT and wrote, “Do you need this?” The student writing about P.F. Chang’s wrote, IF ONE WANT TO WATCH THE BIG GAME AND HAVE A COUPLE DRINKS WITH SOME FRIENDS, IT IS SURE TO BE PLAYING AT P.F. CHANG’S. Mr. Drake asked, “Who is your audience? Does including this information help your review & recommendation? Does the rest of the review have this audience in mind?” The student writing about Parkway Bakery wrote, THE WOOD IS PAINTED A PASTEL YELLOW, WITH PASTEL GREEN TRIM AND AN EMERALD GREEN FRENCH DOOR. Mr. Drake asked, “See how it seems that the wood has a door when you read this?” The use of such questions showed Mr. Drake’s analysis of the text, and in many cases, the questions were intended to push the writers to rethink their work.

Other comments showed Mr. Drake’s analysis of the writing though they were not written as questions. One student wrote about a long wait to be served: BECAUSE OF HOW CROWDED CONNIE’S WAS I HAD TO WAIT AN HOUR FOR MY FOOD BUT WHEN I FINALLY RECEIVED IT, THE SERVER WAS VERY POLITE AND APOLOGETIC. Mr.

Drake wrote, “You are forgiving about it and point out the positives, but you will be more persuasive if you address this negative point more.” Mr. Drake has read the writing analytically.

Just 1% of Mr. Drake’s codings fell in the Emotional subcategory. On only eight occasions did K comment in an emotional way. On two occasions, he responded with “Wow!” to the student writers. One instance of this was in his reaction to a student’s description of a seafood platter at Zydeco’s Cajun Kitchen. The student wrote, THE LARGEST AND MOST EXPENSIVE PLATTER IS THE ZYDECO COMBO PLATTER WHICH CONTAINS A LITTLE OF EVERYTHING IN IT. Mr. Drake wrote, “Wow! The Zydeco Platter seems like an amazing picture, with seafood piled high.” In another instance, a student wrote about the long wait time at Connie’s restaurant. Mr. Drake wrote, “Wow! That is a very long time. Don’t you think you should address that?”

**Summary.** More than half of Mr. Drake’s codings fell into one orientation, the Pedagogical Orientation. The remaining 47% of the codings were fairly evenly distributed across the other four orientations. With many more codings (NC=902) than comments (N=557), Mr. Drake obviously had many of his comments multiply coded.

### **Individual Themes**

Three major themes arose from the analysis of Mr. Drake’s interviews, observations, and syllabus. These themes, specific to Mr. Drake, demonstrate the relationship between Mr. Drake’s beliefs and his practices. The first two themes focus on the idea of “connecting” while the third theme focuses on writing as inquiry.

**Connecting writing with the real world.** The first theme to emerge from the data is that the skills learned in freshman English composition should help connect students to the tasks

expected of them in the real world. Perhaps because of his engineering background, Mr. Drake thinks about how the skills he is teaching can be useful outside of the academy. He said, “I’m teaching a lot of engineering majors, and so I use my many years . . . in the engineering field to talk to them about how important the class is, to realize that you’re going to be using this stuff.” One thing that concerns Mr. Drake is that some writing teachers may not think beyond the immediate context of what they are teaching. He observed, “And sometimes, . . . English teachers . . . get really focused in our writing and stuff and it’s easy to miss the real world connection” needed by students in various majors. He wants students to see how the things they are learning help connect them to “their place in the world, . . . the grand scheme.”

The way Mr. Drake structures his class supports the theme of connecting to the real world. For the first half or three-fourths of the semester, students focus their writing on the larger theme of food. Mr. Drake designed the assignments to be useful in a real-world setting. For example, one of the assignments is to review a restaurant menu. He instructed students to review the menu according to their college majors. Business majors could review franchising issues related to the restaurant chain, or science majors could review the use of artificial sweeteners or the effects of too many chemical additives in food. In other words, he wants the assignment to be applicable to the possible career choices of the students.

In his syllabus, Mr. Drake stated the importance of writing in terms of life beyond college. He stated, “This course will aim to develop the inquiry, discovery and writing skills that you will use in your college career and beyond.” Additionally, Mr. Drake recognizes that students write for many other purposes even while they are in college. Therefore, he mentioned in his syllabus that the writing students do in ENGL 102 will help them to “engage successfully with an increasingly text-heavy world.”

Because the writing program is inquiry-based, Mr. Drake often jokes that “inquiring minds want to know.” At least four times in the first interview, he made that joke, acknowledging that most of his students are too young to remember that slogan from the *National Enquirer*. In any case, he thinks the statement makes sense in terms of connections. If students are going to become writers, Mr. Drake said that they have to have some connection with the subject. His role is to help the student connect the concepts being taught in class with the topic about which students are curious. These topics tend to be things not related to English but to interests outside of the academy.

The writing skills students need should be skills beyond the “tweeting and texting” that students do all the time. Mr. Drake said the skills they are learning in freshman composition should help students go beyond the everyday writing into what he called the “professional part.” In other words, to connect with the real world, students need to know certain rhetorical skills and be able to write in a manner consistent with Edited American English to enable them to make the connections beyond college.

He emphasized these rhetorical skills and language skills in his classroom activities. For example, in a peer editing exercise, students wrote comments on four or five their classmates’ essays. Once all students had commented on at least four other essays, he asked them to share what they found that worked in the essays they read. As students shared, he reiterated what they said, then discussed the rhetorical strategies that students noticed. One student noted one author gave a “good mental picture.” Mr. Drake mentioned how the use of “specific concrete” descriptions helps give the reader a sense of direction. The use of specific support is one of the rhetorical skills that Mr. Drake feels is necessary in writing if students are going to make real-world connections. When another student mentioned what she liked in one of the essays she

reviewed, Mr. Drake discussed the importance of the “guiding principle” of the paper. Yet another student “liked the atmosphere” in one of the essays he read, and Mr. Drake reminded the class that setting the atmosphere was one of the elements of writing that they had discussed in a previous class. As students shared, he repeated phrases like “rhetorical moves” or “rhetorical strategies,” those skills that they would need as they wrote longer essays.

In another class session, the students met in groups to review a copy of one student’s essay. Each group reviewed a different paragraph of the essay, and Mr. Drake asked them to focus on both “global” issues, which he defined as content and context, and “local” issues, which he defined as mechanics. As the students discussed their assigned paragraph, Mr. Drake circulated around the room and asked each group to justify why they made their various suggestions for revision. By asking them to justify their responses, he reminded them that they are learning to “exercise rhetorical and analytical muscles” that they will need. Not only did he ask each group to justify their suggestions, but he took the time to teach mini-lessons on skills that he expects them to know. Some of the mini-lessons in that particular class focused on comma usage, paragraph length, authorial control, the importance of inquiry. To Mr. Drake, the skills students practice in class are the skills they will put to use not only in their writing for his course but for writing in the real world. During the interview, Mr. Drake did not mention specific skills that he thought were important to learn, but his commenting practices reveal the skills that he obviously believes are important, and many of these skills are listed as student learning objectives in the syllabus.

His commenting practices reinforce the theme that the skills learned in ENGL 102 will help them connect to skills they will use in the real world. This theme was especially evident in the Pedagogical Orientation, the orientation in which Mr. Drake had the highest percentage of



codings (53%). Comments in the Pedagogical Orientation are intended to instruct students regarding issues with text and ideas. Because so many of his codings fell into this orientation, he obviously places a high priority on instructing students regarding their text and ideas. Forty-five percent of his codings were in the subcategory of change/correct text, indicating his emphasis on what he called the mechanical issues (i.e. grammar, syntax, organization). However, his comments did more than point out miscues; instead, he provided specific feedback that instructed students. For example, many of his comments to students focused on their sentence structure. To one student, he wrote, “Can you reword this to focus on the real subject of the sentence?” Another student wrote several comma splices, so he commented, “Comma splice—are you familiar with how to identify & correct this?”

Other comments in this orientation focused on organizational skills students would need to write for real-world application. One student’s transitions seemed out of place, so Mr. Drake suggested, “Consider this: Rather than having your transition sentence at the end of a paragraph, end naturally and use the first sentence of the next paragraph to transition (perhaps a more natural place).” With this comment, he instructed the student to make organizational changes so that the writing would communicate more clearly. Another student mentioned the owner of a restaurant in the first paragraph of his essay, and then five paragraphs later, he gave the background information on the owner. Mr. Drake wrote, “You’ve already mentioned him earlier. Can you find a more appropriate place to include this information?” Organization is an important skill to Mr. Drake, a skill that he believes is necessary for students to know in order to be prepared for real-world writing experiences.

Most of Mr. Drake’s comments in the Interpretive Orientation fell into the Writer’s Text Knowledge subcategory. Comments made by Mr. Drake in this subcategory focused on how the

writer's use (or misuse) of textual structure impacted the reader's ability to make meaning. In terms of the theme of connecting to the real world, if a student's writing interferes with a reader's ability to make meaning, then the writing is not clear. Therefore, clarity is an important skill. For example, one student was using vague nouns to refer to people who might be reading the restaurant review. Mr. Drake crossed out nouns or pronouns he felt were vague (*their* and *the customer*) and replaced them with second person pronouns. He then wrote, "Do you see how you can better connect to your reader with direct address rather than vague nouns?" He often reminded students to use words that sounded natural rather than overly formal.

In the Evaluative Orientation, Mr. Drake uses comments to tell writers whether or not their writing worked for him. Though he had more comments coded in the Positive subcategory than the Negative subcategory, both types of comments in this orientation often focused on the use of specific details, a skill he reviewed in class. Also, in an interview he mentioned the importance of finding and using specific evidence in writing persuasive essays, something which he believes students should know how to do well as part of their liberal arts education. To one student who stopped short of providing detail, Mr. Drake wrote, "Here's a great visual detail that can really connect with the reader—can you describe & show the reader this tabletop service? It's an important part of the appeal of this restaurant, right?" Another student needed to focus more on descriptive writing, so Mr. Drake wrote, "Here I would specifically show the reader two dishes—show how good they are using descriptive terms. You need to convince your audience how good P.F. Chang's is."

In the Social Orientation, Mr. Drake had more comments coded into the Expert subcategory (13%) than the Peer subcategory (1%). The higher percentage in the Expert subcategory supports the theme that college writing should help students develop the skills for

life beyond college since his comments reflect that he is reading the writing as an expert reader. Many of his comments coded in the Expert subcategory focused on proofreading for the mechanics of writing. In the text of the essays, he often drew arrows to move words to a different part of the sentence, or he crossed off unnecessary words, or he changed verb tenses. Comments such as these indicated that he values correctness in the area of the mechanics of writing (syntax, grammar, and spelling, for example). Other comments coded as expert focused on rhetorical skills such as considering audience. For example, when one student used the phrase *every man* to refer to all people in general, Mr. Drake wrote, “Don’t focus on one gender. Some women might like this, too.” At other times, he encouraged students to “show the reader,” or “tell the reader” more detail, or he asked, “Who’s your intended audience?”

Comments coded in the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation were placed in the Analytical subcategory nearly 10 times more often than in the Emotional subcategory. Many of the analytical comments were phrased as questions intended to make the writer analyze what he (the writer) has written or to demonstrate to the writer how the reader analyzed what had been written. The questions often focused on the skills Mr. Drake considers important. For example, he inserted the paragraph symbol into the text of an essay and wrote, “See how this is a natural paragraph break?” This question focused on organizational skills. To another student who made an unsubstantiated claim, he wrote, “Why? Elaborate.” This question focused on a rhetorical skill of providing specific evidence.

**Connecting with students.** The second theme to emerge from the data is that teachers of freshman composition should connect with their students. While Mr. Drake did not say what he meant by *connect*, Mr. Drake mentioned connecting with students more than 25 times in his first interview. He talked about how the courses that he teaches help him connect with students. He

teaches a technical writing course, and because he was in a job that required technical communication, he thinks that helps him connect with his students. In another course, film as literature, he can make connections with students because “everybody sees movies” and together, he and the students “look at movies as text.” In his writing courses, he works hard “not to be the authority figure who sits up there . . . and rules his scepter” but to connect with students through being more accessible. He believes that connecting with students means participating alongside them when necessary and providing them with the support they need to write successfully.

The syllabus does not specifically mention the importance of teachers connecting with students, though it does mention being “an active participant” in the classroom. He also uses first-person and second-person pronouns in the syllabus, suggesting that the class is not about teachers and students in general but about himself (“I”) as the teacher, “we” as a classroom of writers, and “you” as the students. For example, when he discussed some of the daily work students would be required to do in class, he wrote, “We will often be writing shorter, more informal pieces in class,” implying that he would participate with them. Then, when discussing how he would assess the informal writing, he wrote, “I will often offer you constructive feedback on your daily work,” suggesting that he would provide them support. Finally, in his syllabus, he discussed the importance of meeting with him for conferences. Such meetings are another way that he feels that he can connect with students. He told students that he “looked forward” to discussing their work with them, and he told them they could come by his office during office hours “as often as you like.”

Mr. Drake’s classroom interactions suggest he believes he should make personal connections with his students. During the two class sessions I observed, he did not stand in front of the room and lecture (though he said he does lecture at times). Instead, he circulated around

the room as students participated in a peer editing exercise and in group work leading up to a group assignment. He provided direction for their work, but he did not act in a dictatorial manner. Instead, he encouraged the work they were doing. For example, as he walked around the room, he agreed with one student that another student's phrasing "doesn't roll off the tongue," but instead of telling the student suggestions for revising the stilted phrase, he asked others in the group to make suggestions. He then asked the members of the group to justify their choices of wording. He made sure to provide the instruction each group needed without having to stand in front of the whole class in a formal manner and lecture. Rather, he connected with his students by teaching mini-lessons based on their needs.

Mr. Drake also talked about connecting with his students through the comments he writes. He does this through finding something good to say about each paper, even the "most egregious paper," and finding something to write to encourage the student. He connects with them through calling them by name as he comments, through recognizing the students as individuals. He also connects with them through building trust: "With comments, you've got to connect. You've got to show that you understand what they're trying to say and where they're coming from, . . . that you're not some person kind of just sitting there blindly counting errors." If he can recognize what the student is trying to do and comment specifically to the student regarding the student's effort, then he thinks that he has made a connection with that student.

The percentages of his codings in the specific orientations support that teachers should connect with their students. His highest percentage of codings (53% of the total codings) fell in the Pedagogical Orientation, demonstrating that he wants his written comments to be not only constructive but instructive as well. The high percentage of instructional, constructive feedback corresponds with the statement in his syllabus that he wanted to provide constructive feedback.

The instructional comments coded into this orientation help him provide the support he feels they need to write successfully.

With 9% of his codings in the Positive subcategory of the Evaluative Orientation, Mr. Drake demonstrated that he wants to connect with his students by indicating to them when and how their writing works for him. Many of his comments coded into this orientation simulate a conversation, as evidenced by Mr. Drake's use of first-person and second-person pronouns. For example, in response to one student's reflection letter stapled to the front of an essay, Mr. Drake wrote, "Glad you experienced something you were familiar with with an open and fresh eye. That will serve you well in this class and throughout your career." With this comment, Mr. Drake encouraged the student to continue working on certain rhetorical skills that would be useful for the course and for his career.

Certain comments coded into the Interpretive Orientation promote the theme of the importance of teachers connecting with students. Mr. Drake was the only one of the four participants to have comments coded into each subcategory of this orientation, suggesting that Mr. Drake values making meaning of student writing. In making meaning, he made connections to the students, especially his comments dealing with the subcategory of Inner Feelings. He told one student that the writing was "enjoyable," and he responded to another student's feelings when he said, "It seems like you had a good experience at Rum House." The conversational tone of such meaning-making comments shows that he wants to make connections to students even as he reads their essays.

Although just 1% of Mr. Drake's comments were coded in the Peer subcategory of the Social Orientation, those few comments indicate that Mr. Drake works to connect with his students on certain levels. To the student who reviewed a movie for one assignment, Mr. Drake

wrote, “I’m glad you’re going back to the file to take a close ‘reading.’ That process is rewarding and allows you [to] discover some of the depth of the piece.” With this comment, he is not acting as the teacher or the expert; instead, he responded as a person who, like the student, knows the value of watching a film for its literary aspects. By valuing the student’s experience and affirming the student, Mr. Drake connects to the student.

Even comments coded into the Cognitive/Emotive Interpretation support the theme of teachers connecting with students. Most of his comments in this orientation fell into the Analytical subcategory. Many of Mr. Drake’s comments in this subcategory were phrased as questions, suggesting a conversational approach to analyzing writing. Conversations can promote connections with students. For example, after Mr. Drake inserted the word *only* into a student’s sentence, he wrote, “See how these descriptive words help emphasize the point?”

The data for Mr. Drake reinforce the theme of teachers connecting with students. Mr. Drake clearly values connecting as evidenced by his use of the word *connect* so frequently in the interviews, and his classroom and syllabus infer the importance of making connections with students. Finally, his commenting practices confirm that written comments can help teachers connect with their students.

**Writing as inquiry.** The final theme emerging from the Mr. Drake’s data is that inquiry should be an integral component of a freshman writing program. Although all four of the instructors mentioned writing as inquiry, Mr. Drake mentioned it more than 40 times in the first interview. I think the fact that he has made the *National Enquirer* slogan a catch phrase for his class shows that he believes in the inquiry-based program. On several other occasions, he talked about the “inquiring mind” without attaching it to the *National Enquirer* slogan “Inquiring minds want to know.”

He believes that inquiry is a logical fit in a writing program, especially the research component of the course. As students select topics for their research, they have to be curious and find a topic that means something to them. Students with inquiring minds need to be able to filter through the information they receive and determine whether it is useful or credible. As they conduct the research, they have to read and think and ask questions about what they are reading. Then, as they reflect about their writing, they have think about their writing process, articulate it, and write about it. As they work on their writing assignments and make decisions about their writing, they are “exercising the inquiry process.”

The concept of inquiry came up often when Mr. Drake talked about his role as a teacher, specifically as he discussed how he tries to help his students learn to think. He believes that the inquiry process is about thinking, and his role is to facilitate such thinking rather than to tell students how or what to think: “I like to think that I’m not the person who is going to say, ‘This is the way you do that, now do it.’ It’s a cliché, [but] I try to give them the keys to find it out themselves.”

His syllabus also conveys his belief in the importance of inquiry. He called the course an “inquiry-based college level writing course” rather than a freshman English composition course. He explained what that inquiry might entail: “being an active participant in asking questions, investigating subjects and discovering information and how you might position yourself in these issues.” He reminded students that their writing will reflect their “individual inquiry,” and their process writing in class will allow them to “think” about issues. Even in the classroom as students participated in a peer review exercise, he reminded students that “an essay needs to give more inquiry.”



In the classroom, Mr. Drake pushed his students to inquire about the writing process. During one of the class sessions I observed, students participated in a peer review activity. He asked students to read another student's essay and write one positive comment and one negative comment. As students read other students' papers, they had to make choices about the writing and decide how the writing worked or did not work for them. Their comments to each other reflected their thought processes in determining the effectiveness of the persuasive writing. As he debriefed the peer review activity, he reiterated important concepts he had been teaching them over the past few weeks. Such reiteration modeled inquiry—how does this piece of writing meet the criteria for successful writing, and how does the writing appeal to the reader? In another class session, students met in groups to prepare for a group presentation. As students made decisions about the presentation, he reminded them that they would be writing peer evaluations of each other's presentations. He then circulated around the room prompting the students to “exercise rhetorical and analytical muscles” in this exercise in preparation for the kinds of research they would be doing later in the semester. By providing practice in inquiry in an oral group presentation, he prepared them for using inquiry in their writing.

Inquiry is on his mind even as he comments. His practice of phrasing comments as questions supports the inquiry process. He said, “If you're talking about the inquiry process and asking questions, it seems appropriate in your comments as you're going through and assessing papers, to phrase, where appropriate, into questions.” He also believes that his practice of writing key notes—numbers on the essay keyed to a longer end note of explanation—fosters inquiry. Those comments act as “tools” to help students “figure out how to better express what [they] want to say.” As they work out what they want to say, they are using inquiry. For example, one student's paper included six key notes that Mr. Drake had written on a separate

piece of paper attached to the back of the essay. Two key notes focused on how to write numerals. Two other key notes focused on sentence structure. The other two key notes focused on rhetorical strategies. These six key notes remind students to think about what they are writing.

The distribution of Mr. Drake's comments across the five orientations also verifies the importance of inquiry in the writing process. Although more than half of his codings fell into the Pedagogical Orientation, the remaining codings (48%) were nearly evenly distributed across the remaining orientations. If Mr. Drake thought that all comments should deal with one narrow aspect of writing (i.e. mechanics of grammar), then his comments would not have been coded across all orientations. In terms of inquiry, such a distribution indicates that he wants his students to think about more than just the mechanics of writing. For example, in the Interpretive Orientation, the reader comments as he makes meaning of the writing. This meaning-making process is in itself inquiry—the reader inquires about the writer's intent and responds once meaning has occurred. For example, when Mr. Drake wrote, "This is obvious, don't you think?" he inquired as to the writer's intended meaning and responded to let the reader know he had arrived at an understanding of the writing.

In the Social Orientation, Mr. Drake's comments reflected inquiry especially when he acted in the role of expert. About 13% of his codings fell into the Expert subcategory, and many of these comments are intended to help the writer question his writing and consider possible revisions. For example, in one of his key notes, Mr. Drake told a student, "You are forgiving about [the long wait] and point out the positives, but you will be more persuasive if you address this negative point more." By reacting as an expert reader responding to argumentative writing,

Mr. Drake both modeled inquiry while directing the writer to expand his writing to be more persuasive.

Comments coded into the Evaluative Orientation signal inquiry as Mr. Drake let the writers know how their writing worked for him. Most of his comments in this orientation fell into the Positive subcategory, but comments coded as both positive and negative facilitate inquiry. When he wrote, “A bit confusing, can you reword?” he modeled inquiry while asking the writer to consider a more appropriate word. In another instance, a student had used the phrase “health nuts” in his essay. Mr. Drake responded, “You might alienate your audience here. You might not mean it as insulting, but I’d reword.” Again, he modeled inquiry by showing the writer the thought process behind the comment, but he also suggested that the writer reconsider his wording. The writer will have to question his choice of wording as he revises the essay.

Comments coded into the Pedagogical Orientation focus on the writer’s text and ideas. When Mr. Drake responded to his students’ text and ideas, he often suggested ways that they could change, expand, or support their text and ideas without telling them that they must do so. For example, to the student who wrote a series of short sentences, he wrote, “Better combined.” The student can make the choice as to whether or not to combine, but he at least has something to consider in the revision process. Many of the comments coded into this orientation deal with audience, and consideration of audience implies inquiry as the writer makes choices in order to connect with the audience. For example, one of his students wrote a long essay providing details but not much review of the restaurant. In the margins of the student’s essay, Mr. Drake wrote the numeral 5 five times, keyed to key note 5 on the last page of the essay. In key note 5, Mr. Drake wrote, “Some good details here; however, this reads more like a narrative (or story). Re-work this to show the reader what you did, not tell the whole story.” As the writer revises the

draft, he will have to consider not only the specific instructions for the assignment but also the audience for whom he wrote the restaurant review.

As stated previously, Mr. Drake phrased many of his comments as questions. Comments written as questions were often coded into the Analytical subcategory of the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation. About 9% of Mr. Drake's codings were analytical, second only to comments coded in the Change/Correct Text subcategory. Analysis implies inquiry in that Mr. Drake must analyze students' writing in order to respond. As he models analysis, he models inquiry. Many of his analytical comments direct the student to do more thinking. For example, when one student ended his restaurant review questioning if the food would be as good the next time he visited, Mr. Drake wrote, "You're almost there at the ending, but I somehow want a bit more as you look back on that changing restaurant. It seems to say so much." He analyzed the writing and pointed the writer to probe the theme of change more deeply in the revision.

The theme of the importance of inquiry in a writing course emerged through the analysis of Mr. Drake's data. The repetition of the word *inquiry* in the interviews, the focus on inquiry in the classroom and in the syllabus, and the comments focused on inquiry suggest that Mr. Drake not only believes in the importance of inquiry, but he practices it as well.

### **Teacher Reaction**

I met with Mr. Drake about four months after the data collection period to review with him the results of his comment analysis. After explaining the meaning of the various orientations and their subcategories, I reviewed with Mr. Drake the breakdown of his codings and explained the how the narrative report showed examples of his comments related to each subcategory.

Mr. Drake said that he understood the information, and he was not surprised about the results. He said, “I don’t see anything out of the ordinary.” He mentioned that the paper he had given me was an early paper, their second short formal assignment, and “absolutely the first essays get a lot more.” Thus, the higher number in the Pedagogical Orientation was about what he would have expected since he wants to show students “where we need to work.”

He said that prior to his participation in this project, he tried “to self-monitor and self-question and step back and look at his comments” in a detached way. However, this project was valuable to him because of the systematic way in which his comments were analyzed. He would be able to think about the results and reflect on them.

**Summary: Mr. Drake**

I can best describe Mr. Drake as a conscientious teacher who wants his students to see the importance of writing. He also wants to provide as much support for his students as possible, both in the class and through his comments. He places a high value on critical thinking and self-reflection. He knows what he believes, and he is confident in his classroom techniques and his commenting practices. His commenting practices are somewhat consistent with the principles suggested by Sommers (1982) and Straub (2000), though he did have more emphasis on grammar for this particular assignment than he would probably have further in the semester.

**Summary: Individual Case Analyses**

Participants’ interview responses, classroom instructional practices, course documents, and written comments were analyzed to revealed specific themes important to the individual participants. These individual themes, uncovered through and verified by the various forms of data, comprise the instructors’ primary beliefs about the purpose of freshman writing and their

roles as teachers of freshman English composition. The participants' written response practices both support their beliefs and convey the importance of their beliefs to students.

In this study, I did not assume that teachers would have the same beliefs or employ the same written response practices. Rather, I sought to determine the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their written response practices regardless of the content and form of those beliefs and practices. However, the teachers not only articulated their beliefs through the interview process, but they verified their beliefs in the way they constructed their syllabi, taught their students, and replied in writing to their students' texts. In the cross- case analysis to follow, I will build on the individual case studies to discuss certain common beliefs and response practices. The goal for the cross-case analysis is to uncover important themes related to the main research question, "How do freshman English composition teachers' written comments on students' essays reflect their beliefs about the purpose of response and their roles in the writing process?"

## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH FINDINGS: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to determine the answer to the question, “How do freshman English composition teachers’ written comments on students’ essays reflect their beliefs about the purpose of response and their roles in the writing process?” To answer that question, I conducted a case study analysis of four individual cases using a compilation of several data sources. Beliefs specific to the four individual teachers emerged through the analysis of all data sources, and teachers’ written commenting practices verified those beliefs. The individual case analyses therefore suggest that teachers’ written response practices support their beliefs, and their beliefs shape their response practices.

In order to uncover major themes about the relationship between beliefs and practices, I analyzed all data sources used for the individual case analyses to conduct a cross-case analysis. Major themes emerge from the data but are also verified through the data. I present the cross-case analysis by reporting common beliefs among the four participants (as opposed to the individual beliefs uncovered in the individual case studies), comparing the written response practices of the four participants, and describing the major themes of this study.

#### **Common Beliefs**

During the initial interviews, I asked each participant questions in four broad areas: beliefs about the purpose of freshman writing, knowledge of the specific writing program, understanding of best practices for response, and perspectives of their response practices. Relying primarily on the interview data, and analyzing their responses in light of other data sources, I determined three common beliefs—beliefs common to the four participants--about the

purposes of freshman English composition and the teachers' roles in the writing as explicitly articulated by the four participants. These common beliefs are important for determining the major themes and for answering the research question.

### **The Purpose of Freshman English Composition**

The first common belief relates to the purpose of freshman English composition. Each of the four participants felt that one purpose of freshman writing is to teach students the rhetorical, thinking, and writing skills they will need for success in college and beyond. The skills to which they refer correspond to the specific program outcomes as outlined in the custom edition of the course textbook: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; and knowledge of writing conventions, though none of the four participants specifically mentioned program outcomes in interviews. This purpose—that freshman English composition should teach students the skills they need for success in college and beyond—is also consistent with the program identity as described in the course textbook: the program “[e]mphasizes transferrable skills and strategies” and “[h]elps students see first-year writing courses as relevant to other areas of academic study and to their lives” (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. iv).

Both Ms. Bowden and Mr. Drake noted that freshman English composition (English comp) is one class that nearly every student must take, and often, English comp is the first class of their first day of their first year of college. According to Ms. Bowden,

So it is our job as the department that touches almost every single student who steps foot on our campus, it's our job to ensure that if they have not yet been made college ready that they are college-ready by the time they complete our program.

Mr. Drake stated what seems to be obvious, that the course is “*freshman comp*,” (emphasis mine) but he said that freshman comp plays a certain “part in the university” to



prepare students for college success. While “they’re freshman, they’re just coming in, the university says they should be at a certain level to make it and thrive in their other classes and thus and in society. “ Therefore, teachers in the freshman writing program try to ensure that students will acquire certain skills that the university assumes students will gain during their time in school.

Mr. Anderson differentiated between teaching writing and teaching skills necessary for college success. He said, “It is to teach writing, but it’s also to teach introductory college skills.” By skills, he does not mean the mechanics of writing. Rather, he means ways of thinking that students are expected to know, skills that the university calls “habits of mind.” Other instructors did not separate writing from the thinking. They saw the writing and the thinking as working together. Mr. Drake discussed the “analytical and rhetorical skills” necessary for success in college. Ms. Cato conceded that the freshman writing program should teach thinking and writing skills that students will use throughout their college careers, but she was thinking about The Program—freshman writing as a function of the overall field of rhetoric and composition—rather than as the specific university setting. She said,

I think that the program wants me to think, and I’m talking like big T big P, not necessarily [this] program, but the whole history of composition and rhetoric at the freshman level, you know, teaching comp/rhet at college, that it’s sort of preparing students for being thinkers and writers at the college level. And . . . I believe that the purpose is that I need to prepare them for the kind of thinking and the kind of writing that they’ll be doing in their other classes.

With this comment, Ms. Cato acknowledged that the skills expected of students in her particular context, the freshman writing program being studied in this research project, are the skills

generally expected of students taking freshman writing courses at most universities. As such, the freshman writing program acts as a service course to the university.

Both Ms. Bowden and Ms. Cato suggested that the preparation for college success happens on a small scale in English comp. According to Ms. Bowden, the introduction to the academy should be done “in a very soft way . . . that we sort of teach them what we do inside the academy and very gently . . . encourage them to cross the threshold and to participate in sort of micro ways what the larger purpose of the academy is.” Ms. Cato said that she likes to think more pragmatically about the preparation for college success. Rather than think in broad terms, she said she prefers to teach students an awareness of rhetoric so that they understand the relationship between the writer, the audience, and the subject.

The skills taught in freshman comp serve to help students think about their place in college. Ms. Cato asserted, “We do need to be helping them to position themselves in the academy by helping them think about who am I and what do I have to say and what am I curious about?” This type of thinking skill is not unique to freshman comp. Mr. Anderson suggested that the skills taught in English comp should be “transferable” to other college contexts.

One specialized type of skill fostered by freshman English composition is the ability to deal with the demands of a text-heavy world. Three of the four instructors noted that students write all the time. Mr. Drake pointed out that “They know how to write. They’re texting and tweeting all the time, but you know, to get them above, to get them beyond that, to expand their horizons behind the 140 characters and the text abbreviations and stuff.” Ms. Bowden stated that

[students] now write more than ever because they interact with each other voluntarily online so much with the written word, so becoming adept at written communication is all

the more important to, for success as a student, as, as a, in your career, um, and for your own personal life satisfaction.’

Ms. Bowden, Ms. Cato, and Mr. Drake realize that freshman comp has to help students learn to communicate through other various media, a skill necessary not only for college but for many career choices as well. Mr. Drake requires his students to make a presentation to the class at the end of the semester, and he expects them to use some form of media text (PowerPoint, YouTube video, etc.) in their presentations. Ms. Cato recognized that “whether we like it or not, and I include myself in the ‘or not’ category, we’re going to have to do more digital media and maybe even online instruction, too. Mr. Anderson, who believes that a writing class should be a writing class, conceded that he is still not ready to allow the use of multimedia text in his students’ writing though he recognized that the program allows for it.

The four participants in this study all believe that the purpose of freshman English composition is to teach students the rhetorical, thinking, and writing skills that students will need to function in college and beyond college. The skills taught in freshman English composition support the specific program outcomes of rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; and knowledge of conventions.

### **The Role of the Writing Teacher**

The second belief common to the four participants is that the teacher’s role in the classroom is to facilitate students’ learning of specific rhetorical skills, life skills, and ways of thinking. The four participants did not each use the term *facilitate* to describe their roles, but they each implied that teachers were to be less authoritative in telling students how and what to think; instead, teachers should be more assertive in helping students to take charge of their own learning. They see their roles as coming alongside students to help them learn. The types of skills

they facilitate align with the three broad program outcomes. This belief also aligns with the program identity as defined in the course textbook: “In an inquiry-based program, instructors *lead* students to recognize and practice” the types of skills necessary for success in the course and in college (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. iv; emphasis mine).

To Mr. Drake, facilitating learning means being accessible to students and building their confidence. He believes his role is “to encourage what I see, to build that encouragement, to build up their confidence.” One way that he can be accessible and encourage students is through his written comments to students. He can individualize with his students to provide the support that they need to improve their writing. Individualizing the process is more effective than “having the teacher stand in front of the room saying, ‘This is the right way.’”

Mr. Anderson actually used the word *facilitator* but not in a way that the others meant it. He does see his role as being a facilitator but outside of the classroom, and not necessarily related to writing. Instead, he sees it as a “community-building role” between the freshman and the college. However, he does talk about challenging students, pushing them to see what they are capable of doing and what he can then get them to do. While the new program aims for students to guide themselves, especially in terms of topic selection, he thinks that he should “push” students.

Ms. Bowden also did not use the word *facilitate* to describe her role, though she implied that her role is to facilitate their learning. She said that her role is to “ensure” learning, which suggests a facilitative role. She also talked about loving and encouraging her students:

I think that I need to love them and sometimes loving them means harsh love. It means honesty. . . . It means being willing to tell them things that are sometimes going to hurt their feelings if it’s going to encourage their growth.

Actions such as loving and encouraging imply coming alongside a student to help guide their learning.

Ms. Cato used the words “guide,” “mentor,” and “coach” in conjunction with each other six times in her initial interview. These words each suggest the idea of coming alongside students. Ms. Cato, in fact, used the term “besideness” when describing her role as a coach, a guide, and a mentor. In her capacity as a guide to students, she sees herself as

someone who needs to help them see, to discover what they know. They don’t necessarily know it already, but [I can] help them, help guide them to an understanding that I can’t give . . . to them, but I can help them find it.

This “besideness” is evident in the instructors’ classroom pedagogies through activities and through availability but also in their comments as they question students, personalize their comments, and use first-person to show her reader response. When I observed the four instructors, I saw that they value facilitating learning. In three of four teachers’ classes, I observed teachers requiring students to do some sort of peer review exercise. As students participated in the peer review process, teachers circulated around the room encouraging students, keeping students focused on the activity, and teaching mini-lessons as needed. The one teacher whose students did not participate in a peer activity required students to participate in a self-evaluation activity. This particular teacher circulated around the room keeping students on task, clarifying the assignment, and rewarding students for completing their tasks.

The four teachers each believe that freshman English composition teachers should help students acquire specific rhetorical skills, life skills, and ways of thinking. Facilitating such learning requires teachers to come alongside students in the learning process. The use of written

feedback, to be discussed in the next section, is just one way that teachers can facilitate such learning.

### **The Best Practices for Assessing Writing**

The third common belief is that while there is no “right” way to assess student writing, certain written response practices are more effective at supporting the program outcomes of rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; and knowledge of conventions. Although teachers are supposed to use “best practices” when assessing student writing (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. iv), no list of best practices is common to the four teachers. However, the practices described in the following paragraphs are employed by at least two of the four participants, with many of the practices being employed by at least three of the four participants.

When I asked all of the instructors about their training in assessment, I found that they all had virtually the same training but at different institutions. Mr. Anderson and Ms. Bowden attended the same university for their graduate studies in English though not at the same time, and Ms. Cato and Mr. Drake attended the same university for their graduate studies in English but at different times. However, all of them talked about working with mentors, grading practice essays and attending calibration sessions, and getting feedback from someone regarding their grading. The similarity in training may be a result of a certain corpus of information taught in graduate composition courses, but since the four participants represent only two graduate composition programs, no generalization can be made regarding the preparation students receive in graduate school. Teaching assistants in the program being studied are required to participate in the same training methods as part of their preparation to teach.

Regarding best practices, again not one “list” emerged, but several practices were mentioned by at least two of the four instructors. Additionally, the faculty handbook for the

freshman writing program includes many of the practices mentioned by the participants. The order in which I have presented the practices is random. Also, although I asked the participants about best practices, I also asked them to describe their actual process for assessing papers. Because the participants gave similar answers to both questions, I have combined the answers to those two interview questions to describe the common best practices.

Three of the four instructors mentioned a long end note, though in practice, all four write long end notes. Mr. Anderson felt that he owed his students a lengthy end note; if he made them write, then he should at least give students a lengthy reply. Mr. Drake thought that students deserved a “sign off” via an end note at the end of their essay. Ms. Cato mentioned her end notes several times but did not give her reasons for writing them. Ms. Bowden did not mention end notes in her interview, though she wrote a longer end note for each of her students. The use of an end note, called a summary comment in the faculty handbook, allows instructors to prioritize their concerns.

All four instructors mentioned in some form the importance of contextualizing comments, of making them individual and specific to the student’s writing. Ms. Cato said that comments should be “couched in context” meaning that “I want my comments to be contextual in terms of our relationship and refer to things that happened in class or in conference.” Ms. Bowden, who referred to Nancy Sommers when discussing best practices, said that comments need to “be contextual; they shouldn’t be rubber stamps” that could jump from one paper to another. Mr. Anderson also said that he wants his comments to refer to specific issues in the essay. Mr. Drake, with his emphasis on connecting with students, also thought that his responses should consider the individual writing. The faculty handbooks references the Sommers’ 1982 article, and all instructors teaching in the writing program are required to read the article. As

indicated in Chapter 1, Sommers argued that teachers' written comments should be contextual, and the faculty handbook mentions the importance of text-specific comments in response to student writing.

According to the participants, comments should not be diagnostic but should be instructional. Mrs. Bowden was adamant that comments should instruct: "I feel that my comments . . . have one purpose and that's to instruct. I do not worry about justifying grades. At all." Mr. Drake did not mention instruction explicitly, but in many of the examples of comments he gave in the interview, he demonstrated how his comments are meant to instruct the writer. Mr. Drake, Ms. Cato, and Mr. Anderson talked about how their comments should model for the student what they want the student to do. Additionally, the comment analysis of each of the four participants indicated the Pedagogical Orientation was their most prominent orientation based on the percentage of total codings.

Most of the instructors said that teachers should not mark everything, just the big things. Ms. Bowden said simply, "I don't mark everything." Mr. Drake remarked, "I have learned over the years to not point out every error . . . but to concentrate on a few things." Mr. Anderson admitted that it is better to "try to stay focused on major things, or pick one thing to really focus on instead of trying to cover everything. I still kind of try to cover everything but I've found that focusing in on a few particulars helps." Ms. Cato gave practical advice when she suggested "you really can't hit on everything otherwise you'll overwhelm the student so I try to think in three—three big things that I can cover." According to the faculty handbook, instructors should point out patterns of error rather than marking every error.

Two of the four instructors talked about not appropriating student text. Mr. Drake writes his longer comments on a separate page so that he does not have to write on the students' papers.



He said that some students do not like extra writing on their papers: “[Students] think, Gosh, I put my soul out there but I got all these marks on it.” Ms. Cato claimed that “when we write on a student’s text, it kind of becomes ours, and we’re sort of appropriating it.” She had the second highest number of original comments (N=547) of the four participants even though she recognized that such writing appropriated the students’ texts. Ms. Bowden did not specifically mention appropriation of text, but she is the one participant who wrote the least amount of comments (N=364). In the introduction to the section on responding to student writing in the faculty handbook, instructors are cautioned against appropriating student text. This caution was linked to the work of both Sommers (1982) article and to Knoblauch and Brannon (1981), though citations to those articles were not provided.

Three of the four instructors talked about whether or not to read a paper once without marking. Some conceded that they try to read without marking but most admitted that they end up marking on the first reading. Mr. Drake said, “I have to say that I am not the person that reads the paper first all the way through and then goes back and reads it again.” Ms. Cato said that she tries to read a paper through once without a pen but that she is not always successful at not marking the paper during the initial reading. Mr. Anderson reads “a first pass just to kind of get a sense of it, and generally mark if I see like major grammar stuff or patterns of grammar stuff. I’ll mark that and make a few comments.”

All of the instructors used questions as comments, though not all mentioned it as a best practice. Mr. Drake said, “If you’re talking about the inquiry process and asking questions, it seems appropriate in your comments as you’re going through and assessing papers, to phrase [comments], where appropriate, into questions.” Mr. Anderson said that he writes “lots of questions” to help writers think. Ms. Cato said, “I try really hard to ask questions.” The high

percentages of comments coded into the Analytical subcategory of the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation support the instructors' use of questions since many of the comments coded as analytical are phrased as questions which are designed not only to show the teachers' analyses of the writing but to model for students how to analyze writing. The faculty handbook mentions phrasing some comments as questions, especially when framing text-specific comments.

When I asked the instructors what authors, theories, or philosophies may have informed their practices, one name came up for three of the four: Nancy Sommers, particularly her 1982 article, "Responding to Student Writing." All teachers new to the program are required to read the article, and all instructors, except Mr. Drake, mentioned Sommers immediately. Both Ms. Cato and Mr. Drake mentioned Peter Elbow, though Mr. Drake gave the name in a very non-specific way: "I remember all of the big names, the Peter Elbows, the Bartholomaes and all that stuff." Ms. Cato, however, referenced an article of Elbow's from which she learned a style of commenting. The only other name mentioned by more than one participant was Donald Murray. Mr. Anderson referred to Murray in his syllabus, and Ms. Cato quoted Donald Murray. The names mentioned by the instructors are prominent names in the field of rhetoric and composition studies, though only Ms. Cato was able to name more recent authors (i.e., Brian Huot). Of the authors whose names were mentioned by the four participants, only Sommers and Murray were named in the faculty handbook. Sommers, as previously noted, was mentioned in relation to writing text-specific comments, and Murray's name was included in a sample syllabus. The handbook did not provide citations for either Sommers or Murray.

Mr. Anderson was able to mention some broad theories that he remembered from graduate school (i.e. critical pedagogy, audience, and conversation), and Ms. Bowden mentioned a DVD of various authors who talk about issues related to writing. Ms. Cato did name several

other authors and several books that have been helpful to her in developing her philosophy of assessment. Some of the books she mentioned are published by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and would be considered credible resources in the field of composition studies. Mr. Anderson also referred to an article—“My Five-Paragraph-Theme Theme”—but could not remember the author. (The author is Edward White, whom Ms. Cato did mention.)

Because of the variety of written response practices, teachers are able to tailor their responses to their particular students while still meeting the outcomes of the program. They do not adhere to a strict formula for assessing writing; instead, they respond in a manner that complements their individual personalities and facilitates meeting program outcomes. The third common belief for the four instructors, therefore, is that while there is no “right” way to assess student writing, certain written response practices support program the program outcomes of rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; and knowledge of conventions.

### **Summary of Common Beliefs**

The four instructors agree on three beliefs related to the purpose of freshman composition, their roles as writing teachers, and the best way to respond to student writing. Based on interview responses, classroom observations, and program materials, I ascertained that the four teachers have a clear understanding of the program identity and the program outcomes which should guide their written response practices. The majority of the written response practices suggested and followed by the four participants are mentioned in the handbook distributed to all instructors of ENGL 102.

## Comparison of Teacher Practices

Although I provided a detailed analysis of each of the four instructors in their individual case studies, here I have combined the individual data from the individual comment analyses and presented the combined data both in table form and narrative form. I will present the results for each orientation separately. Additionally, although the table percentages refer to the total codings (*nc*) for each participant, I will use the term *comment* in the following paragraphs since each coding represents an actual comment. The five orientations explained in detail in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 will be used here for the side-by-side comparison of the teachers' written commenting practices. Additionally, in the sections to follow, I have not provided many examples of specific comments as chapters 3 and 4 contain numerous examples.

As part of the comparison of the instructors' written response practices, I also analyzed how the various orientations (and subcategories of each orientation) correspond to specific program outcomes as noted on page v of the course textbook *The Curious Writer* (2011). Additionally, where pertinent, I included information from other data sources to demonstrate how the commenting practices of the teachers can facilitate students' proficiency in the three program outcomes. The comparison of teacher practices, when considered alongside the common beliefs of the teachers, will provide the foundation for the major themes to be discussed later in this chapter.

### Interpretive Orientation

The Interpretive Orientation focuses on the shaping of meaning, an intricate negotiation between the experiences, text knowledge, and inner feelings of both the reader and the writer. A comment could have been coded multiply in this orientation, reflecting this complexity. As Table 25 indicates, the instructors most frequently related their comments to their text knowledge

or to the students' text knowledge. Mr. Anderson's comments show balance between his and his students' knowledge of text (7% to 6%). Ms. Bowden likewise showed balance between her and her students' knowledge of text structure (7% to 5%). The biggest disparity between the reader's and writer's text knowledge showed up in Ms. Cato's comments. She commented on the writer's sense of text knowledge nearly twice as often as on her text knowledge as the reader (11% to 6%). However, the data support that all instructors make meaning of student text as they respond to student writing.

Table 25

*Interpretive Orientation*  
(Percentage of Codings across Instructors)

	Mr. Anderson <i>nc</i> = 542 ( <i>n</i> =398)	Ms. Bowden <i>nc</i> =364 ( <i>n</i> =170)	Ms. Cato <i>nc</i> =547 ( <i>n</i> =302)	Mr. Drake <i>nc</i> =902 ( <i>n</i> =557)
NC=2355 N=1427				
Reader's Experiences	0%	2%	0%	0%
Reader's Text Knowledge	7%	7%	6%	2%
Reader's Inner Feelings	0%	2%	4%	2%
Writer's Experiences	0%	1%	0%	1%
Writer's Text Knowledge	6%	5%	11%	6%
Writer's Inner Feelings	.5%	0%	2%	1%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* NC represents the total number of codings for all instructors; *nc* represents the number of codings per instructor. N represents the total number of comments; *n* represents the number of comments per instructor. The percentages in the cells are based on *nc*.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 25 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

Many of the comment coded into the Interpretive Orientation correspond to subsections of the all three program outcomes. As teachers write comments in this category, they model specific objectives of the outcome of Rhetorical Knowledge such as determining audience and purpose, demonstrating familiarity with genres, applying appropriate rhetorical strategies for

diverse writing situations. In the Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing program outcome, teachers' interpretive comments demonstrate summarizing, analyzing, evaluating, and responding to the ideas of other; incorporating the ideas and texts of others; and logical reasoning. In the Knowledge of Conventions orientation, teachers' interpretive comments demonstrate the important habit of using standard grammar, following conventions for word choice, syntax, spelling, and punctuation; and using a variety of sentence structures.

The instructors' comments infrequently reflected inner feelings. Mr. Anderson almost never related any comments to inner feelings, which is consistent with his belief that structure is important. Of the four instructors, Ms. Cato commented more related to inner feelings than did the others. This focus on inner feelings could be related her belief that she should come alongside students to facilitate their learning. Rarely did the instructors' comments reflect world experiences, though of the four, Ms. Bowden did so more than the others. An examination of reader totals versus writer totals revealed that the percentages were nearly even. Nearly the same numbers of codings fell into the reader categories as into the writer categories.

### **Social Orientation**

In the social orientation, the teachers' comments reflect their social role either as a peer or as an expert. As shown in Table 26, the instructors acted as experts far more frequently than they did as peers. Because freshman English composition is an entry-level course designed to prepare students for college success, teachers' relationships with students tend to be more as experts than as peers. As teachers help freshmen acclimate to the college setting, they place a high priority on knowing what is expected of students. This perspective—teachers as social contemporaries of student writers—complements the program identity: “instructors *lead*

students to recognize and practice” certain skills (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. iv; emphasis mine).

Table 26

*Social Orientation*  
(Percentage of Codings across Instructors)

	Mr. Anderson	Ms. Bowden	Ms. Cato	Mr. Drake
NC=2355 N=1427	<i>nc</i> = 542 ( <i>n</i> =398)	<i>nc</i> =364 ( <i>n</i> =170)	<i>nc</i> =547 ( <i>n</i> =302)	<i>nc</i> =902 ( <i>n</i> =557)
Peer	.05%	6%	3%	1%
Expert	1%	18%	12%	13%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* NC represents the total number of codings for all instructors; *nc* represents the number of codings per instructor. N represents the total number of comments; *n* represents the number of comments per instructor. The percentages in the cells are based on *nc*.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 26 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

Ms. Bowden’s comments indicate that she acted in a social role much more often than Mr. Anderson, whose comments rarely reflected a social role, and somewhat more often than Ms. Cato and Mr. Drake. Also, Ms. Bowden’s comments show that she acted as a peer more than the other three instructors. The fact that Ms Bowden had the highest percentage of comments in the Social Orientation is not surprising given that she wants to show her students that she loves them and that she treats their writing as she would treat a colleague’s writing. Additionally, because of Mr. Anderson’s belief that structure is important, his lower percentage in this orientation is not surprising. However, the codings of all four teachers indicate that the expert role is important to teachers.

Comments coded into the Social Orientation correlate to many of the specific subsections of the program outcomes. Concerning Rhetorical Knowledge, instructors’ social comments help

students to determine purpose and audience in their own and others' writing; understand how purpose, audience, and context affect writing style, voice, and tone; and apply appropriate rhetorical strategies for diverse writing situation. Concerning Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing, social comments help students to summarize, analyze, evaluate, and respond to the ideas of others; analyze and interpret texts and other forms of discourse in multiple genres; understand writing as a process that involves invention, drafting, collaboration, and revision; and identify and incorporate persuasive techniques. Concerning Knowledge of Conventions, social comments help students in all of the subsections: use standard grammar, follow conventions for word choice, syntax, spelling, and punctuation; follow conventions appropriate for the given genre and/or medium, such as style, diction, and format; use a variety of sentence structures; and document sources in MLA style.

### **Evaluative Orientation**

In the Evaluative Orientation, teachers' comments reflect whether or not the writing worked for them. Comments coded into this orientation support the program's focus on the inquiry-based classroom in which teachers scaffold assignments designed to "stimulate exploring, explaining, *evaluating*, and reflecting" (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. iv; emphasis mine). Table 27 suggests that the instructors' comments indicate overall that the student writing worked for them. Only Ms. Cato's comments reflect the opposite, though her comments coded as negative were also coded into other orientations such as the Pedagogical Orientation. Nearly twice as often in this orientation, she indicated that the student writing did not work for her. Since one of her individual beliefs focused on the importance of thinking through writing, the fact that she expressed through writing how the students' writing did not work for her makes sense. Mr. Anderson's comments reflect that students' writing worked for him far more often



than it did not work for him, but this makes sense given his belief in treating each student individually and fairly. Ms. Bowden had the highest number of codings in this category, and due to her belief that she should love her students, the high percentage in the Positive subcategory makes sense.

Table 27

*Evaluative Orientation*  
(Percentage of Codings across Instructors)

	Mr. Anderson <i>nc</i> = 542 ( <i>n</i> =398)	Ms. Bowden <i>nc</i> =364 ( <i>n</i> =170)	Ms. Cato <i>nc</i> =547 ( <i>n</i> =302)	Mr. Drake <i>nc</i> =902 ( <i>n</i> =557)
NC=2355 N=1427				
Positive	16%	15%	5%	9%
Negative	1%	5%	9%	3%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* NC represents the total number of codings for all instructors; *nc* represents the number of codings per instructor. N represents the total number of comments; *n* represents the number of comments per instructor. The percentages in the cells are based on *nc*.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 27 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

Evaluative comments support several of the subsections of the three program outcomes. In the Rhetorical Knowledge outcome, instructors’ evaluative comments help students determine purpose and audience in their own and others’ writing; understand how purpose, audience, and context affect writing style, voice, and tone; and apply appropriate rhetorical strategies for diverse writing situations. In the Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing outcome, instructors’ evaluative comments helps students to analyze and/or interpret texts and other forms of discourse in multiple genres; use logical reasoning; summarize, analyze, evaluate, and respond to the ideas of others; identify and incorporate persuasive writing techniques; incorporate the ideas and texts of others; and evaluate sources. In the Knowledge of Conventions outcome, teachers’ evaluative

comments help students in all of the subsections: use standard grammar, follow conventions for word choice, syntax, spelling, and punctuation; follow conventions appropriate for the given genre and/or medium, such as style, diction, and format; use a variety of sentence structures; and document sources in MLA style.

### **Pedagogical Orientation**

In the Pedagogical Orientation, teachers' comments act as a means for learning and instruction. The focus of pedagogical comments is the students' text and ideas. Although two of the instructors indicated in interviews that they want their comments to be instructive rather than diagnostic, all four of the instructors had their highest percentage of codings in the Pedagogical Orientation. As shown in Table 28, instructors' comments overwhelmingly functioned to change or correct students' textual structure or language.

Table 28

*Pedagogical Orientation*  
(Percentage of Codings across Instructors)

	Mr. Anderson <i>nc</i> = 542 ( <i>n</i> =398)	Ms. Bowden <i>nc</i> =364 ( <i>n</i> =170)	Ms. Cato <i>nc</i> =547 ( <i>n</i> =302)	Mr. Drake <i>nc</i> =902 ( <i>n</i> =557)
NC=2355 N=1427				
Change/Correct Ideas	3%	1%	2%	1%
Change/Correct Text	40%	13%	17%	45%
Expand Ideas	2%	4%	3%	2%
Expand Text	2%	2%	1%	3%
Support Ideas	3%	5%	5%	1%
Support Text	2%	4%	0%	1%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* NC represents the total number of codings for all instructors; *nc* represents the number of codings per instructor. N represents the total number of comments; *n* represents the number of comments per instructor. The percentages in the cells are based on *nc*.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 28 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

Both Mr. Anderson and Mr. Drake had about half of their codings fall into the Pedagogical Orientation (52% and 53% respectively), while Ms. Bowden and Ms. Cato had about 30% of their codings fall into the Pedagogical Orientation (29% and 28% respectively). Though this might seem to indicate a gender bias toward this orientation, other data sources will not support the gender bias. For example, in both of her interviews, Ms. Bowden was adamant that her comments should be instructive, and she was actually surprised that more of her comments were not coded as pedagogical. Additionally, when I analyzed my own commenting practices, I received the most codings in the Pedagogical Orientation.

Overall, teachers' pedagogical comments focused on textual issues rather than ideas, largely because of the heavy emphasis in the Change/Correct Text subcategory. However, in the Expand subcategories, comments reflected an emphasis on ideas rather than on the text, indicating that instructors wanted to students to extend their ideas and elaborate on their thinking rather than simply write more text. In the Support subcategories as well, instructors made comments supporting students' ideas more than they did supporting students' textual structure and language.

Comments coded into this orientation support the three program outcomes. In the Rhetorical Knowledge outcome, teachers' pedagogical comments help students to determine purpose and audience in their own and others' writing; understand how purpose, audience, and context affect writing style, voice, and tone; and apply appropriate rhetorical strategies for diverse writing situations. In the Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing outcome, teachers' pedagogical comments help students to use logical reasoning; summarize, analyze, evaluate, and respond to the ideas of others; and understand writing as a process that involves invention, drafting, collaboration, and revision. In the Knowledge of Conventions outcome, teachers'

pedagogical comments help students to use standard grammar; follow conventions for word choice, syntax, spelling, and punctuation; use a variety of sentence structures; and document sources in MLA style.

### **Cognitive/Emotive Orientation**

In this orientation, teachers’ comments reflect either an analytical response or an emotional response to the student writing. As indicated by Table 29, the instructors responded analytically to student writing much more frequently than they responded emotionally. In fact, they infrequently responded emotionally to student writing. Of all the instructors, Ms. Cato responded analytically more often (18% of the total codings) than did the others while Mr. Anderson almost never responded emotionally (0%). Just one of his 542 codings fell in the Emotional subcategory. Given Ms. Cato’s belief in the importance of thinking through writing, the high percentage of analytical codings makes sense, and with Mr. Anderson’s emphasis on structure, his lack of codings in the Emotional subcategory is not surprising.

Table 29

*Cognitive/Emotive Orientation*  
(Percentage of Codings across Instructors)

	Mr. Anderson	Ms. Bowden	Ms. Cato	Mr. Drake
NC=2355	<i>nc</i> = 542	<i>nc</i> =364	<i>nc</i> =547	<i>nc</i> =902
N=1427	( <i>n</i> =398)	( <i>n</i> =170)	( <i>n</i> =302)	( <i>n</i> =557)
Analytical	11%	8%	18%	9%
Emotional	0%	2%	1%	1%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* NC represents the total number of codings for all instructors; *nc* represents the number of codings per instructor. N represents the total number of comments; *n* represents the number of comments per instructor. The percentages in the cells are based on *nc*.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 29 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

Comments coded into the Cognitive/Emotive Orientation support both the program identity and the program outcomes. In terms of program identity, teachers' cognitive/emotive comments support the focus on writing as inquiry. In terms of the Rhetorical Knowledge outcome, teachers' comments help students to determine purpose and audience in their own and others' writing; understand how purpose, audience, and context affect writing style, voice, and tone; and apply appropriate rhetorical strategies for diverse writing situations. In the Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing outcome, teachers' comments help students to analyze and/or interpret texts and other forms of discourse in multiple genres; use logical reasoning; summarize, analyze, evaluate, and respond to the ideas of others; and identify and incorporate persuasive techniques. In the Knowledge of Conventions outcome, teachers' comments help students to follow conventions for word choice, syntax, spelling, and punctuation; follow conventions appropriate for the given genre and/or medium, such as style, diction, and format; and use a variety of sentence structures.

### **Combined Results**

Since the four participants teach in the same freshman writing program, I wanted to determine any patterns of the group concerning their perspectives toward student writing. According to the faculty handbook, instructors should respond contextually to student writing. Contextual response assumes that teachers read from various perspectives. The information from the combined results could provide information on how the writing program impacts the pedagogical choices made by the teachers.

To show how the four instructors' comments were collectively coded, I determined the total number of codings per orientation then divided the individual instructor's number of codings in a particular orientation by the total number of codings across all instructors for that

orientation. As shown by Table 30, nearly half of the total number of comments (43%) reflects that the instructors use their comments to instruct the learners regarding the learners’ textual structure, language, and ideas (Pedagogical Orientation). Nearly an equal percentage of the comments (45%) show a balance between the Interpretive Orientation, the Social Orientation, and the Evaluative Orientation.

Table 30

Combined Results  
(Percentage of Total Codings across Orientations)

NC=2355	Codings Per Orientation	Percentage
Interpretive Orientation	365	15%
Social Orientation	347	15%
Evaluative Orientation	344	15%
Pedagogical Orientation	1011	43%
Cognitive/Emotive Orientation	288	12%

*Note:* Percentages are based on the total number of codings across all orientations.

*Note:* NC represents the total number of codings for all instructors. Percentages are based on the total number of codings.

The distribution of comments suggests that teachers do respond to student writing from a variety of perspectives. They consider each student’s writing individually and respond according to the needs of the student and the context of the writing.

### **Summary of Comparison of Teacher Practices**

The four participants’ written response practices suggest the importance of responding to student writing from a variety of perspectives. By using reader-response strategies, the four participants commented on students’ writing based on the particular context of the writing and the specific needs of the students. In order for the four participants to provide individual

students with feedback to help them acquire the skills necessary for successful writing, they had to respond to student writing from more than one perspective.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices. The common teacher beliefs summarized earlier in the chapter and the comparison of teacher beliefs indicated above form the basis for the major themes which will be explained in the following section.

### **Major Themes**

Based on the information reported from the individual case study analyses, the common beliefs of the four participants, and the comparison of the teacher's written response practices, three major themes emerged. First, freshman English composition teachers must be given the opportunity to reflect about and articulate their beliefs about written response so that they will have a basis for their response practices. Second, freshman English composition teachers work through specific program aspects, in this case the program identity and the program outcomes, to organize their written response practices. Finally, freshman English composition teachers must respond to student text from varying perspectives as readers of text in order to provide students with the opportunities they need to acquire the skills needed for successful writing.

#### **Theme One**

The first theme to emerge from the data is that freshman English composition teachers must be given the opportunity to reflect about and articulate their beliefs about written response so that they will have a basis for their response practices and their beliefs. When I enlisted the participants for this study, I indicated the general purpose of the study, so teachers knew that I would be examining their written response practices in relationship to their beliefs (see

Appendix E for the informed consent letter for teacher participants). However, I did not tell the participants how I would determine their beliefs, nor did I ask the participants to reflect on their beliefs ahead of time or to write out their beliefs. The participants did not receive the interview questions prior to the interviews because I wanted to assess their initial reactions to the questions.

During the interviews, the teachers were able to articulate a set of beliefs regarding the purpose of freshman writing and their roles as writing teachers, their knowledge of the specific writing program in which they teach, their understanding of the best practices for written response, and their perspectives of their written response practices. However, in the process of expressing their beliefs, the participants needed time to process their thoughts in order to articulate those beliefs.

During the interviews, participants used various delay tactics to give themselves the time necessary to formulate certain responses. I received at times pauses of varying lengths, a few replies of “Hmmm,” and several responses asking for time to think. Just as some of the participants believe in the importance of thinking through writing, they seemed to use pauses and delay tactics to help them think. For example, Mr. Anderson said, “Hmmmm,” or “Ummm,” at least five times during the interview. Before answering the question about the purpose of freshman writing, he said, “That’s a good question.” He also took long pauses before answering some questions. When I asked him about his role as a teacher of freshman English composition, he paused for a while. I reiterated the question during the lull, and he said, “Yeah, I’m just thinking.” At times, he would begin to answer a question and then pause before taking the response in a different direction or choosing a different word than he had just used.



Ms. Bowden likewise paused to reflect on her answers to interview questions. She often paused and said, “Hmmm,” before answering questions. In response to several questions, not only would she pause, but she would also laugh before continuing with her response. The laughter seemed to interrupt the responses, but when she resumed answering, she often clarified or extended her response. For example, when responding to the question regarding her role as a teacher of freshman composition, she replied, “I think that I need to love them and sometimes loving them means harsh love.” She then laughed and resumed her thought: “It means honesty. Uh, it means being willing to tell them things that are sometimes going to hurt their feelings if it’s going to encourage their growth.” After both laughing and saying “Uh,” she added to her response. At other times in the first interview, she would stop talking to ask, “What was the question again?” This question along with other fillers such as laughing and saying “Ummm” or “Uh” gave her time to think about what she wanted to say.

Ms. Cato, like the others, used various strategies to allow herself time to process responses to interview questions. While she did say “Hmmm” or “Um” several times during the interviews, she made use of long pauses more than the other participants. She, like Ms. Bowden, also laughed frequently during the interview. In addition to the laughter, the pauses, and the use of “um” or “hmmm,” she would indicate that a question required her to think out loud. At times, she combined several of these tactics during a response to an interview question. For example, when asked about the purposes of freshman English composition, she said, “Um,” laughed, said “Hmmm,” and paused for several seconds before confessing, “It’s harder to answer than I would like to admit.” At times, Ms. Cato would ask me to rephrase or clarify a question, similar to the way that Ms. Bowden asked, “What was the question again?” The result was that she had more time to think about her response.

Mr. Drake used many of the strategies of the other participants, but more than any of the other three participants, he would ask me, “What was the question again?” or “Can you repeat the question?” He was also quick to admit that he needed time to think. For example, when I asked him about the purpose of freshman English composition, Mr. Drake said, “Boy, that’s a great question, one that a lot of people talk about. Let me think about that for a minute.” He then repeated the question and said, “Hmmm,” before beginning to answer. Another strategy he used was repetition of the question or rephrasing the question into a statement before beginning to answer.

Certainly, the instructors did not know the specific questions I would be asking them, so their pauses, requests for extra time, uses of filler words like “Hmmm” or “Um,” or repetitions of the questions should not be construed to mean anything except that they were thinking about how to respond to my questions. However, given the time to gather their thoughts, the teachers eventually articulated a reply to my question. Additionally, as the teachers progressed through the interviews, I heard words, phrases, and concepts repeated more frequently. The repetition of certain ideas, often not in direct response to my interview questions, indicated to me that such ideas were what those teachers believed. In most cases, other data verified that the information the teachers articulated to me represented their actual beliefs. In other cases, however, the information conveyed to me may not have represented the instructors’ beliefs, regardless of the reflection that occurred during the interview process. The instructors may have been saying what they thought I wanted to hear or what they thought the program director wanted to hear. My only means for verifying whether or not their words truly represented their beliefs was through triangulation of other data, and in the individual case analyses and the cross-case analysis earlier in this chapter, I demonstrated how instructors’ expressed beliefs shape their response practices

and their written response practices support their beliefs. The question of trustworthiness of instructors' responses will be explored in the discussion of the second theme.

A consensus of beliefs was not the goal of this research. The important issue for this research is that the teachers were able to articulate a set of beliefs. Through the use of delay tactics such as pauses, the restatement of questions, requests for clarification or repetition of questions, or words like “hmmm” or “um,” instructors eventually expressed what they believed. In most cases, their expressed beliefs were confirmed or strengthened by other data sources.

## **Theme Two**

The second theme to emerge from the data is that freshman English composition teachers work through specific program aspects, in this case the program identity and the program outcomes, to organize their written response practices. In most cases, instructors' written response practices reflected their expressed beliefs, and those beliefs and practices often corresponded to the program identity and the program's student outcomes. This theme became apparent in the repetition of two topics across all data sources for all four instructors. The two topics—writing as inquiry and habits of mind—appeared repeatedly in the data despite the lack of mention of those ideas in the interview questions, but the two topics are critical aspects of the new writing program. A third topic—writing as process—also appeared repeatedly in the data, but writing as process is part of writing as inquiry and is considered one of the habits of mind (*The Curious Researcher*, 2011, p. v), so I have chosen to assume that writing as process is part of both writing as inquiry and habits of mind. To summarize how the second theme emerged, I first discuss the prominence of the topics in the data and then examine how the instructors' practices support those aspects of the program. In fact, the course materials indicate that “the

goals of [the] program [should] drive” the development of the individual instructors’ course design (*The Curious Researcher*, 2011, p. v).

Writing as inquiry is the first topic to figure prominently in the data of all four instructors indicating that the four instructors at the very least give verbal assent to its importance. The phrase “writing as inquiry” is listed in program materials as the program identity for the revised freshman writing program (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. iv; Faculty Handbook). According to the program materials,

[a] program identity is the unifying concept that defines the first-year writing program. It provides a clear, succinct description of the focus we believe is best suited for providing our students with the knowledge and resources they need to produce successful writing, not only in their courses, but in the academy, their professions, and their public lives.”

(*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. iv)

Furthermore, the program materials provided a definition of writing as inquiry, situating inquiry-based writing programs within the overarching process of academic inquiry and offering several characteristics of academic inquiry: “asking questions, looking for answers, engaging with different viewpoints and reflecting on what one has learned” (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. iv).

In a freshman writing program, the main tenet of writing as inquiry is curiosity. Writing teachers promote curiosity by leading students to read, to research, and to employ rhetorical strategies in writing. Teachers also create scaffolded assignments which focus on student self-discovery and involve the students in a process of “exploring, explaining, evaluating, and reflecting” (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. iv). As presented in the individual case analyses and in the earlier sections of the cross-case analysis, the aspects of writing as inquiry as described here were mentioned in varying levels by the four instructors.

All four instructors mentioned writing as inquiry during the interviews and in their syllabi. In their classrooms, the instructors taught elements of writing as inquiry. The difficulty for all the teachers was in defining clearly what inquiry is. Ms. Bowden admitted that the teachers “are learning more and more about how to teach writing as an act of inquiry . . . and we’re coming hopeful. I would like to believe that the future means that we would all be more closely aligned in what we mean when we say that.” She said that even those teachers who participated in the overhaul of the program struggle to know exactly what writing as inquiry means and how they can teach it effectively.

An exact definition of inquiry seemed elusive among the four instructors. However, several characteristics of inquiry surfaced during the data analysis. Ms. Bowden, Mr. Anderson, and Mr. Drake implied that inquiry is process. In fact, nearly every time that Mr. Drake mentioned the word “inquiry,” he followed it immediately with the word “process.” When Mr. Anderson talked about the positive aspects of the program, he commented about the benefits of the drafting process through the use of scaffolded assignments. Ms. Bowden, too, discussed the process aspect of inquiry in relation to the scaffolded assignments.

Several of the instructors defined inquiry as curiosity. In his syllabus, Mr. Anderson wrote, “Writing as Inquiry focuses on both fostering intellectual curiosity and communicating effectively.” He also implied that inquiry is curiosity when he mentioned student curiosity as one of the positive aspects of the new program. Ms. Bowden suggested that writing is “an act of being curious, of being inquisitive.” She also suggested that writing as inquiry is more in line with the expectations of the academy, in which “we ask a question, then we inform ourselves by gathering data, and then we draw a conclusion from the data that we have, right?”

Earlier data analysis confirmed that the four instructors both practice and teach inquiry. In their classrooms, they taught inquiry through their emphases on various aspects of the writing process such as researching to find evidence for their essays, crafting introductions and conclusions, reviewing each other's writing, and revising their work. They provided scaffolded assignments so that students could write pieces of varying lengths and think through their writing. They formatted open-ended writing prompts to encourage students' thinking. In their written responses, they modeled inquiry and taught inquiry. They approached reading and responding to student text through various perspectives, perspectives which demonstrate active inquiry.

The second topic appearing predominately in the data is what program materials refer to as "habits of mind." According to the course textbook and the faculty handbook, freshman writing instructors teaching in an inquiry-based writing program should "lead students to recognize and practice **habits of mind** essential to inquiry" (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. iv; Faculty Handbook; emphasis in original). Ms. Bowden called habits of mind "cognitive strategies or ways of thinking," described in course materials as "Questioning, Looking for answers, Suspending judgment, Seeking and valuing complexity, Understanding that academic writing is a conversation, and Understanding that writing is a process" (*The Curious Writer*, 2011, p. iv).

Three of the four instructors specifically mentioned habits of mind in their interviews. Mr. Drake, the only one not to discuss habits of mind during the interview, mentioned them specifically in his syllabus. Ms. Cato said that if a student in her class gets nervous because he is not being graded on an assignment, she will ask him to practice the habit of mind of suspending judgment. She will ask him

first to think through writing about whether or not [the lack of grades] really is serving you. You may think that it's serving you, you know, but when you really think through writing about it, you know, when you write about it . . . and you talk about it and it becomes something outside of here, a belief, that it becomes something else, then is it serving you?

In the interviews, Ms. Cato also discussed the habit of mind of tolerating ambiguity, especially in introducing students to writing as inquiry. When students move away from the idea that a thesis must be an either/or, black-and-white statement to realize that a thesis could be more complex, they are tolerating ambiguity by thinking about more than one or two approaches to an idea.

Ms. Bowden mentioned habits of mind in her first interview, specifically in relation to the crafting of assignments: "Creating assignments that force students to practice the habits of mind is an essential component in ensuring that writing as inquiry sort of stays at the forefront" especially as the program moves from the thesis-driven model of writing to writing as inquiry. She asserted that the kind of writing expected of students in the academy requires a different kind of thinking. The thesis-driven model "shuts down" students' thinking, especially their willingness to suspend judgment. However, "[T]his is not what we do in the academy at all, right? We ask a question, then we inform ourselves by gathering data that we have, right?" To Ms. Bowden, teaching the habits of mind reinforces that "writing is a process or an act of being curious."

Mr. Anderson referred to habits of mind in relation to helping students acquire the thinking skills needed for college and beyond. The habits of mind give students ways to approach texts and assignments. Then, students have options when they have a writing assignment. They are able to ask themselves, "What of the things we did can be helpful that can

be transferable to the future? And then how can I acclimate myself to what is expected of me and my college environment?” He then suggested that scaffolded assignments build on the skills learned through the habits of mind.

Earlier data analysis confirmed that the instructors teach the habits of mind and practice them in their commenting. In their classrooms, they reinforced habits of mind through teaching students various stages of the drafting process, having them develop their own topics for essays, requiring them to research different avenues for evidence, and asking them to reflect on their writing. In the crafting of scaffolded assignments, instructors encouraged the habits of mind by having students build on previous work to produce longer, sustained pieces of writing. In their commenting practices, instructors modeled habits of mind by phrasing comments as questions and writing what they were thinking. Comments coded into the various categories demonstrated that instructors wanted their comments to teach various habits of mind. The diversity of the comments teaches students about conversation. Comments which focused on specific changes needing to be made taught students about the process of revision. Certain analytical comments teach students to look for answers and to question what they have read or written.

Clearly, the instructors have a working knowledge of program materials as evidenced by their mention of the topics of writing as inquiry and habits of mind in their interviews and in their syllabi. Classroom teaching and written response practices confirm that the teachers have structured their instruction to reinforce those topics. However, verbal assent and actual practices do not necessarily mean that the instructors actually believe in the importance of the program expectations. In fact, interview responses from Mr. Anderson and Ms. Cato could be construed to mean that they do not fully “buy in” to what the program expects. For example, when answering my question about the direction of the new program, Mr. Anderson said, “My



interpretation of what the program is *supposed* to be is where I'm going to start, and then I'll talk about my actual interpretations." This response could be construed to mean that he does not believe in the direction of the program, specifically as it relates to allowing students to choose their own topics. However, while he may be more reserved than other teachers on this matter, the program materials do allow for teachers to assign topics that are less open-ended than others. By the semester's end, Mr. Anderson allows students to choose their own topics for their final project. By teaching them aspects of the writing process and the various ways of thinking in their early shorter and longer essays, he prepares them to be able to develop their own topics.

On another occasion, he was discussing audience and said,

And audience is like, with *our* new program, purpose and audience are highlighted for everyone. And in meetings *we*'ll talk about audience, either giving them an audience or saying your classmates are your audience. *We*'re trying to make audience a concrete instead of saying you're writing this for me, or you're writing this paper in the air.

(emphasis mine)

His responses could be construed to mean that he does not personally believe that audience is important. Words such as "our new program," or "we'll talk about audience" suggest that the program pushes concepts that may not match his personal convictions about writing. However, as indicated in the analysis of his individual case, audience and purpose are important to him personally, and his classroom practices, course documents, and written comments verify that he values audience and purpose.

Ms. Bowden also made a comment that could be interpreted to mean that she disagrees with aspects of the program. When I asked her about the purpose of freshman writing, she said, "I think sometimes that I think differently about its purpose than . . . my colleagues or even the

way the program might want me to think.” She was referring specifically to teaching students to write not for college purposes exclusively but for life purposes. However, in both of her interviews, her responses indicated that she truly believes that the writing program should be based on inquiry. In fact, she said that she advocated for the program to be identified as an inquiry-based program. Additionally, she mentioned several of the habits of mind in her interviews. Her classroom practices and her written responses confirm that she does believe in what the program asks of students and teachers.

The issue is not whether or not the teachers believe what the university’s writing program expects of them. The issue is whether or not they teach according to those expectations. The research confirms the theme that freshman English composition teachers work through specific program aspects, in this case the program identity and the program outcomes, to organize their written response practices. The program clearly exerts influence on the instructors such that they structure their written response practices to conform to the expectations of the program. Other data suggest that the instructors actually do believe what the program expects of them whether or not they give verbal assent to it.

### **Theme Three**

The final theme emerging from the data is that freshman English composition teachers must respond to student text from varying perspectives as readers of text in order to provide students with the opportunities they need to acquire the skills needed for successful writing. The framework for this study comes from Sperling (1994). I selected this framework because it focused on the perspectives of teachers as readers. It did not focus on the types of comments (i.e. directive vs. facilitative) that teachers wrote. The Sperling framework was a holistic framework, which was in keeping with the qualitative nature of the study. Additionally, because

the framework allowed for overlap in coding, the implication is that teachers' comments are complex. Because of the diversity in coding, teachers demonstrated that they understand the importance of responding to each piece of writing on its own merit. Table 31 reflects the diversity among the teachers, but the diversity also demonstrates that each instructor understands the importance of responding based on the context of the teaching-learning situation.

Table 31

*Percentage of Codings across Instructors: All Orientations*

	Mr. Anderson <i>nc</i> = 542 ( <i>n</i> =398)	Ms. Bowden <i>nc</i> =364 ( <i>n</i> =170)	Ms. Cato <i>nc</i> =547 ( <i>n</i> =302)	Mr. Drake <i>nc</i> =902 ( <i>n</i> =902)
<b>Interpretive Orientation</b>				
Reader's Experiences	0%	2%	0%	0%
Reader's Text Knowledge	7%	7%	6%	2%
Reader's Inner Feelings	0%	2%	4%	2%
Writer's Experiences	0%	1%	0%	1%
Writer's Text Knowledge	6%	5%	11%	6%
Writer's Inner Feelings	0.5%	0%	2%	1%
<b>Social Orientation</b>				
Peer	0.5%	6%	3%	1%
Expert	8%	18%	12%	13%
<b>Evaluative Orientation</b>				
Positive	16%	15%	5%	9%
Negative	1%	5%	9%	3%
<b>Pedagogical Orientation</b>				
Change/Correct Ideas	3%	1%	2%	1%
Change/Correct Text	40%	13%	17%	45%
Expand Ideas	2%	4%	3%	2%
Expand Text	2%	2%	1%	3%
Support Idea	3%	5%	5%	1%
Support Text	2%	4%	0%	1%
<b>Cognitive/Emotive Orientation</b>				
Analytical	11%	8%	18%	9%
Emotional	0%	2%	1%	1%

*Note:* NC represents the total number of codings for all instructors; *nc* represents the number of codings per instructor. N represents the total number of comments; *n* represents the number of comments per instructor. The percentages in the cells are based on *nc*.

*Note:* Comments could be multiply coded, so rather than report the number of actual comments, the numbers given in Table 31 represent the codings rather than the actual comments.

Each of the instructors mentioned the importance of responding to students as individuals. Data from the individual case analyses and the cross-case analysis of teachers' beliefs and teachers' written response practices indicated that the four instructors not only want to respond to students according to the specific context of the writing, but they also want their written responses to student writing to reinforce the skills they will need for successful writing. For example, in the interviews, Ms. Cato specifically mentioned reader response when she talked about her method of commenting. In discussing reader response, she said that her comments should analyze, should point out what works and does not work, should instruct, and should react to what students have written. She stated, "[I]n every type of comment that I'm making, I hope to own my comment. This is me, this is my reading of it." In the individual analysis of Mr. Anderson, data indicated that he believes that he should treat students with fairness and individuality when he responds to them. This fairness is reflected in his long end notes where he reiterates to students the specific issues they need to address. The issues are different for each student, and the different perspectives he uses in addressing the needs supports his belief that individuality is important in written response to student writing.

Ms. Bowden wants to love her students, and her distribution of comments across codings demonstrated that she shows love for her students in writing comments she believes will help them grow as writers. She referenced Sommers (1982) who contended that comments should be contextual and instructional. In other words, teachers should respond to student writing based on what the teacher perceives is happening in the text. Then, she writes comments that confirm how she reads the text and how students can make changes based on her responses. Finally, Mr. Drake mentioned how his comments should be between the teacher and the student rather than between the student and some non-existent perfect essay. He said, "There has to be some

connection between teacher and student, some recognition of what [they're] doing [with their writing].”

The individual teachers' case analyses support the theme of the importance of responding from various perspectives in order to teach students the skills they need to write successfully. I argued that the individual themes that emerged for each instructor are actually their core beliefs. The beliefs of the individual instructors do not mirror each other, and the commenting practices of the individual instructors likewise do not mirror each other. However, there is mutuality between individual instructors' beliefs and practices: their beliefs shape their commenting practices, and their commenting practices verify their beliefs. The instructors approached assessment of text based not on a set of common beliefs that all teachers of English composition are expected to have; rather, they approached assessment based on their individual perspectives, and they responded in ways that supported those perspectives. Their responses provided the opportunity for students to grow as writers.

Program documents support the claim that various perspectives are necessary. Teachers in ENGL 102 should lead students to achieve program outcomes (*The Curious Researcher*, 2911 p. iv). However, teachers have latitude in how they design their courses, in how they craft assignments, and in how they respond to students. If teachers approach assessment from various perspectives, students have more opportunities to acquire the skills they need to become successful writers in college and beyond.

### **Summary of Major Themes**

Three main themes emerged from the analysis of all of the data sources. These themes developed from the information in the individual analyses, but a closer reading of program documents related to common beliefs and a comparison of teacher practices confirmed each of

the themes: freshman English composition teachers must be given the opportunity to reflect about and articulate their beliefs about written response so that they will have a basis for their response practice; freshman English composition teachers work through specific program aspects, in this case the program identity and the program outcomes, to organize their written response practices; and freshman English composition teachers must respond to student text from varying perspectives as readers of text in order to provide students with the opportunities they need to acquire the skills needed for successful writing.

### **Chapter Summary**

The primary research question guiding this proposed study is “How do teachers’ written comments reflect their stated beliefs about the purpose of response and their roles as writing teachers?” To answer that question, I studied a bound case—a group of four instructors of freshman English composition (ENGL 102) at a commuter university serving a metropolitan area. I reported some common beliefs of the participants, compared the written commenting practices of the four instructors, and described three emerging themes demonstrating the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices. The results reported here provide the foundation for the discussion of the findings to be presented in the next and final chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I synthesize and discuss major findings of the study related to theory and practice in the field of composition studies. I begin the chapter with an overview of the study, which includes a brief summary of the study's purpose, the research questions, major sections of the literature review, the methodology, and the results. Following the overview, I discuss the study's findings in relation to selected research literature presented in Chapter 2. The discussion situates the major findings in the context of the body of pertinent literature. I then reflect on my experiences as a researcher, an important aspect of a qualitative research study. I end the chapter presenting some limitations and delimitations of the study, some implications of the study, some recommendations for future research, and a final summary in which I bring closure to the study.

#### **Overview of the Study**

This qualitative study was designed to explore the relationship between freshman English composition teachers' beliefs and their practices as related to written teacher response. The main research question was "How do freshman English composition teachers' written comments on students' essays reflect their beliefs about the purpose of response and their roles in the writing process?" To provide a knowledge base for the study, I reviewed the most relevant literature pertinent to the study. This review includes selected literature, providing a foundation for the study and a working knowledge of the issues related to the main research question. I reviewed literature related to sociocultural theory, the teacher as reader, teacher written response practices, teacher beliefs, and the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices. After completing the literature review, I narrowed the focus of the study to four areas related to teachers' beliefs and

practices: teachers' beliefs about the purpose of freshman writing, teachers' knowledge about their specific writing program, teachers' understandings of best practices for written response, and teachers' perspectives of their own response practices.

Because of the phrasing of the main research question and my interest in the focus areas of teachers' individual beliefs and practices, I determined that a qualitative study would provide the most appropriate approach for answering the question. The study was designed using a case-study methodology with the case being a bound system of a group of four instructors of freshman English composition (ENGL 102) at a public commuter university serving a metropolitan area. Having submitted a written proposal and having passed the proposal defense, I submitted a request to the Institutional Review Board for approval to conduct the study, approval which was subsequently granted.

I conducted the study during the end of the second year of the implementation of a new freshman writing program at the targeted university. After I had obtained the necessary authorization to do the research, I gathered various kinds of data: two individual interviews with each of the four participants, two classroom observations of each participant, and various forms of documents, most notably departmental documents related to the freshman writing program, the course instructors' syllabi, and copies of student essays on which the teachers had written comments. The three forms of data provided the robust data necessary in a qualitative study. With signed permission, I transcribed the recorded interviews and the observation field notes.

In order to determine the written response practices of teachers, I received written consent from students to collect copies of their writing on which identifying information had been removed. I gathered the copies of marked student essays. Every mark, word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph of comment was typed onto a protocol form. Subsequently, three



independent raters categorized the comments around five orientations or perspectives. The categorization produced codings of the comments which provided numerical data. I also examined the specific kinds of written comments (i.e. questions, proofreading marks, end notes, marginal notes) used by the teachers. Using the numerical data and the information from the kinds of written response, I created profiles of the individual teachers to show them their perspectives as teacher-readers. A final part of the analysis process was a second interview with each of the teachers at which I revealed to them my analysis of their comments in relation to the individual themes which had emerged during the data analysis. Analysis of the data occurred over a period of four months.

I presented the results of the study in two sections: individual case analyses and a cross-case analysis. For each of the individual cases, I reported the beliefs of the individual teachers, some individual themes (which can be argued to be their core beliefs) that emerged in the individual analyses, and the commenting practices of the four teachers. According to the analysis, the four participants clearly articulated their beliefs, and their written comments were consistent with the beliefs they expressed. Additionally, their individual analyses demonstrated that the teachers approached the reading of student text from a variety of perspectives. The comment analysis of two male teachers in the study, Mr. Anderson and Mr. Drake, showed that about half of their codings (50% and 53% respectively) fell in the Pedagogical Orientation. The comment analysis of the two females in the study, Ms. Bowden and Ms. Cato, revealed that they had near identical numbers in the Pedagogical Orientation (29% and 28% respectively), but they had more balance across the five orientations. The combination of all data forms showed that the teachers' practices were consistent with their expressed beliefs. Additionally, the teachers' practices are consistent with scholarship. The data analysis demonstrated that teachers' beliefs

drive their written response practices just as teachers' written response practices derive in part from their beliefs.

In the cross-case analysis, I presented some beliefs common to the four instructors. Specifically, I looked at common beliefs related to the purpose of freshman composition and teachers' roles in the writing classroom. I then compared the commenting practices of the instructors in both chart and narrative form. Three themes emerged from the analyses: (1) Freshman English composition teachers must be given the opportunity to reflect about and articulate their beliefs about written response so they will have a basis for their response practices; (2) Freshman English composition teachers work through specific program aspects, in this case the program identity and the program outcomes, to organize their written response practices; and (3) Freshman English composition teachers must respond to student text from varying perspectives as readers of text in order to provide students with the opportunities they need to acquire the skills needed for successful writing.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

In this section, I summarize the findings of the analysis. The findings are organized into two sections: Teacher Beliefs and Teacher Practices. Additionally, I discuss the findings relative to the review of literature.

#### **Teacher Beliefs**

**The importance of reflection.** The first finding correlates to the first major theme as explained in Chapter 5: freshman English composition teachers must be given the opportunity to reflect about and articulate their beliefs about written response so that they will have a basis for their written response practices." Teachers' beliefs affect their pedagogy (Davis & Andrzejewski, 2009). Teachers, therefore, need to be able to articulate their beliefs so as to

understand the reasons for their practices. In my study, I did find that the four instructors were able to articulate their beliefs, though they each hesitated before answering some of the interview prompts as if collecting their thoughts. Certainly, the instructors did not know what questions I would be asking them, so their pauses or requests for extra time should not be construed to mean anything except that they were thinking about how to respond to my questions. However, given the time to gather their thoughts, the teachers eventually were able to articulate a set of beliefs. Additionally, as the teachers progressed through the interview, they began repeating words, phrases, and concepts that seemed important to them. Talking with me about their beliefs and their response practices helped them to conceptualize and verbalize a set of beliefs, even if those beliefs were not fully representative of the instructor.

Although there were some common concepts among the beliefs of the four participants, I was not expecting a consensus on beliefs, especially since research confirms that teachers' beliefs are subjective (Davis & Andrzejewski, 2009). Also, the content of the teachers' beliefs is not an important aspect of this research; rather, the important factor for the study is that teachers needed to discuss their beliefs so that I would have some data to use as I compared their beliefs and their written response practices. Reflecting on beliefs is necessary if teachers are going to articulate their beliefs. In this case, the reflection came through the interview process, and teachers' beliefs were verified by the comment analysis and other documents.

Davis and Andrzejewski (2009) contended that “[b]eliefs, and their influences, tend to be unexamined because many are implicit, unarticulated, or unconscious” (p. 909). By taking part in the study, the four participants were forced to reflect on their beliefs and to articulate them. During the interviews, the teachers talked about how participating in the project helped them to think about what they believed. They each mentioned the word *think* multiple times in their

responses to my questions. We know that research supports that writing helps people clarify their thinking (Daisey, 2009). In my study, I found that talking or reflecting also helped these teachers think about what they believe related to freshman English composition and their written response practices. The participants' use of the interviews to think about and articulate their beliefs supports Huot (2002), who proposed a change in the way teachers think about their response practices. The change he proposed is a "dialectic between theory and practice [which] shifts the focus from *how* we respond to *why* we respond, making us reflect upon and articulate our beliefs and assumptions about literacy and its teaching" (p. 112). Teachers must think about and articulate their beliefs so that they will know why they respond the way that they respond.

**The sociocultural formation of beliefs.** The next theme uncovered through my data analyses is that freshman English composition teachers work through specific program aspects, in this case the program identity and the program outcomes, to organize their written response practices. The theoretical framework for this study --response as conversation--is situated within the larger framework of the sociocultural theory. In Chapter 2, I reviewed characteristics of sociocultural theory. One of those characteristics of sociocultural theory, especially as related to writing and reading, is the establishment of communities of practice (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006). Since the purpose of the communities of practice is the construction and dissemination of knowledge, then any group that acts to construct and disseminate knowledge can be seen as a practice community. In my study, the freshman writing program acts in the capacity of practice community, or, in a broader sense, the culture which transmits knowledge.

Teacher beliefs also operate within a sociocultural perspective. Huot (2002) contended that schools are "cultural systems bound by specific beliefs and attitudes" (p. 117). Logically, then, a particular school's writing program, which is also bound by beliefs and attitudes, is a

cultural system. Haswell (2008) explained how curriculum (in this case, the revised freshman writing program) “is a site, albeit multiple and highly constructed. Students enter academic programs, teachers instruct in their *fields*, and departments engage in *turf* wars over general education courses” (p. 340). Why is this understanding of a writing program as a specific culture or site important? If beliefs are constructed socially and culturally (Pajares, 1992; Silverman, 2010), then in the context of this study, an argument can be made that the beliefs of the teachers were influenced by the program. As evidenced by the recurrence of common topics, the teachers are acting as members of a specific culture and have internalized the language of the program.

When I conducted the cross-case analysis, I found that all four teachers kept repeating some common topics: writing as inquiry and habits of mind. While some of the teachers mentioned the concepts more than others, I also heard from the participants that these two concepts are critical components of the new writing program. I cannot attribute the prevalent mention of these two topics solely to one specific interview question since the participants mentioned the topics in context of nearly every question I asked. Furthermore, the participants did not mention these concepts when I asked them about any authors or theories they have read that have informed their current practices. Where, then, did this knowledge derive? These two predominant ideas correlate directly to expectations of the new program, so an assumption can be made that the new program influenced the responses of the teachers related to certain aspects of their beliefs. For example, the phrase “habits of mind” is not a common phrase in composition studies, so the teachers likely did not learn that phrase in their graduate studies. However, the new writing program uses that phrase in all of its publications. In fact, regarding habits of mind, Mr. Anderson talked specifically about the “new nomenclature” in the writing program, Ms. Bowden asked me if I was “familiar with the term,” and Ms. Cato said that

teachers in the new program are “introducing students to the habits of mind.” Additionally, Ms. Bowden said the new program was identified by the word *inquiry* (as supported by documents provided by the writing program), and the word *inquiry* occurred more than 50 times during the interviews.

One important consideration is that the writing program materials expect teachers to have familiarity with these three areas. In fact, in the front matter of the textbook used for ENGL 101 and ENGL 102, the program identity is writing as inquiry (*The Curious Writer*, p. iv). One outcome of the program is that students in ENGL 102 will understand writing as a process (*The Curious Writer*, p. v), and one goal of the program is that ENGL 101 and ENGL 102 “should introduce students to the concepts, strategies, and habits of mind that will lead to these outcomes” (*The Curious Writer*, p. v). Teachers in the program meet regularly in faculty meetings and in small groups called teaching circles to review principles important to the program. This study revealed, therefore, that the program is acting to transmit knowledge socially and culturally. In a broader sense, the study confirms literature related to the social and cultural influences on teachers’ beliefs.

### **Teacher Practices**

The final finding, related to the third major theme explained in Chapter 5, is that freshman English composition teachers must respond to student text from varying perspectives as readers of text in order to provide students with the opportunities they need to acquire the skills needed for successful writing.” Just as I did not conduct the study expecting the teachers to have the same set of beliefs, I also did not undertake the study to see if the teachers had the same kinds of assessment practices. While the cross-case analysis demonstrated that the teachers collectively assess writing according to guidelines suggested in literature (Straub, 1999, 2000), it

also revealed an important finding related to the analysis of comments: teachers understand that they must respond to the text as readers. In specific, teachers' comments reflected their attention to the various social processes that happen as teachers interact with text. Hence, Huot's (2002) and Huot and Perry's (2009) research is confirmed.

In order to categorize teachers' written responses, I needed to select a framework focused on the perspectives of teachers rather than on the types of comments the teachers wrote. I did not assume a "right" perspective or a "right" way to respond in writing. The framework for the study (Sperling, 1994) was not intended to determine teachers' predominant perspectives as readers of student-generated text. I selected the framework because I needed some sort of mechanism for categorizing teacher comments, and Sperling's framework of the perspectives of teachers as readers was the most holistic of all the frameworks I reviewed. A holistic framework was in keeping with the qualitative nature of my study since it allowed for overlap in coding. Sperling herself suggested that the various orientations were not meant to be mutually exclusive, instead suggesting that teachers' written comments can "communicat[e] multiple and embedded messages about writing" (p. 200). The results confirmed the complexity of commenting since many of the teachers' comments were coded into more than one orientation.

Teachers' written comments should not exist as distinct entities. Instead, they come in response to students' writing. The students' writing provides the context for the teachers' comments. Therefore, the students' words helped the independent raters to decide the specific orientations for coding the teachers' written comments. As shown in the detailed narrative portion of the comment analysis in Chapter 4, the three independent raters and I considered the student writers' words when we categorized teachers' written comments. When I reported the results of the comment analyses, I typed the students' words along with the teachers' comments.

Additionally, I tried to provide examples of how one comment could be coded into more than one orientation. The point of the analysis was to see the various perspectives teachers might have as they comment on students papers. The four teachers did have diversity in their perspectives, suggesting that they approach each text individually and they comment as readers rather than as impartial editors looking for problems with grammar and mechanics, what composition theorist consider to be *local* issues. This finding is consistent with research suggesting that “response always takes place in complex social and instructional settings” (Anson, 2012, p. 195). Teachers’ comments cannot be easily categorized or explained, nor should every teacher be expected to respond in similar ways.

The teachers in this study demonstrated that their commenting practices do reflect their beliefs in terms of way they comment. While their written assessment practices are consistent with what research considers “best practices,” the more important finding is not that they use best practices but that these practices are the means for them to convey their goals or beliefs, as advocated by Anson (2012). For example, one of the response practices mentioned as a best practice is the use of questions (Straub, 1999, 2000). While all four participants used the questions as a response practice, they did so in a manner consistent with their perspectives as readers of text. Mr. Drake often used questions to help the student writers understand specific rhetorical skills, skills that he believes they will need for success in college and life. Ms. Cato used questions to help the writers think more deeply about their writing, consistent with her belief that writing and thinking are interconnected.

Teachers bring more than one perspective to the reading of and assessment of a text. Not one of the teachers had 100% of the codings on individual essays to fall into the same teacher orientation. While all four teachers’ highest percentage of codings fell into the Pedagogical



Orientation (some higher than others), they all four approached each individual text from more than one perspective. The perspectives the teachers bring to their readings of text derive from their epistemological beliefs (Davis & Andrzejewski, 2009) and impact their assessment practices (Nauman, Stirling, & Borthwick, 2011; Newell et al., 2011). In this study, I did not examine global epistemologies (e.g. essentialism, feminism, etc.), but the framework of orientations I used for the comment analysis is valid no matter a teacher's epistemology (Straub, 1996). Sperling (1994) suggested that the orientations "have a quality that suggests they may be universal" (p. 201). For example, a comment coded as Positive Evaluative would have been coded into that subcategory regardless of the teacher's overarching epistemology. This finding supports Sperling's (1994) claim that "teachers' written comments on student papers can embody a reader's mutually-informing orientations, communicating multiple and embedded messages about writing and the varying ways writing, writers, and readers are linked" (p. 200).

### **Conclusions**

The overarching research question for this dissertation was, "How do freshman English composition teachers' written comments on students' essays reflect their beliefs about the purpose of response and their roles in the writing process?" The answer to this question is very complex. In fact, to answer that question, another question must be answered first: *Do* their written comments reflect their beliefs? In this study of four teachers in a bound system (i.e. a case), the simple answer is yes, their practices do reflect their beliefs.

The "how" aspect of the research question is perhaps more difficult to answer. In answering the main research question, I had to examine the first part of the question—teachers' commenting practices. I was not so much concerned with the actual types of comments teachers wrote (directive or facilitative, vague or specific, content or global, formative or summative)

since the type of comment would not affect how the comment was coded into the various orientations. Neither was I looking to see if the way teachers commented aligned with current acceptable practices, although for the most part, the teachers did employ practices consistent with research literature related to acceptable commenting practices. More importantly, researchers do not prescribe a firm set of best practices, and recent research in the sociocultural arena suggests that teachers may be better served to consider the entire rhetorical situation and respond in a way that meets the demands of that specific context (Anson, 2012). Therefore, to answer the “how” part of the question related to practices, I had to find a framework for comment analysis that was more holistic. The Sperling (1994) framework regarding the teacher-as-reader seemed appropriate since the teacher-as-reader is a basic characteristic of the sociocultural view of reading and writing. Sperling also suggested that the five orientations have a “universal” quality which “can be tested in other contexts” (p. 201). Finally, the framework offered a different way to analyze comments since one comment could be coded into more than one category. My analysis of teachers’ comments found, therefore, that teachers’ written comments are complex and reflect the various ways that teachers read text. In terms of practices, then, teachers operating from a sociocultural theoretical orientation respond to students’ writing less from a set of “good” or “bad” written response practices and more from their various reader-reactions to the individual text.

The second part of the main research question deals with beliefs, so the second aspect to consider is teachers’ beliefs. First, to answer the main research question, I was not looking for the teachers to espouse the same beliefs as each other about the purposes of freshman writing, their roles as teachers of freshman writing, or their understanding of the program in which they were teaching. I asked interview questions designed to let the teachers talk. From the

interviews, the observations, and the documents, I tried to generalize each teacher's broad beliefs related to freshman writing programs, their roles in the process, and their assessment practices. I found that teachers need to spend time reflecting about their beliefs so that they can articulate them. The fact that teachers have beliefs is understood, and even if teachers do not articulate their beliefs explicitly, all teachers base their actions on some sort of belief system. Part of the "how" is that through reflection, teachers should first know what they believe since those beliefs will guide their written response practices.

When should such reflection occur? Recent research (e.g., Anson, 2012; Huot & Perry, 2009) suggests that teachers should always be aware of the reasons they respond. These reasons or purposes for responding will change based on instructional context. According to Knoblauch and Brannon (2006), written commentary "makes explicit to one student at a time, text by text, what a teacher's values are" (p. 15). If teachers respond individually in specific instructional contexts, then their perspectives as readers could also shift based on the demands of the assignment and the student.

Another aspect of beliefs related to the "how" of the research questions is that beliefs can be influenced by a culture. In this particular case being studied, the writing program acted as a culture to transmit beliefs, or in a broad sense, to transmit ideology. The four participants in the study all mentioned the same two concepts as being important, indicating that the program communicates well the concepts behind the identity they present to students and to the university. Likewise, the program understands well its role in providing the participants with the resources they need to operate within the bounds of the program. The second part of "how," then, is for teachers to understand that their beliefs can be constructed or altered based on the specific culture in which they are teaching.

To put the findings together into one concise answer seems complicated. How do teachers' written comments reflect their beliefs? In the present study, teachers with an understanding of the expectations of a particular freshman writing program alternate among various perspectives as readers while responding to and assessing various students' writing. In doing so, they use diverse commenting practices which align with their explicitly stated beliefs about written assessment, their roles as writing teachers, and the purposes of a freshman writing program.

### **Delimitations and Limitations of the Study**

#### **Delimitations**

In designing this study, I chose to delimit the study in order to make the data collection and analysis manageable. Although I described those delimitations in Chapter 1, I summarize them here. First, the teachers all participated in the overhaul of the freshman writing program, a program with specific core values and a specific identity. The teachers self-reported their beliefs, but their knowledge of the department's freshman writing program may have affected how they reported their beliefs.

Second, the teachers teach sections of the same course, ENGL 102. In this course, students are expected to have a certain level of writing ability prior to entering the course, and they are expected to exhibit proficiency in certain course outcomes. The teachers are aware of these expectations and consequently structure the course to help students attain proficiency. The delimitation is that findings will reflect the experiences of teachers in one type of freshman English composition classroom in a specific writing program with specific standard outcomes.

The study is further delimited based on the writing samples provided for comment analysis. I used one set of papers from one assignment given early in the semester, so the

findings are restricted to the comments made early in the semester on one specific assignment. This snapshot in time may not represent the way that the teachers would respond in writing over the course of the semester.

Another delimitation concerns generalizability of the study. The sample size of four participants limits the generalizability of this study. The findings discussed in this chapter relate to the specific case being studied—four instructors of freshman English composition teaching second-semester freshman English composition at a specific university—and should not be generalized to represent even other teachers in the same program much less the whole population of freshman English composition teachers.

Finally, I chose to analyze written teacher response rather than all types of response that may occur in the context of a writing course. This delimits the study to one aspect of teacher response.

### **Limitations**

This study is not without its limitations. First, teachers knew that I would be analyzing the comments they wrote. They may have attended better to those essays rather than to the rest of the essays during the semester. Closely connected to this limitation is another regarding their honesty in answering the questions during the interviews. Because they knew that I would be sharing the results with the program director and the chair of the English department, they may have felt compelled to answer differently than they believed. Finally, the teachers may have had assumptions about my study, and they could have changed their regular written response practices based on those assumptions.

Second, in order to code the comments into the five orientations of teacher-as-reader, I sub-divided longer comments into shorter comments for coding purposes. In doing so, I made

decisions about the comments prior to the coding. My decisions may not reflect the thoughts of the teacher, and the shorter comments may not have functioned well as stand-alone comments though they ended up being stand-alone comments.

Finally, while I trained the other raters who then coded the participants' comments, a limitation related to the use of raters is their subjectivity. Though I used three raters who had 89% agreement on the same one-third of the total comments, they were categorizing the comments based on their perceptions of the teachers' intentions, perceptions which may not have reflected the teachers' intentions for the comments.

### **Implications**

This study does offer implications for theory and practice in college composition instruction. The first few implications relate to teacher beliefs. First, although this sounds obvious, teachers need to understand the importance of identifying their beliefs. Because beliefs are complex, subjective, and subject to change, teachers need to make sure that their beliefs represent who they are at the present time. Self-assessment and self-reflection can help teachers identify and articulate their beliefs about writing and written response.

Second, teachers must ensure that their beliefs will enable them to work within the context of the writing program that employs them. If teachers' beliefs clash with the beliefs of a particular program, or if they are unwilling to work within the confines of the program despite their beliefs, the teacher may make pedagogical decisions which adversely affect students (Davis & Andrzejewski, 2009). This implication has great importance in today's multicultural classrooms. As colleges and universities enroll more students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, writing programs must adapt to meet students' needs. Programs such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) may be instituted to help multilingual students become

proficient in reading and writing English (Silva & Leki, 2004). Teachers whose beliefs do not consider such diversity may have trouble working within those programs.

Third, teachers should not try to force their written response practices to fit every piece of student writing. While this seems intuitive to teachers who are familiar with Sommers' (1982) and Brannon and Knoblauch's (1982) seminal studies, current research suggests that teachers should adapt their response practices to meet the needs of the specific students and the contexts of the rhetorical situation (Anson, 2012).

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

While the selected literature of Chapter 2 provided the impetus for this study, the results from this study suggest the need for further research. First, I intentionally did not consider student reaction to teachers' comments or peer responses in this study. I focused instead on teachers' beliefs as related to practices. Further research could consider students' beliefs about the writing process and the purpose of written response. An extension of this idea would be to compare students' beliefs about written response with their reactions to teachers' written responses.

Additionally, I examined one set of essays assigned during a set period of time in the semester. In future studies, researchers might collect marked essays assigned across the span of an entire semester to see if teachers' responses to earlier essays are consistent with their responses on later essays. A similar study might examine if and how teachers' practices change over the course of a semester.

Also, the participants in this study met certain criteria which limited the study. A study examining teaching assistants, instructors, various levels of professors, and research professors might reveal some differences among the teachers' beliefs related to the purpose of freshman

English composition, the role of the teacher, and the purpose for written response. It might also reveal a wide diversity in the response practices of professionals within the same writing program. A similar study might consider if gender plays a role in teacher beliefs. In this study, the two male teachers' codings in the Pedagogical Orientation were at or above 50% while the female teachers' codings were around 30%, though I did not examine gender as a factor.

Finally, I examined only written responses in this study. Other studies might consider looking at all the ways teachers respond to student writing before comparing teachers' beliefs to their response practices. Finally, researchers might investigate how beliefs impact peer review.

### **Researcher Reflection**

The topic of teacher written response has intrigued me since I began teaching elementary school in 1985. On the very first day of my teaching career, I asked my second-grade students to write for five minutes in a response journal. That afternoon, once the last student had left the classroom, I read their journals, and despite their invented spellings and their emerging sentence structure, I could understand what they had written, and I wrote back to them. I did not "correct" their writing; I simply wrote my reactions to what I was reading. Many of those students' journal entries grew from a few words with a picture to pages-long stories, and I enjoyed learning about my students through their journal writing. For the next thirteen years of teaching elementary and middle school students, I spent nearly every afternoon reading and responding to my students' journal entries.

I responded to those students in other ways, too. When I taught Language Arts in the elementary grades and I explained to my students about the kinds of academic writing they should learn, I responded to their writing, but in this context, my responses dealt more with correctness, with marking those deviations from what the textbooks said was "right." I did not



enjoy having to “correct” their writing, and I suspect that my students learned to compartmentalize their writing. In their response journals, they felt free to write without fear of being marked wrong, but on their other writing assignments, they resisted taking risks with their writing out of fear of the red pen (or green pen or purple pen or whatever color I happened to be using for the day). I, too, compartmentalized my written response, saving one type of response for their journals and another for their subject-area writing.

As I matured as a teacher, the way I responded to student writing changed. I kept asking students to write in response journals, and I kept responding in a reader-response manner to their musings. However, when I would grade work in other subjects (like Language Arts), I learned to respond as a reader even as I responded as an editor marking errors. I believed that a balance was important. At one point, I even had two different grades on every paper—one grade for content and one grade for correctness—because I saw myself as having two distinct roles.

After having taken a six-year hiatus from full-time teaching, I returned to teaching but in the college classroom. Although I had thirteen years of teaching experience, I felt unprepared to teach college. In the first college course I taught, Teaching Methods, I required students to do various types of writing. Students complained that I graded their work too harshly since I was marking their work for correctness in addition to content. When a position opened to teach English courses at the college, I earned a master’s degree in English and began teaching English courses along with my education courses.

In the nine years that I have been teaching college-level English, my views on responding to student writing have changed. I still believe that my job is to help students learn to write for college purposes, so I do have to pay attention to the local issues of grammar and mechanics.

However, I now spend more of my grading time responding as a reader and enjoying the writing for its ability to connect with me—or not connect with me—as a reader.

Until I began this dissertation, I had never spent time reflecting on my beliefs about written response. Furthermore, I do not know if I had ever articulated my beliefs about teaching freshman English composition until I had to write the ubiquitous Philosophy of Teaching Freshman Composition paper for a graduate course. I found and reread that paper, but the views expressed in that paper are not the views I now hold. In fact, I was obviously influenced by course content in writing the paper as it contained references to researchers or theories which do not inform my current practices. Like the teachers in this dissertation project whose beliefs may have been influenced by the writing program, I likely let the course content form the basis of my beliefs at the time I wrote that paper. I suspect that were I to write a Philosophy of Teaching Freshman Composition paper today, the names I would cite would be many of the names in the bibliography of this dissertation, and my views would lean more toward the sociocultural than toward the cognitive.

Additionally, until I began this project, I had never systematically examined my written responses. However, because I needed to be familiar with the orientations in preparation for analyzing the comments of the four teachers in this study, I informally categorized and coded my comments on a set of essays I had graded several semesters ago. Since I coded my own comments, the results are very subjective and should not be compared with the comment analyses of the four teachers in this study. Despite the limitations of self-coding, the analysis provided me with a profile of my perspective as a teacher-reader of student text. My highest orientation was Pedagogical (45%) followed by Interpretive (18%). Social and Evaluative tied with 14% each, and my lowest orientation was Cognitive/Emotive (9%). These results indicated

that my comments do reflect varying perspectives. However, I suspect my percentages would vary depending on several factors such as the type of assignment being graded, the pressures of deadlines, and the course in which the writing was assigned.

The process of conducting this study has been a journey for me as much as it has been a means to complete the degree requirements. Through the process of studying and writing, I have confirmed my beliefs about freshman writing and my role as a teacher. I have confirmed the reasons for my response practices, regardless of whether those practices would be considered “best practices.” In my context as a teacher of freshman English composition, my way of responding to student writing works for me, and I have confidence in my ability to make appropriate pedagogical choices for my students based on what I believe will be best for them as student writers.

### **Final Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and written response practices. A case-study approach was designed to determine how teachers’ written response practices reflect their beliefs about the writing process and their roles as teachers of freshman English composition. Results indicate that the teachers in this study are aware of their beliefs and employ commenting practices consistent with their beliefs. This study contributes to the field of response theory by highlighting the importance of teachers’ articulations of their beliefs and the need for teachers to respond to student writing in ways which consider their various perspectives as readers of text. In short, teachers’ beliefs are but one dimension of the complex social practice of teacher written response.

Why does a study on the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their written response practices matter? It matters when teachers spend hours grading papers and assessing student

writing. In the thirty years since the publication of the seminal works by Sommers (1982) and Brannon and Knoblauch (1982), teachers have been instructed on the types of comments to write, the colors of pens to use for assessing writing, the best position on the page on which to write their comments, the right way to phrase their comments, and the amount of time they should spend grading one essay. However, more recent researchers (Anson, 2012; Huot, 2002; Huot & Perry, 2009; Knoblauch & Brannon, 2006) concede that the emphasis on the “best” way to assess writing removes the focus from the reasons teachers respond.

In my study, I examined the beliefs of teachers in relation to their written response practices because I wanted to understand the dynamics between beliefs and praxis. By examining why teachers respond the way they do and comparing the *why* of their response with the *how* of their response, I found that teachers intuitively are responding to student writing in ways that work for them in their contexts, and those ways of responding are influenced in part by their beliefs. While their beliefs may change over time as teachers learn more about themselves as teachers and about their goals for teaching freshman writing, teachers respond to student writing because it is one of the many ways in which they can teach each student. More importantly, despite the debate as to the effectiveness of written response (Haswell, 2008; Knoblauch & Brannon, 2006), teachers continue to respond to student writing in faith that what they are doing matters.

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Appendix A

“Protecting Human Research Participants” Certificate



**Certificate of Completion**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Sandra Vandercook** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 09/14/2009

Certification Number: 292691



Appendix B

Institutional Review Board Approval

**From:** UNO Institutional Review Board [unoirb@uno.edu]  
**Sent:** Monday, January 30, 2012 12:12 PM  
**To:** John G Barnitz  
**Cc:** Sandra Ficker Vandercook  
**Subject:** IRB Approval 07Jan12

***University Committee for the Protection  
of Human Subjects in Research  
University of New Orleans***

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*Campus Correspondence*

Principal Investigator: John Barnitz

Co-Investigator: Sandra Vandercook

Date: January 30, 2012

Protocol Title: "An Investigation of the Relationship between English Composition Teachers' Beliefs about Written Feedback and Their Written Feedback Practices"

IRB#: 07Jan12

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 1 and 2B. This minimal-risk study will be conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices and will entail research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods. In addition, any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project.

Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair

Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

## Appendix C

Informed Consent: Department Chairman



Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. John Barnitz in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of New Orleans. I am currently conducting a research study to learn how English composition teachers' beliefs about written response reflect their actual written response practices. I am interested in finding out what informs teachers' beliefs and what types of response practices they employ. Additionally, I hope to discover how teachers' practices align with the philosophy of the freshman English program.

I am requesting your permission to conduct case study research in the English Department. As part of the research study, I plan to conduct at least two interviews with three to five instructors of ENGL 102. Teachers' names will not be used, and they must give written informed consent. In addition to the interviews, I will observe the teachers on two to three occasions while they are teaching. The observations will not be recorded, though I will take field notes during the observations. Finally, as the focus of the study is the written comments teachers make on students' essays, I will be collecting copies of students' essays on which teachers have written comments. Students eighteen years and older will be asked if they are willing to participate, and the essays to be collected will come only from those students who have signed a consent form. Students' names will be removed before teachers submit them, and teachers' comments will be analyzed according to a specific coding schema.

The results of the research will be shared with the director of the freshman writing program. Since one of the foci of the newly revised program is the emphasis on teachers' formal assessment of 3000 of a student's 5000 high stakes words, the director may use the information as an informal progress report on the assessment practices of the selected teachers.

I will protect the identity of all participants—both yours and the students'—through the use of pseudonyms in this and any future publications or presentations. Participants should understand that they might be quoted directly but that their names will not be used in any part of the report. They may withdraw at any point in the study at any time, without any prejudice.

The risks associated with to the teachers and the students are minimal. However, if you have any questions about the research study or your participation in the study, please feel free to contact me at 504-329-0000 or Dr. John Barnitz at 504-280-7047.

I appreciate your willingness to share your time. Please contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon (504-280-3990) at the University of New Orleans for answers to questions about this research and your rights as a human subject.

Thank you,

Sandra Vandercook  
Doctoral Student in Curriculum and Instruction  
University of New Orleans



I have read the above and discussed it with the researcher. I understand the study and agree to participate. By signing below, I am giving my informed consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix D

### Initial Request Seeking Participants for the Study

October 12, 2011

Dear Professors/Instructors,

My name is Sandy Vandercook, and I am a Ph.D. student at UNO in the College of Education and Human Development, Department of Curriculum and Instruction. I received both a M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction and a M.A. in English from UNO and am glad to be pursuing my Ph.D. at UNO as well. My major professor is Dr. John Barnitz.

I am preparing to study how English composition teachers' written response practices reflect their beliefs about the purpose of response and about their role in the writing process. I have spoken with Ali Arnold about conducting my research in the Department of English, and she has given me approval to conduct the research. She also gave me your name and gave permission me to contact you to see if you might be interested in helping me with my study. In short, I'd like to interview three to five ENGL 102 instructors regarding their views on assessing student writing and their views on the teacher's role in the writing process. I anticipate this initial interview to last no more than one hour. Following the interview, I plan to observe those teachers during two to three class sessions (specifically class sessions when writing prompts are given and when graded essays are returned to students). I'd then request photocopies of graded student essays so that I can code those written comments and analyze them in light of classroom context and the information gleaned from the initial interviews. Finally, I'd conduct a short (30 minute) follow-up interview in which I will show the teachers the results of my analysis of their comments to elicit their reactions to the analysis. While it seems like I'm asking much, in reality, sitting for the interviews and photocopying student essays would be the major time investment.

I do think that given the recent overhaul of the freshman writing program and the emphasis on having 3,000 of the student's words "formally assessed," the findings could benefit the department when it evaluates the program. A cross-case analysis may be performed to see how individual instructors' written comments on student essays meet specific aspects of the program.

I'd love you know if you might be interested in helping me with my research. I plan to conduct the interviews and observations in the first part of the spring semester. Once I have heard back from those to whom I have sent this letter, I will choose three to five of you and will contact you with a formal consent to conduct the research. You can reply directly to this email, you can email me or you can call my cell phone (504-xxx-xxxx) to let me know if you are interested. Thanks for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Sandy Vandercook

## Appendix E

### Informed Consent: Teacher Participants





Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. John Barnitz in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of New Orleans. I am currently conducting a research study to learn how English composition teachers' beliefs about written response reflect their actual written response practices. I am interested in finding out what informs teachers' beliefs and what types of response practices they employ. Additionally, I hope to discover how teachers' practices align with the philosophy of the freshman English program.

I am requesting your participation in two interviews that will last approximately one to one-and-a-half hours each. We will meet at a location of your time and choice, and the interviews will be tape-recorded. Additionally, I am requesting to observe your classroom on two to three occasions when you are teaching. The observations will not be recorded in any way though I will take field notes while I observe. The dates of the observations will be at a time mutually agreed upon by both parties. Finally, I am requesting that you submit blind copies of student essays on which you have written comments about the student's writing. I will analyze those comments according to a specific coding schema. I will be requesting student consent to have their essays collected as data and will therefore ask you to submit copies only for those students who have given informed consent.

Your participation in the study is voluntary. I will protect the identity of all participants—both yours and the students'—through the use of pseudonyms in this and any future publications or presentations. Participants should understand that they might be quoted directly but that their names will not be used in any part of the report. You may withdraw at any point in the study at any time, without any prejudice.

While you may not receive any direct benefits from your participation in the study, you may have some indirect benefits. Benefits to you may include an understanding of your response practices from an objective observer. Perhaps you have never considered your orientation regarding the types of responses you write. Additionally, the freshman English program may benefit indirectly as the results will be shared with the chair of the program.

The risks associated with your participation in the interviews and observations are minimal. However, if you have any questions about the research study or your participation in the study, please feel free to contact me at 504-329-0000 or Dr. John Barnitz at 504-280-7047.

I appreciate your willingness to share your time. Please contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon (504-280-3990) at the University of New Orleans for answers to questions about this research and your rights as a human subject.

Thank you,

Sandra Vandercook  
Doctoral Student in Curriculum and Instruction  
University of New Orleans



I have read the above and discussed it with the researcher. I understand the study and agree to participate. By signing below, I am giving my informed consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix F

### Informed Consent: Student Participants



Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. John Barnitz in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of New Orleans. I am currently conducting a research study to learn how English composition teachers' beliefs about written response reflect their actual written response practices. I am interested in finding out what informs teachers' beliefs and what types of response practices they employ. Additionally, I hope to discover how teachers' practices align with the philosophy of the freshman English program.

I am requesting your indirect participation. I have asked teachers to submit blind copies of student essays on which they have written comments in response to the student's writing. If you consent to participate, your teacher will include one of your essays to submit to the research project. While the focus of the essays will be the teacher's comments, those comments will be made in reaction to your writing, so portions of your writing may be included in final project report.

Your participation in the study is voluntary. I will protect the identity of all participants—both yours and the teachers'—through the use of pseudonyms in this and any future publications or presentations. Participants should understand that they might be quoted directly but that their names will not be used in any part of the report. You may withdraw at any point in the study at any time, without any penalty. Your grade will not be affected, nor will your status, care, or treatment in class be affected. Teachers will not see my analysis of their comments on your essay until after the semester has ended.

While you may not receive any direct benefits from your participation in the study, you may have some indirect benefits. By understanding their written response practices, teachers may be more aware of the comments they make and how those comments can assist students in growing as writers. In turn, in future classes, you may notice a difference in the responses they write on essays.

The risks associated with your participation are minimal. However, if you have any questions about the research study or your participation in the study, please feel free to contact me at 504-329-0000 or Dr. John Barnitz at 504-280-7047.

I appreciate your willingness to share your time. Please contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon (504-280-3990) at the University of New Orleans for answers to questions about this research and your rights as a human subject.

Thank you,

Sandra Vandercook  
Doctoral Student in Curriculum and Instruction  
University of New Orleans



I have read the above and discussed it with the researcher. I understand the study and agree to participate. By signing below, I am giving my informed consent.

Please indicate your date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Appendix G  
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol  
Interview #1  
Sandy Vandercook  
Dissertation Project  
Spring 2011

**Brief self-introduction:**

- Doctoral student in C&I at UNO, major professor John Barnitz
- Research interest in teachers' written comments (beliefs and practices)
- Already teaching at the college level; hope that research leads me to better practices and to an understanding of how teachers' beliefs shape their practices

**Gather demographic information on participants:**

- College education: undergrad major/minor and graduate emphasis
- Years of teaching experience (at what levels?)
- Years teaching freshman English comp
- Other subjects taught
- Years teaching in UNO's freshman writing program
- Other?

**Major Focus #1: to assess their broad beliefs in the purpose of freshman writing**

1. What do you believe the purpose of freshman writing to be?
2. What is the role of the teacher in freshman writing? (Key in on teacher-as-reader vs. teacher-as-grader if they do not bring this up.)

**Major Focus #2: to assess their knowledge of the freshman writing program at UNO**

1. Regarding the overhaul of the freshman writing program at UNO--having finished one year of the program, what is your interpretation of the direction of the program?
2. What do you believe to be the critical components of the freshman writing program at UNO?
3. What are the expectations of teachers in the UNO writing program—for whom do you feel you're performing? What about autonomy in the classroom?

**Major Focus #3: to assess their understanding of best practices regarding response/assessment of student writing**

1. When you were in your graduate program, what type of training did you receive in assessing student work?
2. What do you consider to be the best practices for assessing student writing?
3. What literature/research informed your understanding of best practices? What do you think about that literature? How does that literature "jive" with 21<sup>st</sup> century freshman writing programs?

4. Regarding UNO's assessment policy (3000 of students' 5000 words are to be formally assessed)—How do you formally assess student writing?
5. How do you respond in writing to students' writing? (May be unnecessary if interviewees have already covered this in #4 above.)

**Major Focus #4: to assess their perspectives of their response practices**

1. Talk about the types of comments you write. What are the comments intended to do?
2. What do you believe students do with your comments? Then why do you write them?
3. How do you think your response practices reflect your beliefs about the role of the teacher in the writing process?
4. How do think your response practices line up with the requirements of the program?



Interview Protocol  
Interview #2  
Sandy Vandercook  
Dissertation Project  
Spring 2011

**Review purpose of study**

**Before showing teachers their individual analyses, ask questions based on the specific results of the analysis of their comments.**

**Note—these questions cannot be predetermined ahead of time as they will be specific to the individual teachers.**

**Show participants results of analysis of their written comments**

**Follow-up Questions—Member Check**

1. Discuss the results of the analysis of their written comments
2. Ask if they agree with the results. If so, why? If not, why?
3. Did you anticipate that you had this specific orientation as reader? Why or why not?
4. Ask if they want to add anything to the analysis (i.e. Did I miss something in the observations?).
5. Discuss the results of the cross analysis regarding the program.
6. Ask if they agree with the results. Why or why not?
7. Ask if they anticipate making any adjustments either to their philosophy of teaching/responding to student writing or to their practices.
8. Ask if they have any further comments to make regarding the study.

Appendix H

Sample Blank Page for Field Notes

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Setting \_\_\_\_\_

Participant \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIPTIVE FIELD NOTES	ANALYTIC FIELD NOTES

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FIELD NOTES:

## Appendix I

### Protocol Form for Coding Teachers' Written Comments

**PROTOCOL FORM FOR CODING TEACHERS' WRITTEN COMMENTS**  
Based on Sperling (1994)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Essay Title

	Comment Number										Total
<b>TEACHER ORIENTATION</b>											
<b>INTERPRETIVE</b>											
Reader's Experiences											
Text Knowledge											
Inner Feelings											
Writer's Experiences											
Text Knowledge											
Inner Feelings											
<b>SOCIAL</b>											
Peer											
Expert											
<b>EVALUATIVE</b>											
Positive											
Negative											
<b>PEDAGOGICAL</b>											
Change/Correct Ideas											
Text											
Expand Ideas											
Text											
Support Ideas											
Text											
<b>COGNITIVE/EMOTIVE</b>											
Analytical											
Emotional											
<b>OTHER</b>											

## Appendix J

### Permission Letter for Using Framework

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE



BERKELEY • DAVIS • IRVINE • LOS ANGELES • MERCED • RIVERSIDE • SAN  
DIEGO • SAN FRANCISCO • SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

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Melanie Sperling, Professor, Faculty Chair  
Graduate School of Education  
RIVERSIDE, CA 92521- 0128  
[melanie.sperling@ucr.edu](mailto:melanie.sperling@ucr.edu)

October 12, 2011

To: Sandy Vandercook  
From: Melanie Sperling

I am happy to grant you permission to use the framework that I developed for thinking about teachers' orientations (Interpretive Orientation, Social Orientation, Cognitive/Emotive Orientation, Evaluative Orientation, Pedagogical Orientation) as reflected in their written comments on students' papers. I ask that you give citations to my work where it is appropriate to do so.

Best of luck with your dissertation.

## VITA

Sandra Ficker Vandercook was born in Hendersonville, North Carolina, but as an infant, she moved with her family to Tequesta, Florida, where she resided until she began college. In 1985, she earned a B.A. in Elementary Education from the University of Florida. Upon graduation, she began teaching elementary school students in Palm Beach County, Florida. In 1988, she moved to Brazil to teach elementary students at an international school in the city of São Paulo. While there, she taught students from over ten different countries. After two years teaching abroad, she returned to teach elementary school students in Palm Beach County for one school year before moving to New Orleans in 1991 to teach in St. Bernard Parish.

During her time as an elementary teacher in St. Bernard Parish, Sandra began graduate studies at the University of New Orleans (UNO), eventually earning her M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction from UNO in 1996. In 1998, she quit teaching for a few years after the birth of her first daughter. When she did return to teaching in the fall of 2000, she taught education courses part-time at Leavell College, the undergraduate college of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. In 2004, she began teaching full-time at Leavell College and resumed graduate studies at UNO, eventually earning her M.A. in English with a concentration in rhetoric/composition studies and American literature.

In 2007, Sandra was promoted to Assistant Professor of English and Education at Leavell College and began working on her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at UNO. In 2012, she was promoted to Associate Professor of English and Education, and she graduated with her Ph.D. She plans to continue teaching at Leavell College.