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Mind the Gap: A Case Study in Instructor Intention and Feedback

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by

Meredith R. Grady

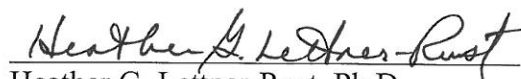A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for a degree of

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Abstract

While effective instructor written feedback is critical, the process is often the least understood and is a detriment to student success when improperly applied. This case study identifies strategies that characterize successful instructor written feedback for students' written assignments in an introductory college composition course. My research examines instructor feedback within the diverse environment of the community college thus highlighting the importance of instructor knowledge of composition pedagogy and feedback methods and approaches. A review of literature on instructor feedback identifies instructor and student collaboration as a key component for success together with understanding of historical trends in the field of composition studies. This case study includes five individual interviews with introductory composition community college instructors and a textual analysis of twenty samples of formative and summative instructor feedback to student submissions. Bloom's Taxonomy is used to graph alignment of stated instructor goals in relation to resulting written feedback. Study findings reveal a discrepancy or gap between instructor approaches to and goals for feedback and the resulting written feedback. An evaluation of the gap between the instructor approach and the resulting written feedback helped develop implications for teaching in any introductory composition course. The implications of the study reveal that understanding various approaches when setting goals and providing written feedback together with knowledge of the history of composition pedagogy are powerful tools in the introductory composition course.

Keywords: Bloom's Taxonomy, composition pedagogy, written feedback

Dedication

To Jewel.

Soar with the wind ladybug.

Acknowledgements

It is a pleasure to thank my advisor, Dr. Heather Lettner-Rust, for her patience, guidance, and support throughout this project. Her knowledge and enthusiasm was invaluable.

In addition, I thank my readers. Each reader challenged me to explore the subject matter in different ways. As a result, I gained a greater understanding of the topic and of my capabilities as a researcher and writer. Also, I extend my thanks to the participants in the case study. They allowed me into their personal teaching space so I could gain a greater understanding of the community college composition course from the instructor's perspective.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter One: Introduction

In 1987, at the age of 17, I took my first college class. I typed my papers on an electric typewriter. Online class registration did not exist, so enrolling in my first community college courses meant driving to campus on registration day and standing in the hallway outside of the registrar's office. Two years later, I graduated with honors, earning an Associate's degree in Legal Assisting.

Over the next 17 years, I built a fulfilling career in the legal field. More recently, as I began to think about other occupational opportunities, I applied and was accepted to the University of Richmond School of Continuing Studies where the average age for enrolled students is 37. Using the online registration system (much more efficient than standing in line), I enrolled in my first course. It was August of 2006, and I was 37 years old with a full-time job. In the interim, technologies for education had changed dramatically. For example, the library's index card catalogue had been replaced by a computerized system, and instead of documenting sources with footnotes only, I was learning varieties of citation styles (i.e. MLA, APA) and other acronyms previously unfamiliar to me. Adapting to the changes, four years later in May of 2010, I graduated with a Bachelor of Liberal Arts (BLA) degree with an emphasis in English.

When I transitioned four months later from the undergraduate experience to the graduate program, one notable difference was the critical analysis incorporated in the written feedback I received on papers. I attributed the changes in the emphasis to the difference in the types of students these two institutions were addressing. Specifically, the University of Richmond School of Continuing Studies taught an audience of primarily older students who were balancing full-time employment and school. In contrast,

Longwood University's graduate program incorporated cross-listed courses blending undergraduate and graduate students. As a result, the majority of students in the cross-listed courses were undergraduates, primarily 19-and 20-year old juniors and seniors, few of whom worked full-time.

Unfortunately, because of the passage of time since my graduation from community college in 1989, I do not recall details regarding feedback from my community college course instructors. However, as I experienced various forms of faculty feedback for my academic submissions, I grew increasingly interested in how instructor feedback on student writing affects student learning. I became interested in the differences in instructor feedback between that which was offered at the University of Richmond (an institution that offers both bachelors and masters' degrees with cross-listed classes) and Longwood University (also an institution that offers both bachelors and masters' degrees with cross-listed classes). More specifically, as I entered into my graduate program, I found that I had to develop multiple innovative strategies for interpreting and applying those various types of feedback in order to improve my writing. I would ask questions of my instructors, either in class or during their office hours or I would research issues raised in an instructor's comments. For example, I recall receiving a comment that simply read "inchoate." I was unsure what the instructor meant by that term, so in order to most effectively revise that draft, I was challenged to obtain clarification of the comment.

My first assignment as a graduate student at Longwood University directed my attention to the style and tenor of the instructor's feedback, with my initial response being quite negative to the instructor's comments. I had been challenged by several aspects of

the assignment and, combined with unfamiliarity of the instructor and the expectations, I was struck by the negative feedback. There were few guidelines provided in the way of an assignment sheet, class discussions, or even an evaluation rubric. The genre of a research analysis of a work of literature was also unfamiliar, as was the process for writing such a document. I was unfamiliar with the process of knowing how to identify a workable idea in the text, research social/historical/or political issues it generated, and then discussing the implications of those issues.

The instructor, following an academic model that promotes learning for his students, afforded me the opportunity to meet twice outside of the instruction time and offered written feedback on my drafts. I followed the guidance and revised the paper so that I was proud to present it to a gathering of my classmates and department faculty. My instructor acknowledged the extent of my progress, and I completed the course with a sense of accomplishment and enthusiasm for what was to come.

However, the next semester, this enthusiasm was challenged when I enrolled in a second course with the same instructor. For this course, the emphasis was on writing a term paper which weighted as the majority of the final grade. There was also less opportunity for instructor feedback during the drafting and revising process, or formative feedback. When the graded paper was returned to me, the instructor's written response indicated that my thesis was weak and the remainder of the paper needed much revision. The grade correlated with the comments. In my perception, the instructor's comments read to me like a sweeping dismissal of my effort. The grade and corresponding comments from the instructor provoked an internal debate regarding whether I had the ability to complete the program or if I was a failure. At that point, I resolved to pursue my

graduate degree and determined that I would not quit just because a course was challenging or I perceived an instructor's comments as critical. Instead, the negativity of one professor on one paper early in my graduate studies momentarily derailed my fortitude to continue to pursue my degree.

What I had brought into my graduate studies did not align with what my graduate instructors required. My writing in undergraduate studies focused on my interpretation of literature while my graduate program emphasized research and analysis. The undergraduate program afforded the opportunity to delve into individualistic interpretation of the literature but did not require a research basis. The graduate program demanded an understanding of the framework of the story which required in-depth study and utilization of research resources that had not been previously required. In my graduate studies, I learned to research motivations and inspirations that may have had an impact on the author. For example, Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo,* the novel I researched in my first graduate course, incorporates the history of Napoleon and the cultural unrest during the time the novel was written. Following completion of my research, I read *The Count of Monte Cristo* with the ability to identify the message the author was sending to his contemporary audience. Upon reflection of the instructor's comments that provoked consideration as to whether I would remain in the program, I recognize that he may have defined my ineffective utilization of source materials, the lack of recognition of the "nuggets" of useful information, and the ability to incorporate it into a more complex, original argument while simultaneously practicing a whole new set of citation/documentation guidelines.

While I felt more confident in the research and analysis skills I acquired in my first graduate course, I still had a lot to learn about composition. With each new course and instructor, I learned new skills, tools, and strategies for addressing the conventions and constraints of the new genres I was also encountering for the first time. For example, one instructor taught me how to combine research and analysis while emphasizing the importance of defining a thesis. I gained experience how to write a solid thesis from another instructor. I learned how to compare multiple texts from yet another instructor. I was challenged to acquire expertise in accessing and utilizing several academic databases in order to locate credible source material; primarily scholarly journals to replace my previous tendency to reach for books and popular media that was current and relevant. I developed a more personalized system for note-taking as I conducted research. As my proficiency in understanding critical thinking in my chosen field grew, I recognized that I could discern the essential elements in the authors' arguments and engage in considering different perspectives simultaneously. Because I focused on successfully completing one or two classes each semester, I did not realize at the time just how effectively my writing processes and proficiencies were developing.

Although I still struggle to craft an effective claim or thesis statements and to analyze a text and validate my argument through research, I now recognize that successful composition is not exclusively one or two skills but a compilation of knowledge that is built over time. The first disastrous essay episode temporarily threatened to derail my commitment to complete my graduate studies but, instead, it drove me to consider my learning needs and pursue learning in new directions. Should my journey result in teaching composition in a community college system, I want to help

students understand and develop the effective strategies and processes for composing a variety of documents, from informal narratives to more involved, researched persuasive texts. I want to use my experience to help students grow in their confidence regarding their writing and, ultimately, become more successful in their professional lives. One of the critical learning dynamics in my graduate study has been wrestling with integrating assignments with my own perspectives and style of writing. For example, challenges include accurate interpretation of instructor comments, revision appropriate to the comments, and application of the knowledge in later composition.

Over the course of my graduate studies, my personal challenges and successes with composition led to an interest in how instructors learn feedback techniques, incorporate methods to enhance learning, and encourage students for future writing. Interestingly, during this case study, I became aware initially I was seeking a specific definition of effective instructor feedback. As my thesis developed, I recognized that the emphasis was not on defining "successful feedback" but rather examining the process involved in achieving effective instructor feedback. As a community college introductory composition course instructor, whether classroom or online format, I will be aware that each student brings an individual skill set to the course. As a result, I have learned that it is important to meet the individual at his or her place of knowledge and encourage the student to grow in academic proficiency. My responsibility as an instructor will be to ensure that each student receives feedback acknowledging his or her place in learning. In addition, I will be charged with giving students guidance and challenges in alignment with their individual skill sets.

Thus, this case study is significant because it is useful to educators, including myself, from pre-school through higher education. For the purpose of this case study, instructor feedback (as a whole) has been isolated and defined within detailed parameters. Specifically, the case study involves interview participants who are full-time English faculty who teach introductory composition at a local community college. This case study examines the strategies for successful instructor feedback approaches through discussion of composition theory and pedagogy. In addition, interviews with community college introductory composition instructors and analysis of student papers containing instructor comments reveal useful methodology for approaching instructor feedback. Because feedback is made up of many competing and complimentary goals, the instructor with an awareness of feedback goals, coupled with understanding of the individual nature of feedback, has the opportunity to teach composition skills that the student may successfully use throughout his or her academic career. This case study identifies approaches instructors can incorporate to provide effective guidance and encouragement intended to match the students' abilities resulting in growth in composition knowledge.

The following chapters are divided as follows: Chapter Two provides a review of scholarly literature concerning instructor feedback approaches; Chapter Three reveals the research methods undertaken for this case study; Chapter Four discusses the interview data findings and analysis; and Chapter Five concludes with the interpretation of case study results, discussion of future research, and my reflections.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Effective instructor feedback in the community college composition course requires an awareness of the importance of understanding approaches to and identifying elements of feedback. The purpose of written feedback in the composition course is to provide students with guidance and resources for effective composition. The process of delivering effective feedback in a composition course is challenging in many aspects.

Thus, the instructor's awareness of conscious and unconscious reaction and response to student writing must be acknowledged to successfully provide effective feedback. Overall, Sommers' (1982) article, "Responding to Student Writing," identified the admirable goal "to help our students to become that questioning reader themselves, because, ultimately, we believe that becoming such a reader will help them to evaluate what they have written and develop control over their writing" (p. 148). In order to achieve this goal, Knoblauch and Brannon's (1984) publication, "Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing," cites the instructor "offer[s] perceptions of uncertainty, incompleteness, unfulfilled promises, unrealized opportunities, as motivation for more writing and therefore more learning about a subject as well as more successful communication of whatever has been learned" (p. 123).

Therefore, the instructor has achieved successful feedback when he or she provides comments to students which acknowledge composition skills and offers guidance to build upon those skills (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 20). For example, the instructor provides successful guidance to the student when specific strengths and weaknesses are identified in a student composition and feedback guides the student to

focus on those elements to develop an effective message. However, the instructor needs to understand the evolution of composition theory and be aware of the impact of feedback tone and style.

Effective instructor feedback is imperative because "No action impacts students as much as ... how student performances are evaluated, and the disposition of evaluation results" (Plata, 2011, p. 120). The instructor is charged with the responsibility "to take a close, hard look at the comments we make, consider whether they [the students] are doing the kind of work we want them to do, and make whatever changes we can to make them work better" (Straub, 1996, p. 248). In order to accomplish Straub's goal, instructors must have an understanding of components impacting the instructor's feedback approach, including strategies, disruptions, and methods.

The environment of an introductory community college composition course poses a unique challenge due to its population of students. Most, if not all, community college courses include a mix of traditional and non-traditional students varying in age, socio-economic status, and educational levels along with a wide range of prior composition skills and knowledge. Thus, understanding the literature regarding strategies for approaching written feedback, disruptions interrupting the instructor's feedback process, and methods resulting in effective feedback is critical to a successful instructor/student dialogue.

Purpose of Feedback

Research of composition history, specifically instructor feedback, reveals the student's responsibility in the composition course has changed over time. For example, at one time emphasis of composition instruction concentrated primarily on correcting lower-

order concerns identified by the instructor such as spelling or grammatical errors. However, the style of instructor approaches to feedback has changed over the years with the transition to an emphasis on the use of formative and summative evaluation. The distinction Horvath's (1984) article, "The Components of Written Response: A Practical Synthesis of Current Views," discusses is between the two types of evaluation, specifically, summative feedback which "pass[es] judgment" and formative feedback which "identify[ies] problems and possibilities" (p. 137). In order to comprehend the scope of effective instructor feedback, it is important to acknowledge the evolution of instructor approach to feedback.

Historically, emphasis of formative and summative evaluation has varied significantly. The variance can be traced to industrial demands. Through historical research, Woods (1986) found that beginning in the early 1800s, summative evaluation focused on student memorization of grammar rules (p. 7). As the nineteenth century progressed, particularly in the 1830s and 1840s, the evaluation practice began to shift from summative evaluation, and this shift was a result of industrial growth in urban areas (p. 4). Specifically, the impact of industrialism integrated formative evaluation into composition instruction with the demand for clear and concise business communication together with the importance of the use of proper grammar (p. 5). As a result, the change in emphasized skill sets allowed individuals entering the workforce to have general communication skills beyond the focused knowledge of correct grammar. Eventually, recitation and analysis practices merged and Woods explains

By 1850, two easily recognizable approaches had emerged in the teaching of

grammar; the traditional one, which stressed memorization, recitation, analysis,

and mental discipline; and what we might call the reform pedagogy, typified by the various methods of inductive teaching and the assumption that student abilities grow through self-activity. (p. 11)

Through the combination of memorization and self-activity, language skills are the foundation for successful composition which clearly conveys thoughts and ideas (p. 15). Interestingly, with this integration, Bloom's Taxonomy emerges, providing a framework to analyze research data in this case study.

Transitioning from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, summative evaluation again became the emphasis in composition studies. Specifically, historical research by Botts (1979) reveals educators identified common grammatical errors and incorporated teaching methods to eliminate the errors (p. 54). Summative evaluation, on its own, makes writing a practice of right or wrong, thereby erasing the encouragement of exploring thoughts and ideas.

However, formative evaluation continued to have a role in composition in the 1930s. Some educators approached composition with the understanding student expression of creativity took precedence over the quality of composition (Botts, 1979, p. 57).

Discussion of evaluation practices continued and Donlan's (1979) historical composition research examining the early 1950s revealed a concern within the field that the decline in grammar studies negatively impacted the quality of student writing (p. 75). Interestingly, the 1950s also highlighted composition pedagogy when a study recognized the need to study instructor evaluation practices as student composition increased (p. 77). The early-to-mid-twentieth century was an important era for composition pedagogy.

The tension between formative and summative evaluation continued beyond the 1950s. "The years ahead [were] fraught with professional conflict over whether the student, the content, or the needs of society should form the core of the writing curriculum" (Donlan, 1979, p. 78). Subsequently, writing curriculum issues results in federal legislation. Smith (1979) explains in a historical account how *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965* impacts evaluation; specifically, the Act "caused education to shift gears at mid-decade from emphasis on curricular development and the academically talented to emphasis on programs for the poor and the culturally different" (p. 82). As a result, summative evaluation retains status in education and, by 1975, English classrooms were again focusing on grammar rules (p. 85). Thus, instructors implementing formative evaluation in the composition course were required to change evaluation methods to adhere to the changes in attitudes toward composition. Instructor knowledge of composition theory was essential to successfully transition with the changing evaluation methods.

However, the transition to summative evaluation was not permanent and instructor-student collaboration in the composition course became standard practice in the 1970s and 1980s, and Anson's (2000) article, "Response and the Social Construction of Error," discusses the shift causing instructors to focus on expression of ideas over proper grammar (p. 5). Subsequently, a disagreement became apparent in the field of composition when "in the 1980s and '90s, skeptics began suggesting that the practice of prioritizing voice above conventional writing assessment criteria, such as logical progression of ideas, confused students while it undermined the goal of teaching academic writing" (Jeffery, 2011, pp. 92-93). The disagreement over feedback practices

comes down to "the degree of control over choices that the writer or the teacher retains" (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984, p. 129). One reason it is important to understand the history of the students' place in the contemporary composition course is because adult students returning to school may have experienced both formative and summative teaching methods. For example, the child in K-12 during the 1970s and early 1980s would have been taught to emphasize content over grammar. However, due to shifts in educational theories and curricula modifications, the same student returning to the classroom in the 1990s receives conflicting instruction because of the emphasis on grammar over content or vice versa. A concern is community college composition instructors do not have the knowledge of composition theory history to adapt feedback when students are impacted by modified evaluative methods. With this understanding, the instructor is able to identify and explain the reasons for student confusion or frustration resulting from changes in feedback approaches and will take a significant step toward providing successful feedback in the composition course.

For the composition instructor seeking education or enhanced understanding of feedback, the challenge he or she discovers is "although commenting on student writing is the most widely used method for responding to student writing, it is the least understood" (Sommers, 1982, p. 148). One primary reason responding to student writing is the least understood is because "Feedback is a complex activity. It is embedded within many, many other activities, and the only way to discover the effectiveness of feedback (and the reasons for its effectiveness) is to see how it works within the larger system of teaching and learning" (Dippre & Hellman, 2013, p. 20). The history of evaluation practices is embedded within composition study. Many influences ranging from *The*

Elementary and Secondary Education Act to the *No Child Left Behind Act* impact the history of evaluation. Therefore, one component to build a foundation of composition knowledge is to understand the history of composition theory with regard to feedback approaches. In addition, study of components such as various feedback methods, disruptions to feedback and instructor perspectives will increase the instructor's understanding of effective feedback in the composition course.

'Social Contract' Between Instructor and Student

A social contract is formed when a student and instructor enter a learning environment, whether it is online or in the classroom. The instructor gives guidance to the student to enhance composition skills. The student's obligation is to attend the course and complete assignments while the instructor's obligation is to provide assignments appropriate for the course. Both parties are working toward the goal of enhancing the student's composition skills throughout the course. When the instructor and student meet the requirements to each other, the social contract is fulfilled. However, if either party fails to meet the requirements, the social contract is, in part, unfulfilled. Therefore, a mutually productive learning environment requires a collaborative relationship between instructor and student. This case study reveals the elements that can impact the successful completion of the social contract and also identifies why and how the social contract can fail.

For the realization of a mutually productive learning environment, it is important to understand the expectations and components involved in the social contract between instructor and student, including Anson's (1989) article, "Response Styles and Ways of Knowing," which discusses the concept that feedback is an essential teaching component

in the classroom community (p. 333). The collaborative environment of the composition

course is beneficial for both instructor and student because both parties are seeking

methods to achieve successful composition (Parr & Timperley, 2010, p. 70). An

instructor entering the composition course with the attitude of a composition expert

whose role is to reveal the student's failures to meet certain levels of composition does

not fulfill the partnership in the course. Additionally, a student entering the composition

course unwilling to engage with the instructor for a deeper knowledge of composition

does not fulfill the partnership in the course. Instead, the instructor who approaches a

composition course in the role as a guide and the student who is willing to accept

instructor feedback with the intent to expand knowledge will fulfill the idea of

partnership in the composition course.

Through identification of several elements required to form a social contract

between instructor and student, the likelihood of a successful collaboration increases. For

example, one required element is the acceptance of roles by the instructor and student. An

example of the roles is the presence of "a partnership between students and teachers

where 'teacher' and 'student' are redefined as 'teacher-student' and 'students-teachers'"

(Van Duinen, 2005/2006, p. 146). While Van Duinen's concept of partnership is

inspiring, its implementation is challenging. One challenge is student and instructor

interaction can be negatively impacted as both parties incorporate different evaluative

sets (Haswell, 2009, p. 1270). Grouping students with age variances along with diverse

backgrounds and cultures can result in a significant barrier to successful collaboration

and is an example of the impact of different evaluative sets found with the community

college composition course. However, certain steps can be taken to overcome

misunderstandings of evaluation practices. These steps include the instructor and student discussing how each perceives the course, the instructor revealing feedback goals and the student revealing interpretation of the feedback and challenges faced during certain aspects of composition.

One example of fulfilling the social contract is to provide effective instructor feedback which guides students toward advanced composition knowledge. This goal is accomplished, in part, by instructors providing students with useful composition strategies which can be incorporated as a guide for current and future writing. For example, a guide for students to follow during composition may include defining goals of the writing assignment, tracking the progress made toward the goals, and identifying tasks necessary to achieve the goals (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 86). Students defining, tracking and identifying goals repeatedly during composition assignments over the term of the course can instill a productive composition habit. As a result, students have the information to independently assess the quality of their writing and implement skills for more effective composition (Parr & Timperley, 2010, p. 81). Specifically, the instructor has defined effective questions the student can apply to future writing assignments and the instructor has instilled an effective roadmap for the student to follow.

Additionally, the successful social contract requires continual awareness of instructor response and student learning. Specifically, success occurs when an instructor recognizes communication breakdown and determines effective methods to teach the weak or missing skills resulting in the learning gap (Parr & Timperley, 2010, p. 80). The instructor constantly assesses his or her feedback to students to ensure comments "connect curriculum, instruction, and student-teacher relationships as individuals and as a

community of learners in a seamless way" (Van Duinen, 2005/2006, p. 147). While Van Duinen's utopian viewport of 'seamless' learning is admirable, the social contract between instructor and student has a high propensity to fail without continual monitoring of collaboration to ensure the instructor understands the student's strengths and weaknesses. One way for instructors to collaborate with students is to refrain from correcting student writing and instead, respond in ways which encourage students to explore thoughts and ideas (Treglia, 2008, p. 108). Through instructor encouragement, students can have the confidence to examine issues without the concern of being judged in the context of right or wrong. Thus, the course is "a valued space for students to pose questions and assert opinions about their writing" (Scrocco, 2012, p. 289). Conversely, the student should understand the reasons for instructor feedback and identify the goals embedded in the feedback.

Treglia (2008) demonstrated that effective feedback provided students with a sense of direction in their writing but gave the student the ultimate decision in composition (p. 128). While the instructor may know what steps are necessary to advance student knowledge, the student needs explanations and guidance to get to the next stage of learning.

Another element needed is for the instructor and student to acknowledge and attempt to meet mutual expectations. For example, the instructor's role is to act as the questioning reader seeking clarification or additional insight (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984, p. 141). In response, the student's role is to approach composition with careful exploration to address the informational needs of the audience (Anson, 1989, p. 352). However, the diversity of the community college student population hinders effective

instructor feedback when the instructor misinterprets the meaning and intent of the student's writing by failing to look at the message as conveyed from the individual student's perspective. For example, "students who possess cultural and language attributes that differ from those of their teachers become lightning rods for teachers' instructional ... practices" (Plata, 2011, p. 118). In other words, the cultural or language gap between instructor and student is not viewed as mutually informative. Instead, this gap may be conceptualized as right or wrong by the instructor whose reaction like a 'lightning rod' is to staunchly defend personally or culturally held beliefs. Therefore, successful composition is not the alignment of student writing with instructor beliefs but student writing that effectively explores topics from the student's perspective with the instructor receptive to new or varying points of view.

Finally, a component in successful fulfillment of the social contract is an understanding of the student's knowledge level and the impact of the instructor's comments. The concept of mutual understanding involves "feedback [that] needs to be clear, purposeful, meaningful, and compatible with students' prior knowledge and to provide logical connections" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 104). In addition, gauging the student's composition skills allows the instructor to know how to phrase response in a style which students can interpret and implement (Anson, 1999/2000, p. 382). One approach to effective instructor feedback is to give the student objectives that build on the student's skills and knowledge (Horvath, 1984, p. 139). Thus, effective instructor feedback goes beyond a level of only grading a student's writing. Instead, the instructor incorporates the dynamics of the student's experience and the student's writing into consideration and responds at a level appropriate to the student's knowledge. In turn, it is

the student's responsibility to acknowledge the instructor feedback and take steps to enhance composition techniques.

Disruptions to effective feedback: instructor personality and social beliefs.

Every instructor brings his or her personality and social beliefs into the composition course and these components inherently impact the instructor's approach to feedback. One challenge in the composition course is to ensure the instructor is aware of the unique "social-psychological way in which teachers read and interpret student texts" (Anson, 2000, p. 7). The impact of personality and social beliefs is significant because regardless of adopted standards readers will not interpret text the same way (Strouthopoulos & Peterson, 2011, p. 51). Specifically, research shows "theoretical and cultural orientations affect interpretations" (Parr & Timperley, 2010, p. 69). Further, each reader applies distinctly personal and social contexts to composition (Slomp, 2012, p. 83). While Slomp's finding is focused on student knowledge, it can also be applied to instructor knowledge. Since every reader interprets text differently, it is to the instructor's, and ultimately, the student's benefit to acknowledge individual composition interpretation. With this acknowledgement, the instructor ensures feedback does not modify the student's composition based on the instructor's beliefs. Instead of acting as a barrier, the instructor's personality and social beliefs enhance feedback by focusing on the student's analysis and argument and showing the student how to see his or her writing from various viewpoints (p. 87). For example, a student submits an assignment arguing a political issue on which the instructor has an opposing viewpoint. The instructor's feedback should not be argumentative or defensive because he or she disagrees with the student's position. Instead, the instructor should determine if the student has presented an argument that is

focused and is relevant to the assignment. Therefore, in order for the social contract to reach fulfillment, the instructor is compelled to read student writing and compose feedback with attention to personal reactions and beliefs and be aware of how reaction impacts tone and message.

The instructor's experiences both in and out of the composition course impact the formation of personal reactions to certain writing techniques or errors. Thus, disruption occurs when instructor feedback is based primarily on personal reaction to student composition instead of composition elements. Connors and Lunsford's (1993) article, "Teachers' Rhetorical Comments on Student Papers," discusses the importance of how instructor awareness is necessary to recognize that feedback can be a result of personal composition style preferences (p. 218). The instructor who teaches a composition course brings personality and beliefs formed over time and experience acquired from previous instructors and long held teaching practices and beliefs (Anson, 1989, p. 358). These experiences are attributes that contribute to teaching expertise and the seasoned educator is able to maintain a thoughtful balance. For example, an assignment for an argument essay should have a clear, well-organized argument. If the instructor has a personal conflict with the argument, that conflict needs to be recognized so response to the student is not impacted. Specifically, feedback in reaction to instructor personal conflict can be argumentative in tone. The instructor who realizes his or her comments are originating from personal beliefs and modifies the feedback to focus on student composition skills has incorporated a successful teaching method. Collaboration between the instructor and student is compromised when feedback is based on instructor disagreement with the student for personal reasons.

Effective feedback fails when an instructor's comments defend personally held beliefs. Instead, successful feedback occurs when response is based on composition pedagogy. Thus, each time an instructor provides feedback, it is important to have the awareness that reaction "may vary depending on our mood, context, or knowledge of specific students and their writing" (Anson, 1999/2000, pp. 374-375). Instructors who fail to acknowledge differing viewpoints can provide ineffective feedback because they are responding from their own personal perspective without allowing the student's message to penetrate the individually held beliefs (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984, p. 122). However, instructors can overcome this disruption when "the value of a text is negotiated, culture-bound, [and] grounded in social structures. We come to student texts as we come to any texts, out of our own positions as people of a particular class, color, gender, age, and background" (White, 1995, p. 131). Therefore, instructor feedback that challenges the student to consider alternatives perspectives without criticizing the student's position can lead to enhanced composition knowledge. It is essential that instructors recognize student diversity at the community college level in order to achieve effective feedback. For example, the community college student population has been described as an institution comprised of lower-income and minority students with lower graduation rates (Weisberger, 2005, p. 128). The instructor having an awareness of the student diversity and reasons for his or her reader response has been demonstrated as an asset in avoiding unhelpful feedback based solely on personal reaction. Therefore, the argument is not whether an instructor should deny his or her own beliefs in instructor feedback but rather it is about awareness of the impact of personal reaction when providing feedback and how the feedback can be received by the student.

Finally, instructors are impacted by the atmosphere created by the institution's administration, which is one of many levels of influence in a model where "decision making power 'trickles down' through educational systems from those with the most political power (policymakers, corporate leaders, and technical experts) to those with the least (students)" (Gallagher, 2011, p. 462). The influence of education is apparent as "schools and colleges and universities as ... bureaucratic institutions ... [have] significantly changed the global, economic, social, political, and cultural landscape" (p. 464). When the administration's concern for reputation overshadows learning, the focus is on the business component of education instead of the learning component of education (p. 452). It is necessary for instructors to understand the models of influence affecting education in order to recognize and respond to those influences.

Instructor's pedagogical knowledge and classroom experience. A disruption to effective feedback is an instructor's lack of pedagogical knowledge and reflective study of the individual instructor's feedback methods. Further, inexperienced composition teachers may not have the confidence that experience and professional training provides. Lack of confidence, together with lack of understanding of the theory of composition, disrupts effective feedback. Experience is gained through teaching composition and from understanding composition pedagogy through education and personal reflection. The impact inexperience has in the classroom, combined with the lack of pedagogical knowledge, creates ineffective or unhelpful feedback to students. Specifically, both inexperienced and experienced teachers lacking pedagogical knowledge may not recognize "what one has to say about the process is different from what one has to say about the product" (Sommers, 1982, p. 154). It is important to understand the distinction

of process and product. For example, Berlin's (1982) article, "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," discusses how "Everyone teaches the process of writing but everyone does not teach the *same* process. The test of one's competence as a composition instructor … reside[s] in being able to recognize and justify the version of the process being taught, complete with all of its significance for the student" (p. 765).

In connection with product, a goal is for the student to be able to provide an effective and interesting argument and recognize viewpoints as seen by others (Elbow, 1991, p. 149). As a result, instructors who lack experience and understanding of composition pedagogy "can have disastrous consequences, ranging from momentarily confusing students to sending them away with faulty and even harmful information" (Berlin, 1982, p. 766). However, the instructor with an understanding of composition pedagogy typically has an increased awareness of successful feedback components. Subsequently, an educated approach to product results in specific tone, focus of comments, and awareness of reader reaction. Effectively blending the elements of process and product is critical for effective feedback in any college introductory composition course.

One challenge regarding the study of pedagogy is limited course offerings in graduate programs on the subject matter. While the successful graduate student has met the requirements for employment of composition instructors, the requirements may not include study of composition pedagogy. According to the *Code of Virginia, Section 8VAC40-31-140.D.1.a.*, instructors can be hired to teach community college introductory composition with a "baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university, plus

at least 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline being taught"
(http://law.lis.virginia.gov). Currently, teachers do not have any course requirements to
study composition pedagogy. As a result, composition theory is often overlooked when
future teachers prepare to enter into the instructional role in composition.

Another concern is how students do not understand the discourse used by
instructors during feedback. Specifically, during student interviews, Treglia (2008)
reveals learning is impaired when students do not have the knowledge to interpret and
implement instructor comments (pp. 127-128). Treglia interviewed students on written
feedback and found, "The majority of students (nine) favored mitigated commentary,
three students said they preferred 'straightforward' commentary and two said it didn't
matter to them" (p. 114). Mitigated commentary was formative feedback that included
praise and open ended comments whereas straightforward commentary was directive
feedback. The age range of students in Treglia's study ranged from 23-55 with various
grade averages in the composition course. The study reinforces the importance of
instructors having knowledge of composition pedagogy. Specifically, instructors aware of
various response methods will modify comments to meet the needs of the individual
student. Therefore, knowing how to phrase feedback is critical to a productive learning
experience for the student and effective teaching. As a result, instructors and students are
at a disadvantage when the instructor has a lack of foundational knowledge of
composition pedagogy.

One key to overcoming the disruption of weak pedagogical knowledge is for
composition instructors to continue to advance their knowledge of pedagogical strategies
through reading journals and other professional publications. To this end, instructors

teaching composition courses but lacking education are charged with researching this field of study since the path to knowledge is through study (Stenberg & Lee, 2002, p. 343). The disruptions resulting from lack of pedagogical understanding and instructional experience are not insurmountable. Instead, continued attention to the study of pedagogy can be achieved, in part, by further study of the practices of composition instructors (Anson, 1989, p. 358). The research Anson is suggesting would benefit instructors in two ways. First, the research could identify and highlight the lack of and need for pedagogical studies in undergraduate and graduate programs. Second, the research could identify ways to provide continuing education for practicing composition instructors. In both dimensions, the resulting effect is the student could benefit from the instructor's pedagogical awareness and education.

Elements of Unsuccessful Feedback

Feedback has the potential to fail when it does not incorporate the student's level of knowledge and is dominated by instructor comments focusing on many levels of composition skills. As a result, the student is confused and frustrated. For example, one element of unsuccessful feedback is the student who is at a disadvantage because feedback focuses on multiple issues varying in complexity. Bloom's Taxonomy is an excellent example of defining multiple issues involved in composition. It examines six primary areas of composition skills. Specifically, from lower-order to higher-order concerns: Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating (Jacobson & Lapp, 2010, p. 34). The instructor who provides feedback focusing on Analyzing and Evaluating, higher-order concerns, will confuse and frustrate the student who is struggling to develop a thesis statement, or lower-order concerns. As a result, the

instructor may be asking the student to implement a composition skill that is not yet fully formed.

In contrast, the instructor whose primary response consists of Remembering, or lower-order concerns, to a student with strong composition knowledge misses the opportunity to address higher-order concerns and loses valuable educational opportunities to advance composition knowledge. A student's response to unfocused, overwhelming feedback "can lead to more trial-and-error strategies and less cognitive effort [by the student] to develop an informal hypothesis about the relationship between the instructions, the feedback, and the intended learning" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 91). In contrast, effective instructor feedback allows a student to comprehend the comments, apply them to the course instructional lessons, and incorporate the suggestions into future writing. However, instructor feedback failing to achieve the goals of comprehension and incorporation may "confuse, frustrate, and depress students unsure which aspects of their prose most need attention but quite sure they will never write well" (Horvath, 1984, p. 141). Therefore, effective feedback is a process where the instructor is continually aware of the "location" of the student's knowledge and attempts to provide guidance for continued composition skill growth.

While the instructor may find many weaknesses in a student's writing, it is the instructor's understanding and implementation of focused feedback highlighting specific concepts that advances the student's composition skills. Specifically, feedback that is related to the purpose of the course enhances learning. In order to ensure synchronization, the instructor must determine if the course is designed with enough time to allow for instructor feedback and student revision as well as define the primary component that

will determine the student's grade (White, 2007, p. 142). The rubric is one tool that will ensure instructor's comments remain related to the course objective. Basically, the rubric highlights and answers questions such as

> What will distinguish the best papers from those that are weak? What will we focus on and value enough for commentary? What are the papers supposed to accomplish and what is the process that the writer should go through to accomplish those goals and how will we know if they have learned whatever the assignment is out to teach? (p. 77)

Using Bloom's Taxonomy to provide framework, together with a focused goal for assignments in connection with course objectives, allows feedback to vary in complexity while still within assignment parameters.

Additional examination of unsuccessful feedback reveals a student is at a disadvantage when feedback consists of vague directives. For example, vague feedback consists of comments that do not relate to specific elements of the student's text and instead are more general in nature (Sommers, 1982, p. 152). Ironically, an example of vague feedback is the actual use of the word "vague" in the paper's margin without supporting commentary to provide a student with understanding of what makes the section "vague" or how to correct it. Thus, "students often refer to or guess at what the teacher 'expects' them to do, without knowledge of any underlying reason for doing it" (Anson, 1989, p. 336). Additionally, vague feedback which fails to give greater understanding of weaknesses will undermine the perception of students and students describe how

discouraged they felt by comments such as 'makes no sense,' 'say what

you mean,' or 'this is off the subject.' They repeatedly said that such

comments not only made them feel unmotivated to revise but also

diminished their capacity to think. (Treglia, 2008, p. 128)

Rephrasing written comments is one technique that assists in avoiding vague feedback.

Treglia found students reported that in order to make a comment such as 'makes no

sense' more effective the instructor should phrase it as "it's not very clear to me" (p.

123). Another example of vague feedback is the comment "Awk." A more appropriate

comment is to ask the student how and why the phrasing is awkward. In fact, posing the

comment as "Awk syntax" would be more to the point as this feedback would highlight

the need for the student to specifically review sentence structure. Effective instructor

feedback acknowledges the student's composition weaknesses and goes a step further to

explain why there is a weakness and provides ideas on how to remediate the issue. Also,

the learning process in the composition course includes the student's realization of an

error, correcting the error, and avoiding the error in future composition; all of which is

completed with the support and guidance of instructor written feedback.

Additionally, unsuccessful feedback occurs when meaningful response fails

because the instructor inserts his or her set of ideals to the feedback process. As a result,

the instructor and student lose the opportunity for exchange of thoughts and ideas leading

to a greater understanding of composition (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984, p. 119). For

example, feedback that questions rather than deems the student's position as wrong

allows for ideas to be exchanged. Thus, the social contract in the composition course

requires acceptance and response by the instructor acknowledging the value of the

student's ideas and providing foundational tools on which to build skills and knowledge. The potential for ineffective feedback is reduced when the instructor is aware of the student's needs (e.g., critical thinking, writing skills) and targets feedback to meet the student's learning objectives.

Tools and Approaches to Student Writing Leading to Effective Feedback

In order for instructors to understand and anticipate students' responses to comments, they need an awareness of how students process feedback. One critical area to discern is cultural awareness. Instructors need to ensure that students entering the composition course are aware composition involves exploring issues beyond personally held beliefs and examining issues from varying viewpoints (Soliday, 1997, p. 62). Students cannot be expected to inherently understand their instructor's reaction to composition or the purpose of resulting feedback. Therefore, a dialogue, either in the classroom or through online discussion boards, can explore the impact culture has in the composition course. Exploring what the students may face and the reasons for instructor response before writing occurs will take some frustration of the unknown out of the composition process for the student.

Further, awareness by the instructor of typical student reactions to various formats of feedback will assist the instructor to achieve a mutually informative environment. For example, when students were asked to comment on their instructor's feedback, the majority of students in Treglia's (2008) study found comments "whether a positive phrase preceding criticism or the use of hedges such as 'perhaps' or 'maybe' was useful to them" (p. 114). Noted forms of response were received as respect, encouragement, and motivation. Further, students who preferred directive feedback were found to approach

composition from a summative perspective instead of a formative perspective (p. 125). However, it was apparent that students who preferred directive comments did not understand the components of formative feedback and found it difficult to apply the comments to future composition (p. 128). In addition, instructors cannot be effective if they approach revision as a student correcting egregious mistakes (White, 1995, p. 128). Drafts and revisions require instructors and students to revisit clarity, message, and meaning. For this process to be successful, feedback should focus on components beyond grammar to increase composition skills (Ball, 1998, p. 242). For example, comments on early drafts should focus on the strength of a thesis statement or the validity of an argument instead of the accuracy of punctuation ensuring the student has a strong foundation on which to build the writing assignment. As the assignment progresses, comments transition from topic development to grammar, thereby giving the student access to the entire writing process resulting in a polished final product. Drafts and revisions highlight the student's need to pay close attention to the writing process. In addition, drafts and revisions require the instructor to pay close attention to the areas of strengths and weaknesses of the student in order for effective learning to occur. Thus, the drafting and revising process allows instructors and students to examine ways to approach writing. Therefore, feedback should develop in conjunction with the student's confidence in composition skills (Soliday, 1997, p. 74). Consequently, the instructor who creates a positive learning environment by encouraging and challenging students during the drafting and revision process has met a requirement of the social contract.

Overcoming Disruptions: Self Understanding and Recognizing Complexity in Communication

Feedback is effective when a composition instructor is aware of his or her reactions to a student's writing style. Further, successful feedback incorporates various methods of validating the student's work while advancing his or her knowledge. However, the instructor who lacks awareness of the feedback impact may bring harmful habits into the composition course. White's (1995) research affirms, "Unfortunately, most of us model our teaching behavior on the instructors we have had in school and college, and most of us have much more experience with negative or worthless responding than we do with effective patterns" (p. 122). One way to increase feedback effectiveness is self-awareness and composing comments by implementing skills and techniques unique to the individual instructor (Straub, 1996, p. 247). Thus, the argument is not supporting that instructors should attempt to change feedback methods to an extent where individuality is lost but rather that feedback resulting from unproductive traditions can be broken and positive habits formed with awareness and education.

Each semester brings a group of students together with different skill sets. For example, in any one community college composition course, the diversity of students may include English as a Second Language students (ESL), a diversity in age, life exposures, and varied writing experiences. Therefore, effective feedback is the combination of the instructor's recognition of the individual student's skill and awareness of personal feedback methods resulting in productive communication in the composition course. For example, an ESL student may not be familiar with abbreviated comments such as "Awk" for "Awkward." The instructor would be aware of his or her personal

style of abbreviated comments and revise the style of feedback to meet the student's level of understanding. For example, the instructor could write "Awkward-revise for clarity" thereby providing information necessary to bridge the gap between the instructor's intent and the student's reception and response.

In addition to awareness of individual reactions to student writing, the instructor's cognizance of the complexity of human interaction and communication is important when realizing effective feedback in the composition course. The field of research concerning communication is ongoing, and the challenge is to understand "the ecology of response – its full human, social, and institutional context – is more complex than the customary practice of response seems to warrant" (Haswell, 2009, p. 1264). With every interaction between instructor and student, whether in written feedback, student conferences, or other interactions, ideas and opinions are formed and exchanged. The complexity of these instructor-student communications is a concept Black and Wiliam (2009) describe as the instructor's reaction and feedback to student writing and reception and implementation of comments by the student (p. 11). By acknowledging the challenges and potential misunderstanding in communication, "diverse and even contradictory approaches or rhetorical styles may be more useful than searching for a single method ... as we know how to choose and apply them constructively" (Anson, 1999/2000, p. 375). Consequently, while research shows the potential for misunderstandings is inherent in communication in general and specifically, composition, awareness of the challenges is an important step toward effective instructor feedback. Successful instructors analyze their feedback methods and responses. However, this analysis may be compromised when faced with large classes and multiple writing

assignments that require grading. One compensatory method is to make a copy of various student papers containing feedback and put them in a pile. During semester breaks, the instructor can analyze the comments from the perspective of a researcher. The goal is to determine if response patterns are a result of habit and not particularly effective. As a result, reflection on why certain styles and phrases are present will lead to greater awareness of its origin. For example, perhaps habits were acquired by mimicking former professors but not pedagogically sound. Also, studying the comments from the student's perspective can be insightful. As a result, anticipating the student's response to comments may provide insight for the instructor that will lead to greater awareness of the feedback impact and result in more effective feedback and expanded pedagogical methods.

For the purposes of this case study, a review of scholarly articles regarding feedback is the first step in understanding strategies characterizing successful instructor feedback for the student written assignments in the introductory community college composition course. In addition, instructors of community college composition courses were interviewed to gain an understanding of various instructor approaches to feedback and qualities of instructor written feedback. In order to examine instructor approach to feedback, several elements were examined. One element involved the investigation of interview transcripts and examined factors the instructors consider when approaching student writing. Another element used to examine instructor approach to feedback was an examination of instructor comments on students' papers.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

This chapter explains the research methods to question "What strategies characterize successful instructor written feedback for students' written assignments in an introductory community college composition course?" The chapter explains the collection of the interview data and sample student papers containing instructor feedback and the process of analysis used to develop the findings from the interview data.

Overview

The premise of this case study is to explore instructor approach to written feedback in an introductory community college composition course. Two methods of analysis were used for this case study. The first strategy incorporated individual interviews with introductory composition community college instructors. The second analytical format included a textual analysis of sample student papers. Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval was sought and granted at Longwood University. Upon presentation of IRB's approval, approval of a request to conduct research was sought and granted at a local community college for this case study.

The research method of individual instructor participant interviews was chosen in an effort to gather information from the participants directly. Specifically, the instructor participant interviews were designed to explore the instructor's approach for providing feedback to students in the introductory community college composition course.

The data collection method involved recording and transcribing interviews with instructor participants. The assumption made in this case study was individual instructor participant interviews focused on instructor approach to feedback would reveal strategies for successful instructor feedback. Because of the relatively small number of interview

participants (*n=5*), my research fits the parameters of a case study which "usually investigates only one event or only a very small number of people or objects (typically 12 or fewer)" (MacNealy, 1999, p. 198). An e-mail solicitation, upon the department chair's approval, was sent to all full-time first-year or introduction composition faculty at a local community college in this case study (*n=20*). Individual interviews with five instructor participants were the result of responses to solicitation to 20 introductory composition instructors. Instructor participants were asked to discuss their approach to feedback. In addition, instructor participants were asked to provide samples of their written feedback from their course for the researcher's analysis.

To analyze the interview data collected from the case study, I read and coded the interview transcripts using "units of analysis ... that illuminate[s] the significant features of [the] data" (Foss & Waters, 2007, 187). For the instructor interview participants, I used units of analysis from the research question regarding instructor approach to feedback and instructor written feedback.

In order to gather samples of interview participants feedback directly, I collected samples of graded student writing and compared the instructor feedback written comments with their stated goals and methods during individual interviews

The method of data collection for textual analysis involved requesting and receiving student papers from instructor participants. The assumption made in this case study regarding textual analysis was individual instructor written feedback was necessary to understand strategies leading to successful instructor written feedback. Instructor participants were asked to provide samples of student papers containing written feedback and four of the five instructors provided the same. The fifth instructor was on sabbatical

at the time of the interview and did not have any student papers available for analysis. Although the fifth instructor did not have student papers available, his interview revealed invaluable insight into the dynamics of the social contract between instructor and student.

A discrepancy between the instructor interview response regarding approaches to and goals for feedback and the resulting written feedback came into focus during analysis. Specifically, in some instances, the instructor stated goals and resulting feedback did not align. Therefore, in order to examine the alignment or misalignment of goals and written feedback, I used units of analysis from Bloom's Taxonomy as a guide. This guide enabled me to chart the skills targeted by each instructor as discussed during the interview in comparison to the resulting written feedback taking into account composition skills beginning with lower-order skills and leading to higher-order skills.

Interview Research Method

This section begins with a review of the purpose, type, and design of the interviews of instructors as a research instrument. The section concludes with a description of the collection and analysis of the interview data.

Purpose of Interview Research

The purpose of the interview phase was to gain insight from instructors about their goals and feedback methods. Specifically, each instructor participant interview explored his or her individual feedback approach. Further, instructor participants discussed formative and summative feedback and how these methods were used in response to student composition. Finally, instructor participants discussed how they could recognize the impact on student writing based on the feedback. As a result, the five instructor participant interviews provided me with insight to the expectations of

instructors in the community college introductory composition course for analysis in this case study.

Type of Interview Research

Using interviews as a research method was essential to examine the targeted focus of this case study, specifically, instructors of the introductory community college composition course. Because of the inherently personal nature of feedback, the semi-structured open interviews with the instructor participants allowed for a greater understanding of the process of instructor approach to feedback and instructor written feedback. The interviews relied on a static list of open-ended questions. This method allowed for the instructor interview participants to respond to the questions that, in some instances, led to follow-up inquiries or requests for clarification during the individual interviews.

Each instructor participant interview began with my introduction of the case study and the origins of interest for the topic. To initiate the research part of the interview, I developed open-ended questions including:

- How would you characterize your approach to giving feedback on written work?

- What forms of formative feedback do you use? Why?

- What forms of summative feedback do you use? Why?

- How much do you know about your student before providing feedback?

- What pet peeves impact your feedback to student writing? How do you deal with this?

- How do you know your feedback strategies have been effective?

A copy of the Interview Protocol Form used can be found in the Appendix.

Interview Data Collection

Each interview, using a static list of open-ended questions, was recorded using a digital voice recorder to register the interview material conducted in this case study. Each interview lasted from 15 minutes to one hour. Transcribing of the interviews was completed in a timely manner. However, during the interviews, I was able to identify aspects of my questions that needed clarification and I modified certain phrases resulting in more direct inquiries. After each interview was transcribed, I sent each participant his or her transcript for review.

Interview Data Analysis

Coding, based on the research question, began once all of the transcription was complete. Utilizing the pre-designed interview questions, the first step in analysis was to assign one or two words that described the theme of the question. For example, when coding "How would you characterize your approach to giving feedback on written work?" the beginning and end of the unit was marked and "approach" was written in the margin. The second step was to use these specific codes during the reading of the interview transcripts. This reading was purposed to "come to a unit of analysis, mark the beginning and the end of the excerpt that constitutes or contains that unit" and assign the specific word assignments for the unit of analysis in the margin (Foss & Waters, 2007, p. 188). For the instructor participant transcripts, the examination produced coding related to instructor approach to feedback and instructor written feedback. The following explanation of coding has been organized by the explanatory schema representing the "conceptual, organizing principal" that allows the data to unfold (p. 196). The method of

specific coding ensured the information excerpted from the transcripts related specifically to the research question.

Explanation of Coding of Interview Research

Once the interviews were coded, the unmarked copies were retained. On the coded copy, the margins of each page of the transcript were highlighted for each interview participant with a color specific to the individual and the coded excerpts were cut out and arranged into like piles (Foss & Waters, 2007, p. 191). After reviewing all the interviews, there remained an extensive collection of data requiring a narrowing scope for analysis. Therefore, the narrowing process required reflection on the accumulated information, and a journal was used to organize and record my thoughts, questions and challenges. During this reflective process, I was interested and challenged by each instructor's discussion of his or her own personal approach and awareness and, in the same interview, the instructor's discussion of what he or she conveyed to the student in the written feedback. At this point, an evaluation of the gap was explored between the instructor approach and the resulting written feedback. Reflection and analysis resulted in the main topic of *Instructor Approach* to come forth during the coding sessions of the interview transcripts.

I coded this group with the heading *Instructor Approach* because it examined the individual instructor's feedback goals as well as the instructor's intended outcome of student composition skills upon receipt of feedback. The grouped excerpts under this section included how the instructor approached student writing, student writing habits that disrupted the feedback process together with methods to address and overcome the disruptive writing habits, and what the instructors wanted students to learn from the

feedback. The purpose of this section was to understand individual processes and awareness leading to successful instructor written feedback.

Textual Analysis Method

This section begins with a review of the purpose, type, and design of the textual analysis of feedback samples collected from instructors containing instructor written feedback as a research instrument. The section concludes with a description of the collection and analysis of the samples of feedback collected from instructors.

Purpose of Textual Analysis

The purpose of the textual analysis of instructor feedback samples was to gain insight from instructor-written responses. In addition, the samples were compared to the goals and methods as discussed in the interview portion of this case study. Specifically, each sample was analyzed to explore the individual instructor's resulting feedback.

Type of Textual Analysis

Using linguistic annotation as a research method was necessary to examine the targeted focus of this case study, specifically, instructors of the introductory community college composition course. During the research, the samples of instructor feedback were compiled into individual documents specific to each instructor. A review of the document composed solely of written feedback resulted in the identification of patterns of feedback and these styles are detailed in Chapter Four. The linguistic annotation provided the opportunity to compare the instructor stated goals with instructor written feedback.

Text Data Collection

At the conclusion of each instructor participant interview, sample copies of feedback provided to students were requested. Information was either provided to me at

the conclusion of the interview or sent by e-mail at a later date. Samples received from three instructors included three student draft essays and one final submission which contained typed or handwritten instructor comments. In addition, the fourth instructor provided 16 samples of typed final draft summary comments, unaccompanied by the student assignments. All of these samples were chosen for analysis because they contain feedback addressing both draft and final submissions and highlighted the different language used for these specific stages of development.

Text Data Analysis

Coding, based on the research question, began once all feedback samples were received. Using Bloom's Taxonomy as a guide, one word was assigned describing the theme of the feedback. For example, "Remembering" or "Understanding" was used to code lower-order comments. Further, "Evaluating" and "Creating" was used to code higher-order comments. Next, these specific codes were applied to the feedback samples which "mark[ed] the beginning and the end of the excerpt that constitute[d] or contain[ed] that unit" and assigned specific word assignments for the unit of analysis in the margin (Foss & Waters, 2007, p. 188). The coding explanation was organized by the explanatory schema representing the "conceptual, organizing principal" that allows the data to unfold (p. 196). The method of specific coding ensured the information excerpted from the samples of feedback related specifically to the research question.

Explanation of Coding of Textual Analysis

The samples of written feedback were compared to the portions of the instructor's interview transcript pertaining to what he or she told the student in the feedback. The

reflection and study in textual analysis resulted in the topic of *Instructor Written Feedback* to come forth during the coding sessions of the textual analysis.

This was coded with the heading *Instructor Written Feedback* because it examined actual written comments from instructor to student. The grouped excerpts under this section included written feedback that was coded as *Instructor Approach* and *Instructor Written Feedback*. The purpose of this analysis was to examine instructor approach which discussed what the instructor wanted the student to learn upon receipt of the feedback and disruptions to the process. The next section examined actual instructor written comments on student papers to determine the alignment between instructor approach to feedback and resulting comments to students.

Accuracy

In order to ensure accuracy of the data, I sent the transcripts to each participant for review. Participants were asked to respond with any transcription errors or misrepresentations. Three of the five instructor interview participants responded to my request for comments upon transcript review. No changes were requested by the responding instructors.

Chapter Four: Interview Data and Sample Text Findings and Analysis

This chapter discusses the results of the instructor interviews and sample textual analysis. Instructor participants were interviewed to gain an understanding of instructor stated goals during feedback approach in correlation to instructor written feedback in an introductory community college composition course. In addition, collection and analysis of samples of feedback was completed.

The interview data findings and analysis section is divided into three parts. The first part explains the demographics of the interview participants. The second part discusses instructor stated goals during approach to feedback. The third part discusses instructor written feedback.

Description of the Participants

I interviewed five instructor participants who have taught introductory composition – three male and two female instructors from the faculty of a local community college. All of the interview participants incorporate discussion and drafts into their teaching practice. The participant pseudonyms, titles, and post-secondary teaching experience are shown in Table 1.

5 Instructor Participants	Title	Experience
Instructor Baker	Professor of English	28 years
Instructor Phillips	Associate Professor of English	27 years
Instructor Evans	Assistant Professor of English	10 years
Instructor Richardson	Assistant Professor of English	9 years
Instructor Clark	Instructor of English	3.5 years

Table 1 Interview Participants Table

Viewpoints of Feedback from Instructor Perspective

The following sections have been divided into two categories. Those categories are *Instructor Approach* and *Instructor Written Feedback*.

Instructor Approach

Under this section, the interview transcripts were divided into two sub-categories. The first category is the instructor's stated goals during approach to feedback. The second category is the instructor's approach to disruption to feedback.

Instructor goals during approach to feedback. During the instructor interviews, it was noted the instructors had goals for what they wanted their students to take away from feedback. For the purpose of this case study, Bloom's Taxonomy was used to classify each instructor's goals. Originally published in 1956, Benjamin Bloom detailed an order of learning. Bloom's work was recently used in the 2010 study by Jacobson and Lapp. Because Bloom's Taxonomy outlines the order of learning when one skill is built on the strength of other skills, it is an effective tool to analyze feedback in the introductory community college composition course. Specifically, Bloom's Taxonomy

provides a hierarchy of skills to chart and compare instructor goals with written feedback. Since Bloom's Taxonomy addresses lower-order through higher-order skills it encompasses all skill levels of community college composition students. Jacobson and Lapp provide an overview of the elements of Bloom's Taxonomy (p. 34):

Remembering
Recognizing Recalling

Understanding
Interpreting, Exemplifying, Classifying, Summarizing, Inferring, Comparing, Explaining

Applying
Executing, Implementing

Analyzing
Differentiating, Organizing, Attributing

Evaluating
Checking, Critiquing

Creating
Generating, Planning, Producing

Table 2 Bloom's Taxonomy Table

Using Bloom's classification system for the purposes of my case study, analysis of each instructor's comments during the interview regarding the goals for students was analyzed to determine the level the instructor wants the student to achieve after reception of feedback. The classification system allowed visualization of the scale of formative and summative evaluation and of the chart where each instructor emphasized his or her feedback. In addition, it allowed for the ability to analyze the instructor comments to determine if they were advancing the student's knowledge or meeting the student at his or her place of knowledge without providing guidance to advance composition skills.

Transcribed comments from the first interview participant, Instructor Phillips, demonstrated three levels of Bloom's Taxonomy: Understanding, Applying, and Analyzing. Comments that fall into the category of "Understanding" include when he asks his students to show "engagement with the topic." The next skill level Phillips wants his students to achieve is the ability to apply information. Phillips encourages his students to be "willing to take some chances" with "develop further" their ideas. Finally, he seeks for his students to be able to analyze information by "sifting through details" and working with "the more analytic side of the assignment" (personal communication, February 4, 2013). Therefore, Phillips is asking students to interact with their composition rather than recite facts and make general statements.

Additionally, Phillips directs his students to be "thinking more about how the writing is working" which is a composition skill the student can use with future composition. Phillips approaches his feedback with the mindset that he "tend[s] to believe that students aren't really capable of digesting and using more than a few very specific clear key things" and believes "what you gain in directness I think you lose in something of what you really want to create … [to] get them thinking more about how the writing is working rather than just did it work well enough for my purposes of getting a grade?" (personal communication, February 4, 2013). However, Phillips did not have student papers for analysis to compare the application of his comments to his written feedback. Nevertheless, it may be safe to assert that Phillips is challenging his students by specifically asking them to define their composition goals, determine how to achieve the goals and continue to advance composition knowledge by building on foundational skills (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

The second interview participant, Instructor Evans, has primarily two basic goals for students, Remembering and Understanding. For example, Evans wants the students to remember certain composition skills by "focusing" on specific elements of composition. Her students are continuing to strengthen basic composition elements, in part, by "[writing] cohesive paragraphs." Evans remarked several times she tracks student writing through the drafting stages for progress purposes. For example, her comments includes the idea that she will "typically think about the progress or non-progress that I have seen a student make from draft to draft to final" during the course of the writing unit (personal communication, February 18, 2013). Bloom's Taxonomy provides a framework for Evans' recognition of student progress or lack of progress through lower-order skills of Remembering to Understanding. Evans is concentrating on two basic composition skills and giving the student the opportunity to hone those skills.

While the skills taught by Evans are critical for effective composition, her students are not given the higher-order composition tasks such as Analyzing, Evaluating or Creating. Instead, Evans said she will "try to demystify what it is I am asking of them." Also, when beginning the phrasing of her feedback, she will "try to find ways to get to the point as quickly as possible" with her students (personal communication, February 18, 2013). Therefore, while the student may have a fully developed argument, the instructor cannot be certain that the student can analyze the implication of the argument.

Additionally, Evans is asking students for organization and structure. One concern is the student may not have the skills or knowledge to analyze the organized paragraph and look at it from varying viewpoints for different interpretations. Evans is relying on

multiple drafts to incorporate comments encouraging advanced composition skills (Horvath, 1984). However, the instructional approach of multiple drafts has a significant opportunity for learning due to the opportunity for formative feedback as opposed to the assignment that is assessed a final grade on the first and only submission to the instructor.

Interestingly, the third instructor participant, Instructor Richardson, focuses primarily on Bloom's lower-order concerns. Specifically, Richardson targets feedback on Remembering. For example, she wants her students to "think … more carefully and critically about what they are writing." In order for students to accomplish Richardson's goal, they need to be "as specific as possible and … [avoid] vagueness" within their writing. As a result, Richardson's feedback incorporates a "questioning process" and "engage[s] in a conversation with students" with the goal to guide the students to the creation of a clearer message (personal communication, February 19, 2013).

In addition to clarity, Richardson, "look[s] at … grammar and also punctuation." She wants her students to incorporate her feedback from various drafts so they can "recognize comma splices or fragments … before they turn something in for a grade" (personal communication, February 19, 2013). One concern is the student will receive a paper incorporating comments highlighting vague areas as well as grammatical corrections. The student may not know how to multi-task during revisions to successfully acknowledge all of Richardson's comments. Therefore, the student is revising without the opportunity to focus solely on one area of composition such as clarity which could be a higher-order concern or grammar. Without focus, skills such as Recognizing and Remembering may not be mastered because of the various tasks involved in each revision. For example, if a student successfully achieves a clearer message through

revision but the revisions contain grammatical errors, subsequent instructor feedback will highlight the errors. Because of the highlighted grammatical errors, the student will not have a sense of accomplishment even though the goal for a clearer message was achieved.

The fourth instructor participant, Instructor Baker, bypasses the first four elements on Bloom's Taxonomy, and wants his students to achieve the skills of Evaluating and Creating. During his interview, Baker said that he wants his students to "demonstrate through some kind of revision and reflection" what they have learned. Additionally, Baker wants to know his students have successfully completed the "intellectual transformation that they are supposed to have" in the composition course. In the introductory composition course, the knowledge level varies with each student, and Baker stresses "you have got to be really flexible" in approaching feedback to accommodate the students. Baker's comment reflects his understanding of the diversity of the community college population. One example of diversity impacting instructor feedback is an acknowledgement of levels of student confidence in his or her writing ability. Baker says he is "really attentive to the [phenomenon of] how a 35-year-old student who doesn't have a lot of confidence but who is actually a better writer than the 18-year-old student who has way too much confidence." As a result,
Baker explains

> There is a formula in my mind just with terms of student response ... and I think
> this is true of community college instructors, is you do read your population and
> you read sort of the level of homogeneity or heterogeneity of your population.
> (personal communication, February 20, 2013)

As a result, Bloom's Taxonomy is an effective research tool to graph Baker's feedback which incorporates each student's skills ranging between lower-order to higher-order strengths. However, one concern might be how much intellectual transformation is possible for students enrolled in an introductory community college composition course. At this point in learning, Parr and Timperley's observation of gaps in learning may become evident as the student is attempting higher-order skills without necessary foundational knowledge of lower-order skills (2010, p. 80). Perhaps this transformation of learning is more appropriate over time. For example, the student who successfully incorporates feedback into a subsequent draft may have followed specific directions detailed in feedback without fully understanding the reasons for the revisions. Therefore, it is equally important for the student to know why a revision is necessary and how to make the revision. Otherwise, gaps in learning will occur without an understanding of the full composition process.

Finally, the fifth instructor participant, Instructor Clark, targets the elementary and advanced goals based on Bloom's Taxonomy: Remembering, Applying, and Evaluating. For example, he wants students to "start recognizing" elements of writing and applying proper composition techniques. Beyond the basic composition skills, Clark wants his students to have the skills to apply information and "look at the question [raised in instructor feedback] and say 'Well, I can answer that.'" Finally, he focuses on helping students to learn how to evaluate or to "critically approach" their writing. He said, "It is important for me to know where the student is coming from and to try to level the playing field but at the same time not have the same high bar for everybody." Further, Clark said he will "try to deal with [the students] conceptually," so the learning base is broadened

beyond simply conforming to assignment requirements (personal communication, February 18, 2013).

In summary, successful students will have the skills required to be able to interpret feedback and be able to answer questions raised in feedback, but unsuccessful students may feel frustrated and overwhelmed by the inability to meet Clark's goals. His feedback underscores the importance of the observation that feedback should provide foundational knowledge in a systematic way thereby increasing student confidence in composition (Soliday, 1997).

Instructor feedback requiring specific revision action provides the student with an opportunity to practice a skill. Once a skill is learned, the student has the ability to build on knowledge to an advanced composition level. However, the partnership between the instructor and student will erode if instructor feedback is addressing skills beyond the student's place of knowledge. In some instances, the student will ignore the feedback because it does not have context for the student. Further, the partnership does not meet its full potential when the instructor meets the student at his or her place of learning but fails to encourage the student to advance composition skills. In summary, a partnership between instructor and student is critical for successful growth in the composition course.

Instructor approach to disruptions to feedback. Instructors revealed three primary areas of composition which serve as disruptions when approaching feedback to student composition: weak lower-order skills, lack of advanced composition knowledge over several drafts, and the perceived absence of student effort. The most common disruption to approaching feedback is lower-order concerns.

Lower-Order Disruptions

The most common disruption to approaching feedback is lower-order concerns. Lower-order skills include application of proper grammar techniques in composition. Lower-order disruptions are highlighted by Phillips, a self-proclaimed "compulsive editor," who stated during the interview that in order to overcome disruption from lower-order issues, he "will go through first and do all of the sentence level grammar mechanics … [then] read through without noticing it anymore." Interestingly, one reason Phillips is attuned to sentence level grammar is he "worked for a newspaper for a couple of years." While he acknowledges his approach of marking grammar "is not textbook," he said after he makes the edits he "can read it through for the content and organization" (personal communication, February 4, 2013). Resulting feedback will have advantages and disadvantages. One advantage to the approach used by Phillips is the student will receive feedback acknowledging lower-order concerns as well as higher-order concerns, thereby looking at the student composition from various perspectives instead of singularly focused on one aspect. However, Phillips reacts only to what he believes to be right or wrong instead of using a wider focus for the greater benefit of the student (Connors & Lunsford, 1993). Therefore, the numerous markings and comments can be received as negative feedback and overwhelm the student thereby discouraging enthusiasm for future composition assignments. One approach to encourage a successful partnership between the instructor and student would be for Phillips to explain his approach to the student before the student receives instructor feedback.

Evans has found she will "get to a point where o.k. you know I have marked one or two pages really extensively for these punctuation or verb tense errors or whatever so

then what I do is I sort of just stop and I make [note] of that on the final sheet" (personal communication, February 18, 2013). Evans provides feedback highlighting issues for the student to address and learn from. Through highlighting errors, the instructor is creating a teaching moment for the student, thereby reinforcing grammar rules in order to help students refrain from repeating the errors in future composition. Additionally, by highlighting some, but not all, of the errors, Evans is tasking the student to identify and correct additional errors within the composition assignment. One concern with this technique is the student will receive the instructor feedback and, upon review of the first one or two pages, become discouraged by the number of remarks even though the remarks gradually decrease throughout the student's paper. Alternatively, they will only see errors on those pages but not be able to apply that lens to the other pages. Providing feedback meant to teach composition rules and simultaneously providing feedback encouraging students to explore ideas is a delicate balance. Evans' approach is an example where achievement of the social contract in the composition course is critical. The goals between the instructor and student must be clear and it must be understood that grammatical corrections are not meant to discourage. Rather, the goal is to work in partnership to strengthen student lower-order skills to have the capability to move to higher-order composition skills. Therefore, instructor-student interaction and mutual understanding is a cornerstone to effective feedback (Black & Wiliam, 2009).

Clark remarked his style is "instead of going through and marking each time there is a grammatical issue," he will add a note for the student to be aware he has marked a problem area "maybe once or twice … it is a recurring issue" in the paper (personal communication, February 18, 2013). Clark has highlighted areas for the student to focus

his or her attention in the attempt to avoid similar errors on future composition. Additionally, he is spending his time efficiently. Specifically, he recognized and marked an error, made a note to the student, and continued reading with satisfaction he has met his responsibility to create a teachable moment for the student without putting an overwhelming number of comments on the paper.

Baker warns that "you are going to burn yourself out" when feedback's purpose is to fix or correct a student's composition assignment. Because of this awareness, Baker is "not typically doing as much line-by-line editing; [he is] doing more general holistic comments" (personal communication, February 20, 2013). As a result, his comments have the least number of marks on the student paper. However, if a primary concern is student reception of comments, the tone of the general holistic comments also has the potential to encourage or discourage the student for future composition. Specifically, the holistic comments need to meet the place of the student's level of knowledge to avoid the potential of the comments being disregarded by the student. Therefore, Baker has taken a significant step toward achieving the social contract when holistic comments are phrased in a positive manner, directing the student to areas of concern with guidance on methods to correct weaknesses. For example, if the student writes a strong introduction but loses focus of the topic during the paper's progression then ineffective feedback would cite the lack of topic focus and apply a grade accordingly. However, effective feedback would celebrate the strong introduction and identify where the topic begins to fade. With this specific feedback, the student can revisit the introduction and trace the topic development.

While each instructor has a personal approach to addressing disruptions to feedback, it is critical for the instructor to recognize the impact of feedback on the student. The goal of feedback is identify lower-order concerns and teach the student how to recognize and correct weak areas of composition skills. However, extensive lower-order feedback will have a direct impact on each student and will determine whether composition skills will advance or whether the student will disregard the instructor's attempts for a partnership in the composition course. As Sommers (1982) notes, the instructional goal is to teach foundational composition skills while helping the student to advance the ability to convey thoughts and ideas in composition. Therefore, feedback should highlight areas in need of improvement but it should also encourage the student to practice skills beyond his or her place of knowledge. Student composition skill growth can be encouraged and positively reinforced with appropriate feedback.

Repetitive Error Disruptions

The second most common disruption discussed by instructors was repetitive errors of both lower and higher-order concerns over the course of several drafts and assignments. For example, Evans commented she would be "really conscious of writing the same exact thing. Wow, I made this comment on the draft. I remember it. I can go back and look it up. It is right there, and I felt like that is a huge waste of my time" (personal communication, February 18, 2013). Clark said there are not many disruptions to his approach to instructor feedback "unless it is something where I know we have gone over and over and over again" (personal communication, February 18, 2013). Both instructors had a frustrated tone in their description of the disruption of repetitive errors. As a result, since the most common approach to instructor feedback (according to the

instructor interviews) is to recognize the progress of the student's composition skills, the tone of feedback can be negatively impacted when the lack of progress is noted. Repetitive errors can be examined from two perspectives. One perspective is the student is disregarding the instructor's comments leading to a frustrated response in written feedback. The second perspective is the student does not know how to implement the instructor's comments and repetitive errors occur also frustrating the instructor. A discussion with the student can determine an important distinction, specifically, whether the student will not or does not know how to implement the instructor's comments. Therefore, it is important to determine if there is a gap of knowledge which is resulting in repetitive errors.

Perception of Student Effort and Ownership

A final disruption discussed by the instructors aligns with the aforementioned discussion of repetitive errors. Specifically, a disruption to instructor feedback is the perceived lack of participation on behalf of the student. However, the lack of student participation may also be an indicator of a gap in student knowledge restraining the student from advancing his or her composition skills rather than ignoring instructor comment or lack of effort.

Phillips describes his negative reaction when the students "have taken the sort of standard five-paragraph essay thing a little too much to heart." He also finds he is challenged when the student has the "attitude of here is an assignment I think I know what the instructor wants and this will do it." Phillips wants his students to compose with the awareness of "the whole idea of rhetoric and audiences and how your words work on somebody" (personal communication, February 4, 2013). However, Phillips defined

himself as a compulsive editor and acknowledged he extensively marks student papers for grammatical errors. Therefore, it is possible the student who makes the corrections as indicated by Phillips believes that he or she has satisfied the instructor's editing directives without understanding what was incorrect.

Richardson wants her students to strive for a good writing product and recognizes when "a student does something really thoughtless my comment can be a little bit negative." A follow-up question of how Richardson defines a "thoughtless error" was not posed. Ironically, her choice of words is significant in that the student can be "really thoughtless" but her comments can be a "little bit negative." As a result, the student can perceive the feedback as harsh. Richardson gives her students the opportunity to resubmit papers and they have two weeks from the date the student receives the graded paper. Richardson gave students until the end of the semester to resubmit but changed her practice as she found it was a lot of "extra grading as we already have so much" (personal communication, February 19, 2013). Richardson's reactions in her feedback could be a result of stress from reviewing a great number of student papers, thus highlighting how workload impacts resulting feedback (White, 1995).

Baker's awareness of student ownership of composition is important because he has learned to limit the time he spends correcting errors "and that helps a lot with those errors that I used to spend weekends correcting because if the student thinks that you are the only reader they don't care how much work you do" (personal communication, February 20, 2013). In comparison, Phillips is withholding the student's ownership of composition through extensive editing. Instructor approach to feedback is a tool which comes with personal awareness as well as experience. As Baker indicates he has changed

his approach to student writing over time but he continues to incorporate editing as a major focus of instructor feedback.

Disruptions are unique because they are isolated to the instructor's time with the student's paper. Specifically, it is a time when the student has provided a work of composition and in the solitary moments of reading the student writing, the instructor has potential to become frustrated and lose perspective of the goal (i.e. guide the student in creating and increasing composition skills). The dynamic between the individual instructor's reactions to the student composition has the opportunity to create a moment of feedback that will be negatively received by the student, thereby minimizing the impact on learning because of the instructor's inability to recognize or overcome personal annoyances.

Instructor Written Feedback

Samples of student papers with instructor comments were collected during the interview process. The comments were collected from four of the five instructor participants. Phillips was on sabbatical at the time of the interview and did not have any student papers readily available for collection. Bloom's Taxonomy was used to categorize instructor stated goals and compare written feedback from student papers.

Instructor	Remembering	Understanding	Applying	Analyzing	Evaluating	Creating
Phillips						
Stated Goals		X	X	X		
Evidence in Written Feedback	N/A					
Evans						
Stated Goals	X	X				
Evidence in Written Feedback	X	X				
Richardson						
Stated Goals	X					
Evidence in Written Feedback	X	X				
Baker						
Stated Goals					X	X
Evidence in Written Feedback	X	X				
Clark						
Stated Goals	X		X		X	
Evidence in Written Feedback	X	X		X		
	Remembering	Understanding	Applying	Analyzing	Evaluating	Creating

Table 3 Goals and Written Feedback Comparison Table

Intention of feedback. The stated feedback goals of Evans can be classified as Remembering and Understanding when she uses the terms "focusing" and "cohesive." The written feedback Evans provided to her students agreed with the goals. Evans pointed out composition problems to students in her feedback. Examples of comments that are targeted to the fundamental elements of composition included: "fix margins here," "Possessive and plural here," "incorporate quotes into sentences – no hanging q's," "SP?," "Missing verb," "Don't capitalize," "Move punctuation, add space," and "Need a period here" (personal communication, February 18, 2013). The comments are clear and concise. Evans gave the student opportunities to recognize lower-order composition issues and the method to correct them. With enough practice, the student has the opportunity to develop experience and knowledge to recognize similar errors in a rough draft stage before the paper is presented to the instructor.

Additionally, Evans encouraged students to focus and expand on ideas. Evans asked students to have an understanding of the methods to compare, explain, or interpret a piece of writing. This is done by specifically commenting on one point that can be expanded as well as using language that is clear and concise. Examples of language Evans used to enhance the student's understanding include "Need to say more about this, expand," "Say more – again, why," "Good, now add a specific thesis," "This is a fine start, but you need to develop your argument a bit more fully," and "do you have evidence?" (personal communication, February 18, 2013). As a result, the feedback does not attempt to overwhelm the student but instead targets an area and asks the student to revisit it using her comments as a guide. Therefore, the student has the opportunity to

practice the skills of Understanding (which includes explaining, interpreting, and inferring).

Displacement of ownership. Richardson's stated feedback goals can be classified as Remembering when she says she wants her students to be as "specific as possible" and know how to "recognize comma splices or fragments." The written feedback Richardson supplied to students moves beyond her stated goals on Bloom's Taxonomy. Upon review of written feedback, Richardson manually inserted edits to student writing. The following samples are copied directly from the student's paper. For clarification, the words that have been stricken represent words the student had in the paper which Richardson removed, and the underlined words are inserted directly into the student paper by Richardson. Examples of the edits include: "~~that~~ why <u>we</u> should use chariots~~.~~<u>?,</u>" "harmful to <u>the</u> environment," and "trillions of dollars ~~later~~ in future." Through her edits, Richardson is highlighting changes she believes enhance the composition. However, her insertion of the edits directly into the student writing means the student does not need to determine the action necessary to make the correction because the instructor has already made the change. This approach removes the ownership of the student writing from the student and places it with the instructor. Richardson also uses positive comments such as "this paragraph offers a good perspective on pollutants in relation to transportation" to endorse the achievement of remembering and successfully executing foundational elements of composition, thereby reinforcing the student's fundamental knowledge of composition. Other comments made by Richardson that endorse structural skills include: "intro establishes focus well" and praising elaboration such as: "you offer a good many benefits to your solution" (personal communication, February 19, 2013). Richardson

simultaneously interrupts and upholds the social contract. Specifically, the social contract is interrupted when Richardson edits the student's composition and the contract is upheld when she provides positive, encouraging comments.

Enhancement of student understanding. Richardson's written feedback exceeds her stated goals by asking the student to have an understanding of an issue by seeking additional information. Written feedback examples provided by Richardson include comments such as: "do you mean because they will be more physically active in addition to breathing in cleaner air?" and "clarify." As a result, these comments highlight specific areas for re-examination by the student. Other examples of written feedback by Richardson use short responses such as: "For some people, yes? There are many people and companies who are taking significant steps to minimize pollution and the resulting harm to the environment" and "Well, I guess this would depend on how quickly they walk that mile!" (personal communication, February 19, 2013). Richardson has highlighted aspects of the student's writing that can be expanded and asked her student to reach beyond a comfort level and explore ideas thereby building lower-order composition skills.

However, Richardson's feedback is disrupted when "a student does something really thoughtless," and her feedback can be negative (personal communication, February 19, 2013). Yet, Richardson has achieved and exceeded her stated goals with an awareness of her barriers to feedback. She did not convey that her goals would exceed Remembering, yet the evidence of written feedback supports Remembering and Understanding. Certainly, students who seek to advance composition skills will make "thoughtless" mistakes because the foundation of knowledge for the mistake is not yet

formed. However, Richardson is aware of her potential to provide negative feedback in certain instances. Her teaching would improve if she recognized the student who was trying to learn new skills and received feedback acknowledging the attempt instead of focusing on the errors of the attempt.

Recognition of achievements. Baker's stated feedback goals can be classified as Evaluating and Creating when he uses the terms "demonstrate" and "reflection and revision." However, his written comments to students are primarily focused on lower-order concerns such as Remembering and Understanding. Baker provided 16 samples of instructor written feedback, each in the format of approximately a half-page length paragraph for each student. In several instances, Baker took the feedback opportunity to positively acknowledge the student's understanding of fundamental skills. Examples of comments reinforcing skills include: "You found a good window of opportunity," "You did an admirable job," and "You do a nice job establishing yourself." Additionally, feedback included comments highlighting lower-order concerns such as "You're still being held back somewhat by some careless grammatical errors" (personal communication, February 20, 2013). One concern is without highlighting specific deficiencies, but rather making general statements, the student is unable to recognize the errors and a learning opportunity is lost. In these examples, one way to balance the praise, criticism, and general comments is to ensure the student has a specific lesson that can be applied to future composition. For example, highlighting specific "careless grammatical errors" will direct the student to the errors with the goal for the student to learn the proper grammar usage and apply the lesson to future assignments.

Baker does provide written feedback in a manner that outlines areas that need more explanation or interpretation. It is important to note the samples provided by Baker for this case study were final submissions of papers and the comments were made with the understanding that no further drafting would be done by the student. Examples of comments seeking understanding include: "I guess you could have dug a little deeper into the competition," "I wasn't quite sure why you were trying to make it more readable on the Web," "what is their source for that, by the way?," and "The education website you zeroed in on could have used a good deal more detail from you" (personal communication, February 20, 2013). If the comments were made on a rough draft, they would have effectively highlighted specific areas for the student to revisit and practice skills to enhance the concept of understanding.

Baker's disruptions to feedback are reflected in his comment that students "don't care how much work you do" on feedback (personal communication, February 20, 2013). Baker feels as though his feedback is undervalued and has changed his style from grammatical editing to holistic comments. Baker has failed to achieve his stated goals because he realizes that the time and effort necessary to teach Evaluating and Creating is not appreciated by many of his students. There is a sense of frustration in his tone in that, if the student is not willing to put in the time and effort for advanced composition skills, he will provide the basic instruction and nothing beyond. Although, in his ideal composition course with students successfully incorporating higher-level composition knowledge, student skills would flourish.

Encouragement of self-analysis activities. Clark's stated feedback goals can be classified as Remembering, Applying, and Evaluating when he wants the student to begin

"recognizing" composition techniques and to "critically approach" their writing. His written feedback to students can be classified as Remembering, Understanding, and Analyzing when he uses terms including: "Show, don't tell," "grammar," "fragment," "clean up extra space," "Does your paragraph support the sub-claim established here?," and "What is the rhetorical purpose of your image?" (personal communication, February 18, 2013). However, Clark's feedback is only effective if the student has the foundational knowledge to apply comments such as "grammar" or understanding the rhetorical purpose to the action necessary to correct the error. In addition, his comments reinforce successful composition techniques such as "excellent thesis." However, the instructor's feedback could also include a short explanation as to why the thesis was "excellent."

In addition, Clark asks his students to practice self-reflective analysis of academic writing which may be an advanced skill for some community college introductory composition course students. One example of the request for self-analysis includes

This section appears to be rushed. You have a lot of ideas packed into one single paragraph! Your audience needs breaks between your ideas (paragraph separate) so they can process the material. Consider taking each idea you have included here and breaking it out into its own paragraph. From there you can 'unpack' the point you are trying to make and give additional support and context. (personal communication, February 18, 2013)

Another example of self-analysis is "your points are solid; however, you need to separate the concepts out and 'unpack' them. The reason the section may feel cumbersome is because it is too tightly packed" (personal communication, February 18, 2013). These comments are telling the student what to do but are not specifically stating

how to make the changes. Therefore, the student may not know how to recognize various ideas, break them out, and provide context unless the student has previously been taught this foundational knowledge.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The purpose of this case study is to understand strategies characterizing successful instructor feedback in an introductory community college composition course. Seminal and current literature emphasizing the community college student's experience serves as theoretical foundation. Five instructor participants from local community college faculty were interviewed in this case study. Upon completion, the voice recorded interviews were transcribed. The transcripts were coded and the resulting data was subdivided into two categories including instructor approach and instructor written feedback. Further, sample student papers with instructor comments were collected and analyzed offering a comparison and contrast of different styles of written feedback.

Information obtained through instructor interviews correlated with sample student papers with instructor comments was analyzed. Using the instructor interview transcripts, three primary areas of study were examined. The first area of study analyzed how instructors stated their goals for feedback. The second area of study compared written feedback to the stated goals the instructors outlined during the interviews. This analysis was done to determine whether instructor written feedback aligned with the stated goals or if the written feedback varied from the stated goals. The third area of analysis was the examination of elements causing disruption to instructor goals for feedback. For example, disruption occurred when instructors perceived lack of engagement or willingness by the students to work beyond the edits necessary to achieve a targeted grade.

The research demonstrated that successful instructor feedback is challenging but attainable in the introductory community college composition course. Specifically, success in the introductory composition course in the community college does not have a

singular level of criteria every student must meet. Further, success relies on achieving the social contract between instructor and student. Therefore, the instructor with successful feedback is the instructor who pays attention to each student's writing, provides comments with goals achievable by the student, and monitors the student's progress throughout the composition course (Horvath, 1984). In an era of increasing standardization of assessment and scoring, this situation will continue to be a challenge in the community college setting.

The learning process is in the control of the individual instructor and student. As a result, the instructor's pedagogical knowledge and personal awareness can significantly impact the course outcome (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In order to ensure the possibility of a successful social contract, this case study highlights the importance of alignment of stated goals with written feedback targeted to the student's knowledge level. Through the results of this analysis, it is possible to identify achievement of the social contract, the opportunity to achieve the social contract, and failure to realize the social contract.

Strategies for Successful Instructor Approaches to Feedback

Upon reflection of the interview data and analysis, the social contract is successful when the instructor is aware of goals for the students, written feedback aligns with the goals, and students have a clear message and can respond accordingly. Bloom's Taxonomy highlights the tiers of skills necessary to successfully strengthen composition. As a result, gaps in foundational knowledge can be avoided or overcome through alignment of instructor feedback and student knowledge. By the end of the course, composition skills should be stronger, but it is also recognized that the learning process is variable and has many influences (Sommers, 1982). However, instructor feedback and

student response is a closed loop. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge composition can and does have a larger audience beyond the student and individual instructor. For example, composition assignments posted on blogs are available for public scrutiny. Further, students' awareness of the variance among instructors regarding goals and written feedback increase subjectivity. While this may seem obvious, students need to understand what is considered successful composition by one instructor may not be considered successful by another instructor because each instructor has individual goals.

In addition, along with the varying individual goals of instructors, another component impacting feedback is time management. Specifically, instructor comments may suffer because large course enrollments impact the amount of time instructors have to reflect and comment on student composition (Haswell, 2009). Instructors who incorporate effective time management during the preparation of feedback will reduce the possibility that the pressure does not impact the tone to the student. An example of a feedback practice that can be modified for more effective time management is an instructor who manually inserts numerous edits into a student's composition. An alternative method would be to highlight a repetitive error once or twice with a note to the student explaining the error and how it can be corrected. As time management becomes an issue because of increased student enrollment, the result is standardization which can become an element that disrupts or eliminates the social contract in the composition course. For example, the instructor who uses a standard checklist for every composition assignment without providing individual feedback has removed the opportunity to share thoughts and ideas with the student.

Strategies that Disrupt Successful Instructor Feedback

The social contract may be disrupted when goals and written feedback conflict in the introductory composition course because of the disruption that occurs with the feedback process. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), awareness of students' varying skill levels is important for foundational knowledge of composition skills. An instructor's written feedback can lead the student to attempt composition skills beyond the student's place of learning which can be a positive action. Consequently, if the student tries this advanced composition skill and does not achieve it successfully, written feedback that is interpreted by the student as critical and does not provide a learning mechanism, may reduce the chance of learning occurring. However, along with learning come errors. Therefore, the social contract is upheld when the student makes an error in an attempt to advance composition skills and the instructor's written feedback acknowledges the attempt as a learning experience.

Further, another example of the social contract disruption is when instructor goals for students focus on higher-order concerns while written feedback supports lower-order concerns. Therefore, instructor goals and written feedback are at opposite ends of the spectrum. An instructor can ensure comments are effective during revision by phrasing feedback in terms the student can recognize and act upon. A concern is instructor feedback may fail to recognize a need to bridge the gap of knowledge resulting from the tension created when goals are pushing the student for advanced skills while written feedback is restraining stated goals. Instructors in the introductory composition course in the community college will enhance the learning process by avoiding using terms that may be common to those familiar with composition study but unfamiliar to some students

who will not know what to do in response to these comments (Treglia, 2008). One aspect to consider is whether written feedback provides the scaffolding necessary to advance composition goals. If the instructor is providing written feedback for foundation skills but composing the feedback in terms and concepts targeted at a higher skill level, then the social contract may not be successful because the instructor and student are speaking two different languages.

Finally, an example of the social contract disruption is the instructor who fails to identify gaps in learning. For example, the focus of comments on specific elements of the student's work can provide a roadmap for composition skill growth (Ball, 1998). There is a basic foundation of knowledge a student possesses for each skill level. Therefore, if written feedback fails to target the basic skill elements necessary for the student to comprehend and practice, then frustration will occur for both the student and instructor. The social contract could fail because there is tension between where the instructor wants the student to be and where the student actually is.

Strategies that Fail Successful Instructor Feedback

Finally, a social contract will fail if the instructor performs extensive editing on behalf of the student. In this example of feedback, the instructor has failed to enter into a partnership with the student (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984). Awareness that the student cannot reach a higher composition knowledge level when the instructor performs extensive editing is essential. In these situations, the instructor has taken the responsibility of learning the specific skill away from the student. One concern is the student may not see the instructor's goals through all the editing. Even if the student could recognize the goals, the comments, specifically editing, do not give the student the

scaffolding necessary to practice and advance composition skills. The student will not realize that learning can exceed lower-order composition issues and reach a level where perspectives can be explored and ideas shared (Strouthopoulos & Peterson, 2011). As a result, directive feedback can be so extreme that, instead of providing feedback, the instructor is revising and editing the student's work and the student's response on a later draft is merely making the corrections highlighted by the instructor. The social contract fails in this instance because the student does not have the opportunity to practice and apply composition skills.

However, the success of the social contract is not the sole responsibility of the instructor. Instead, the social contract can fail when the student does not participate in the community that is created in the composition course (Anson, 1989). Specifically, the social contract is not fulfilled when the student has been provided with information to attain new skills and the student does not put any effort into learning. It is ultimately the student's decision whether the feedback will be received, understood, and acted upon (Black & William, 2009). Therefore, if the instructor provides the necessary tools for growth, then the student must be an equal partner to achieve a successful social contract.

A result of this case study highlighted how unrealistic instructor expectations lead to frustration. Specifically, frustration occurs when stated goals and evidence in written feedback do not align. For example, if the instructor is expecting an advanced composition level and the student's resulting work falls below the expectation, then frustration can result. However, investigation into the frustration or disconnection is necessary to determine the reasons for the frustration. The introspective and analytical process involved in determining the source of frustration is especially important. Ongoing

frustration can lead to lack of enthusiasm for teaching which has a direct impact on the students.

Implications

One aspect of the case study that was disturbing is the idea that an entire field of study, composition pedagogy, was not a course requirement in either my undergraduate or graduate studies or a requirement for most of my instructors. As I transition from the role of student to instructor, I now understand that teaching the diverse audience of community college introductory composition course students requires awareness that different approaches are necessary when setting goals and providing written feedback.

Further, instructors benefit not only from education in composition theory history with regard to feedback but also from an awareness of the ongoing dialogue within the composition field. Composition theory history is important to feedback because "writing faculty and administrators need to know in greater nuance and depth not only contemporary definitions of assessment concepts, but also how these concepts have historically developed" (Huot, O'Neill & Moore, 2010, p. 495). Additionally, composition theory history reveals "teachers need an understanding of what is already known about the characteristic patterns in the spoken linguistic systems of their students. This step is crucially important for improving evaluation and the instructional process" (Ball, 1998, pp. 230-231). Thus, research of composition theory history with regard to feedback provides instructors with a foundation of theory and practice which impacts today's composition course.

Knowledge of the history of instructor feedback is a powerful tool in the introductory composition course. In addition, reflection of each individual instructor's

writing style is critical. For these reasons, the findings of this case study provide introductory community college instructors insight into the components of success or failure of the social contract in the composition course. Specifically, academic standards concerning feedback change over time. The pendulum for focus of feedback has moved from the emphasis on content to the mechanics of writing and back again (Jeffery, 2011). Therefore, instructor knowledge of the role pedagogy has in the composition course and the understanding of the "why" and "how" it changes is critical (Berlin, 1982). Instructors must continually be aware of pedagogy impacting the composition course and need to continually upgrade their skills.

It is necessary that students understand how instructors approach feedback and have an awareness of the instructor's goals and expectations for the student's writing. Then, it is the instructor's responsibility to ensure written feedback supports those stated beliefs. As the student who considered leaving graduate school due to disillusionment (e.g. believing my essay was well-done and receiving significant negative feedback), the power of the impact of instructor feedback can never be taken for granted, and that is why it is critical that instructors entering the introductory community college composition course have every tool available to ensure success.

Limitations of Case Study

While the process of reviewing literature, interviewing instructor participants, and analyzing written feedback provided a wealth of data, there are two aspects to the investigation limiting the case study. One limitation is the instructor interview sample size. Only five instructors were interviewed for this case study, and one of the five was

on sabbatical at the time of interview. Due to the small sampling of instructor responses, the data is limited in scope.

Another limitation to the case study is that I was interviewing in-class instructors in the introductory composition course without any teaching experience myself. As the interviews progressed, the content of the questions remained unchanged but the format became more refined.

Future Research

In consideration of future research, two areas of research would serve as useful avenues to continue the exploration of strategies characterizing successful instructor feedback for student written assignments in an introductory community college composition course. One area of research would be to track a larger student population through the semester using the traditional in-classroom format through in-class observation. This research would capture immediate reaction upon receipt of instructor feedback. In addition, the research would provide the opportunity to track the subsequent drafts of student writing in response to instructor feedback to determine which comments lead to skill and knowledge growth and which comments are ineffective and why. The in-class opportunity could also provide the opportunity to observe and videotape instructor-student conferences to register reactions to oral comments.

Another area of research is to investigate advanced academic degree programs that focus on preparation to teach English to determine what pedagogical courses are imbedded within the programs. Community colleges rely on universities and colleges to educate future community college instructors. Dialogue and partnership between two-year and four-year colleges is essential. Increasing awareness within the academic

community regarding the diversity intrinsic in the community college system would

enhance the preparation of future instructors in this system.

Finally, one goal for this case study was to include student interview participants

who have successfully completed the introductory composition course at the community

college in this case study. However, only two students volunteered to be a part of the case

study and the students had already completed the course. Because of the small sampling

and the fact student observations were made retrospectively, the student interviews are

not incorporated in this case study. Future research would include interviews with

students currently enrolled in the introductory composition courses to get real-time

responses and impressions to instructor feedback.

Reflections and Final Thoughts

As a result of my case study, should I enter the introductory composition course

as an instructor, I will use my research as a reference guide. For example, I have self-

awareness that misspellings and incomplete sentences are disconcerting to me as I review

a composition. However, there are two primary goals that must take precedence over my

disruptions. First, I need to determine if the course objectives are met. It is my

responsibility to align instruction, assignments, and feedback within the parameters of the

stated course objectives. The second awareness that I will bring into the introductory

composition course is the need to provide students with tools and references that can be

applied to future composition. The introductory composition course is just one of many

courses students will be enrolled that will require writing skills. If, as an instructor, I can

provide information to help students transfer knowledge from the introductory

composition course to writing across the curriculum, then I made a positive impact on the learning process.

The most challenging and rewarding aspect of the case study was the evolution of the project as a result of feedback. My thesis director and readers challenged me to analyze my writing. I was charged with explaining why my statements and research matter. I was tasked with exploring how my research will help instructors. My thesis director and readers highlighted areas needing clarification. In my efforts to seek clarification, I gained additional knowledge and insight into instructor feedback. Not only did I gain insight into my case study, I learned about myself as a writer. In other words, I have practiced the skills necessary to be an effective community college introductory composition course instructor.

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Appendix

Faculty Interview Protocol

Institution: _____

Interviewee (Title and Name): _____

Interviewer: _____

Documents Obtained: _____

Post Interview Comments or Leads: _____

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your consent at any time, (2) the purposes, procedures and duration of the study have been explained, (3) information regarding this research project is available and all questions will be answered satisfactorily, (4) no information will be presented identifying you are the subject of this study unless written permission is provided, and (5) the consent has been read and fully understood and is signed freely and voluntarily.

Introduction

You have agreed to participant in this interview in response to an e-mail solicitation sent to instructors of introductory composition in the community college. My research project focuses on understanding strategies characterizing successful instructor approaches to feedback for student written assignments in the introductory community college composition course.

A. How would you characterize your approach to giving feedback on written work?

B. What forms of formative feedback do you use? Why?

C. What forms of summative feedback do you use? Why?

D. How much do you know about your student before providing feedback?

E. What pet peeves impact your feedback to student writing? How do you deal with this?

F. How do you know your feedback strategies have been effective?

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations: