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PAPER CONFERENCES AS MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK TO STUDENT WRITING

By

Jessica N. Betz

THESIS

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Paper Conferences as Meaningful Feedback to Student Writing

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ABSTRACT

PAPER CONFERENCES AS MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK TO STUDENT WRITING

By

Jessica N. Betz

This case study is designed to examine a potentially effective way to evaluate and provide feedback on student writing, and through meaningful evaluation, the writing process for secondary students could be more holistic, could better prepare students for college writing. This case study took place in a small eighth grade Language Arts/social studies classroom, located in a town of approximately thirty thousand residents, and the case is the classroom of 22 students, six of which were purposefully chosen for observation during their Paper Conference session and fourteen of which chose to participate in a survey. Paper Conferences are regular practice in the chosen classroom and all data collection took place during regularly schedule class time. Analysis revealed Paper Conferences were meaningful to both students and the teacher, thus documenting and describing a positive way to provide teacher feedback to student writing.

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INTRODUCTION

As a secondary teacher, I have continually encountered students who are uninterested in learning from their writing projects, and they often choose to throw a graded paper into the trash rather than analyze the corrections. This problem can be addressed through the use of more effective evaluations when teaching writing.

In 2011 I attended a writing conference, Writing Across the Peninsula, at Northern Michigan University. The keynote speaker, John J. Ruszkiewicz, author of *How to Write Anything* (2010), and *Everything's an Argument* (2010), among many others, suggested the idea of conferencing with students rather than handing back graded papers. Ruszkiewicz would regularly meet with his students to discuss, in depth, their writing projects and writing skills.

Ruszkiewicz's idea was mainly directed at college professors. He thought that professors and instructors should meet with each and every one of their students about their own, individual papers. The instructor and students would have a one-on-one conference regarding their paper and their work and writing in general. This idea is easily translated into the secondary classroom and could be a better alternative to the current methods being used for instructor feedback.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION OF PAPER CONFERENCES AND PROBLEM

Background of the Problem

It is clear the literature available supports this study. There is an evident gap between the need for feedback on student writing and the effectiveness of written feedback on student writing. "For the most part, teachers do not respond to student writing with the kind of thoughtful commentary which will help students to engage with the issues they are writing about or which will help them think about their purposes and goals in writing a specific text" (Sommers, 1982, p. 154). Barnett (1989) states, "Research on first and second language writing is documenting what we already know as teachers: students are frustrated by seeing compositions marked up, and they rarely incorporate all our suggestions or corrections even when we ask them to rewrite (or is it copy?) their papers" (p. 31). There is a lack of connection between teacher written feedback and the student, thus making teacher written feedback less effective in many cases. Nevertheless, in order for the writing process to be complete, teacher feedback is a necessary element. "Reader feedback on the various drafts is what pushed the writer through the writing process on to the eventual end-product" (Keh, 1990, p. 294). Keh (1990) also states: "Feedback is a fundamental element of a process approach to writing" (p. 294). Feedback is essential in the process of writing, and further, if writing is essential, it needs to be provided in an effective way.

This apparent gap between the teacher's ability to provide usable written feedback on student writing and the necessity of teacher feedback to allow for the process of writing to come full circle brings an obvious problem to light. "Teachers have written

themselves out of the writing process" (Barnett, 1989, p. 32). The teacher plays a crucial role in the writing process, and there are other possible forms of feedback that could bring the teacher back into the process. Paper Conferencing with students could potentially allow for effective student feedback, which would allow the process of writing to take place. Therefore, by examining to what extent Paper Conferences are meaningful to teachers and students during the writing process will move the field toward the use of effective feedback on student writing.

Statement of the Problem

Throughout my six years of teaching experience, I have had the pleasure of working in five different schools. The opportunity of teaching and working within these different schools opened up my eyes to what was and what is happening in the Language Arts classroom. When I came into these schools I always found the same problems: the students were not familiar with formal writing; the students did not regularly practice writing papers; the students were not familiar with the formatting of papers or even how to effectively construct a paragraph; and finally, the students all lacked crucial grammatical skills. Most importantly, written feedback from teachers was not valued, and because it was not valued, students were missing pertinent information pertaining to all aspects of writing. "We do not know in any definitive way what constitutes thoughtful commentary or what effect, if any, our comments have on helping our student become more effective writers" (Sommers, 1982, p. 148). Not knowing what makes commentary thoughtful continues to be an issue for teachers in the classroom.

Writing is a process that should not stop once a paper is submitted for assessment. The completion of the writing process is vital to the students' learning and growth in the

area of writing. Students must learn from their mistakes. They need to hear teacher feedback, set goals, and know how they can make their paper better the next time. They should correct their mistakes so that mistakes are not repeated in future writing assignments. This is also a great opportunity for the students to ask questions about writing and for the teacher to see and to understand how the student feels as a writer.

Teachers spend endless hours grading papers and providing written feedback to students. This time is not necessarily time well spent if the written feedback is not valued or understood. If a teacher's work is not valued or even viewed by students, it becomes worthless. Recognizing this problem also allows for another issue to surface. Not all teachers' written feedback is valuable. Oftentimes, teachers struggle with how to give thoughtful written feedback to their students. Barnett (1989) said, "Consider the ease with which a fluent reader can circle, underline, or correct surface-level errors in form compared to the expertise and discernment that a reader needs to counsel a writer about a confused presentation of ideas or a convoluted organization" (p. 31). Could it be that there is a divide between teacher and student due to the level of expertise held by the teacher? The teacher understands the corrections and suggestions that he or she is providing to the student, but that does not mean the student will understand.

Significance of the Study

This study is designed to explore, to describe, and to understand the extent to which Paper Conferences provide meaningful feedback on student writing, in the classroom. If the Paper Conferences are found to be meaningful, conferencing could be used as a more effective way to evaluate student writing and to provide valuable feedback to students, therefore, promoting the writing process. Through effective evaluation and

feedback, the writing process for secondary students will be more efficient and better prepare students for college writing. When teaching writing, instructor feedback is vital, and because some students do not value written instructor feedback, additional methods should be explored. Ruszkiewicz's (2011) idea of conferencing with students is one method, in particular, that could ensure students receive the information they need from teacher feedback on their written works.

Research Question: To what extent are Paper Conferences meaningful to teachers and students in the process of writing? This case study will focus on answering the question at hand. It is necessary to understand the meaningfulness of Paper Conferences—that is, the extent to which the experience is deemed useful, valued, significant, or purposeful by an individual—before Paper Conferences can be deemed a valuable method of feedback for the writing process in classrooms. Due to the importance of completing the writing process and the importance of the revision process, a meaningful method to provide effective feedback to student writing is of the utmost importance. The ultimate goal in student writing is to create better writers and prepare students for writing successfully in the future.

Theoretical Framework

This research is viewed from the perspective that writing is a continual process that cannot be propelled without meaningful teacher feedback. In this case study, teacher feedback happens through the use of Paper Conferences. Paper Conferences (Ruszkiewicz, 2011) encourage communication between the teacher and the student, thus eliminating confusion and allowing the student to set future goals for writing. This study may generate a construct about the use of Paper Conferences thus contributing toward

understanding the purpose they could serve for the process of writing in the context of a classroom.

This case study is situated in Social Cognitive and Constructivist theories of learning. Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2011) informs the idea that Paper Conferences allow for individual differences in the process of writing and learning. In context of a Language Arts classroom, personal variables play a large role in teaching and learning dynamics, especially when it comes to teaching the process of writing. "Diversity in social practices produces substantial individual differences in the capabilities that are cultivated and those that remain underdeveloped" (Bandura, 2011, p. 2). Different students command different support in the writing process; additionally, some students require immense amounts of feedback and direction while other students require minimal feedback.

A Constructivist theory of teaching and learning (Cunningham, 1996) also aligns with the concept of Paper Conferences in the classroom: "However, they [teachers] do seem to be committed to the general view that (1) learning is an active process of constructing rather than acquiring knowledge, and (2) instruction is a process of supporting that construction rather than communicating knowledge" (p. 2). Cunningham (1996) discusses how constructivism allows for an expanse variety of views. If we truly believe that learning is an active process, then the teacher must encourage students to be active in their learning of the writing process. Paper Conferences inspire students to actively co-learn with the teacher as their papers are explored and goals are set for future writing (Ruszkiewicz, 2011). Sometimes the method of communication needs to be

modified to allow students to actively learn and receive knowledge in a meaningful, purposeful way.

Research Question

This case study explored the following question: To what extent are Paper Conferences meaningful to teachers and students in the process of writing? A Paper Conference takes place after the final draft of a student's paper is written. Once the final paper is written, the writing process is not complete. The student can still learn from issues in the final draft and can also benefit from recognizing strengths and setting goals for future writing. Through this study, I examined the experience of a Paper Conference in the context of a Language Arts classroom in order to explore, to understand, and to describe the extent to which Paper Conferences are meaningful to the student writer and to the teacher.

Definition of Terms

Key terms used in this study are defined as follows:

Paper Conference. A one-on-one verbal conference between teacher and student regarding a student's written work

Meaningfulness. The extent to which the experience is deemed useful, valued, significant, or purposeful by an individual

The Writing Process. In the classroom, the writing process includes steps students take while working toward a final piece of writing. **"**The writing process itself can de divided into three stages: prewriting, writing and rewriting" (Murray, 1982, p. 15). The writing process also refers to the ongoing process of an individual developing as a writer; in this way, writing is ongoing, continuing after a final draft of a piece of writing

is completed. “Instead of teaching finished writing, we should teach unfinished writing, and glory in its unfinishedness” (Murray, 1982, p. 15).

The Revision Process. The process of correcting or improving a student’s written work based on teacher and peer feedback

Limitations and Assumptions

Limitations to this study include the timing of the case study, which occurred at the beginning of the school year. As the school year progresses, students become more and more familiar and comfortable with their Language Arts teacher, potentially allowing for a more personal Paper Conference to take place. The students were also just beginning to practice their writing and the use of Paper Conferences after the long summer break. It was my hope that by observing multiple students participate in Paper Conferences, there would be ample examples where the students were comfortable and well-practiced in their writing, and there was.

This case study is delimited to one classroom and one teacher in order to explore, to describe, and to understanding the meaningfulness of Paper Conferences in the context of a specific classroom. In this particular case, the teacher had prior experience with Paper Conferences, although the experience was minimal, and she used the Paper Conference strategy in both her social studies and Language Arts classroom. During this investigation, the teacher provided time for six Paper Conference sessions to be observed and analyzed. The six conference sessions were chosen through purposeful selection in order to contribute to understanding the experience of Paper Conferences with students who performed at different writing levels; the teacher assisted me in selecting students who performed at different writing levels. Random selection for observations may have

influenced the findings of the study. A future, more in-depth study will provide the opportunity to observe additional Paper Conference sessions.

A future study would benefit from observing multiple teachers and classrooms taking part in Paper Conference sessions. This would allow for a comparison of Paper Conference sessions from classroom to classroom and teacher to teacher. It is safe to assume that different teachers have different classroom environments and different procedures they might use while conducting a Paper Conference, and while this is not the focus of the study, these elements would more than likely play a role in the outcome of the Paper Conference sessions.

During this investigation, the importance of student-teacher relationships emerged. Again this was not one of the main focuses of the study, but this concept plays an important role in the limitations aspect of this study. Because the teacher participating in this study had established relationships with her students prior to the start of study, and because she continued to foster that relationship through the Paper Conference sessions, the students seemed to be more comfortable and confident during the Conference session. Findings in future investigations may depend on the relationship status of the teacher and his or her students.

Chapter Summary and Brief Overview of the Study

Teacher feedback on student written work is absolutely vital to the overall, ongoing writing process and also to improving student writing. Meaningful feedback allows students to develop as writers. "Reader feedback on the various drafts is what pushed the writer through the writing process on to the eventual end-product" (Keh,1990, p. 294). Keh (1990) also states: "Feedback is a fundamental element of a process

approach to writing" (p. 294). Research shows that teacher feedback through written comments is often ineffective; Paper Conferencing is a form of feedback that might allow students to receive effective and much needed teacher feedback. Sommers (1982) comments that the writing process is reduced to a single trivial activity of rewording, which is driven by the misunderstanding of the teachers' comments. Additionally, Sommers (1982) declares that teachers do not respond to student writing with commentary that will help the students to think about purposes or goals in their writing.

Through meaningful evaluation, the writing process for secondary students should be more efficient and better prepare students for college writing. The goal of this research was to describe and to understand the experience of Paper Conferences and to gain perspective on the meaningfulness of Paper Conferences to students and teachers. This case study into one language arts classroom was designed to examine Paper Conferences as a potentially meaningful way to evaluate student writing. From a class of 22 eighth-grade students, 14 completed an open-ended survey on Paper Conferencing (see Appendix F). Six students were purposefully selected and observed participating in Paper Conferences during their natural classroom setting as a part of their regular classroom practices. I also interviewed the teacher of these students, to gain the teacher's perspective on the meaningfulness of Paper Conferencing.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the Study

The goal of this research was to describe and to understand the experience of Paper Conferences and to gain perspective on the meaningfulness of Paper Conferences to students and teachers. This case study into one language arts classroom was designed to examine Paper Conferences as a potentially meaningful way to evaluate student writing. From a class of 22 eighth-grade students, 14 completed an open-ended survey on Paper Conferencing (see Appendix F). Six students were purposefully selected and observed participating in Paper Conferences during their natural classroom setting as a part of their regular classroom practices. I also interviewed the teacher of these students, to gain the teacher's perspective on the meaningfulness of Paper Conferencing.

This chapter reviews concepts central to the investigation: the writing process; feedback in the revision process; and using Paper Conferences as meaningful feedback in the classroom.

The Writing Process

It is not uncommon to think of writing as a process, and in fact, writing has been thought of as a process for years. Murray (1982), a leader in the field of teaching writing said, "And once you can look at your composition program with the realization you are teaching a process, you may be able to design a curriculum which works" (p. 14). Writing is a complex process that takes ample time. "The writing process itself can be divided into three stages: prewriting, writing, and rewriting" (Murray, 1982, p. 15). Oftentimes the stages are labeled differently or other stages might exist in the process, for example, editing and proofreading.

Murray (1982) does stress, however, that many, including teachers, did not always view writing as a process. There was a time when writing was not a process, but a product and this idea still exists in some writing classrooms. Murray continues, "Naturally we try to use our training. It's an investment and so we teach writing as a product, focusing our critical attentions on what our students have done, as if they had passed literature in to us" (p. 14). Further, Barnett (1989) states, " What if we look at each piece of writing as one version in a progression toward the expression of the students' ideas? To do so is to regard writing as an expression of the mental process" (p. 34).

Like any process, writing must begin somewhere. According to Murray (1982), the writing process begins at the prewriting stage. After prewriting, the writer will spend time writing the actual piece. Once the writer is finished with the first draft of their writing, he or she will spend time rewriting. Rewriting might include editing, in different forms, and proofreading. The rewriting stage, like writing itself, is multifarious, and Paper Conferences could play an important role during this particular rewriting/revision phase:

> This is not a question of correct or incorrect, of etiquette or custom. This is a matter of far higher importance. The writer, as he writes, is making ethical decisions. He doesn't test his words by a rule book, but by life. He uses language to reveal the truth to himself so that he can tell it to others. It is an exciting, eventful, evolving process. (Murray, 1982, p. 15)

Murray (1982) explains writing as an "eventful, evolving process". This perspective has the opportunity to give the teaching of writing a whole new meaning.

So why is the writing process so crucial when discussing Paper Conferences? Paper Conferences aid the writing process, allowing the process to come full circle. During the revision or rewriting portion of the writing process, students are asked to dissect their papers piece by piece, making corrections, until the paper is a final product. Of course, students need the support of a teacher during this arduous process. More often than not, the teacher uses written feedback to assist students in the revision and re-writing, and sometimes, once the students receive this written feedback, the process stops. If the student doesn't complete the revision/rewriting process, making a final product, the writing process is never completed, and the student is unable to set future goals and learn from the entire writing process.

Feedback in the Revision Process

The question remains: what is commonly known about feedback in the writing process? And additionally, do the traditional ways (written feedback) of providing feedback to students really work? Research shows that feedback from the instructor, in the writing process is fundamental. "Feedback is a fundamental element of a process approach to writing" (Keh, 1990, p. 294). Additionally, Keh (1990) declares that reader feedback is what pushes the writing through the process of writing and eventually to a final draft. Knowing this, it is safe to assume that teachers are providing feedback to their students, but are the students actually receiving the feedback? Are they using it? Students and teachers are encountering a number of problems in the area of feedback: students struggle to read the teacher's hand-writing; students do not know how to properly use the teacher's suggestions; and often, students just do not take the time to

read written teacher feedback. A synthesis of the literature makes it is clear that teacher feedback in the writing process is struggling to make an impression.

Murray (1982), a recognized scholar on writing and the writing process, provides a glimpse into his experience with the problem of written feedback for improving student writing:

> I used to mark up every student paper diligently. How much I hoped my colleagues would see how carefully I marked up student papers. I alone held the bridge against the pagan hordes. No one escaped the blow of my 'awk.' And then one Sunday afternoon a devil bounded to the arm of my chair. I started giving purposefully bad counsel on my students' papers to see what would happen. 'Do this backward,' 'add adjectives and adverbs,' 'be general and abstract,' 'edit with a purple pencil,' 'you don't mean black you mean white.'" Not one student questioned my comments. (Murray, 1982, p. 158)

Murray brings up many valid points in this excerpt. Teachers spend ample time and effort hoping to provide their students with meaningful written feedback. What happens when the students receive their papers back and do not even take the time to review or even glance at the written feedback? Not only is the teacher's time and efforts wasted, but also the student does not benefit whatsoever from the teacher's written feedback. Further, the student is not able to learn from the revision process, because the teacher experienced the process alone, away from the student, and he or she was unable to explain the meanings behind their efforts and feedback. Unfortunately, the writing process will not be completed if the student does not learn from his or her mistakes and take note on how he or she can apply the newly learned materials to future writings.

Another question is: how often are students receiving written feedback from their teachers and completely disregarding it? The revision process should not take place without teacher feedback, and a polished paper needs the assistance of a teacher (Pei Wu & Ju Lin, 2015). Through this process, good writers evolve. Studies on composition have stressed the significance of the role that writing instructors play, especially when it comes to feedback (Pei Wu & Ju Lin, 2015).

There are different types of written and verbal feedback that can be given to students such as direct and indirect feedback. Frodesen (2001) discovered that the indirect teacher's feedback helped students' writing more than direct correction feedback. Indirect feedback can be described as a moment when the teacher shows an error to the student, but lets the student make the correction instead of providing a direct answer as to how to correct an error. Direct feedback is exactly the opposite. Direct feedback is given when the teacher provides the corrected form for students if students need to make a correction for their final version (Pei Wu & Ju Lin, 2015). While indirect feedback provides students with the opportunity and task to make required corrections, some students may not fare well with independently figuring out an answer to fix their mistakes.

Clearly students need teacher feedback in writing, and it is the teacher's job to provide feedback that is easy to understand. The students need to be able to use the teacher feedback to propel the writing process and in turn, become better writers.
A student not taking the time to look at a teacher's comments is just one of the many problems with written feedback in the writing classroom. "Leki (1990) argues that when presented with written feedback on the content, students may not read the annotations,

may read them but not understand, or may understand them. Sometimes students didn't know how to respond to them" (as cited in Pei Wu & Ju Lin, 2015, p. 290). Despite the issues with written feedback, there may exist effective ways to provide students with feedback, and teachers should be seeking these alternative methods of feedback during the revision process.

Forms of feedback. There exist a vast number of options for providing feedback in the K-12 classrooms, and many of them are considered norms for one reason or another. Teachers may provide a certain type of feedback because they are familiar with it, because they were given that type of feedback themselves as a student, or because it is easy. In some cases, the school operates under a pre-determined system of feedback that may be part of an adopted curriculum. For example, Matsumura, Patthey-Chavez, Valdes, and Garnier (2002) observed teacher written feedback on student drafts of work, which is used in urban third-grade classrooms in Los Angeles. Teachers may opt to provide students with written feedback, peer-editing feedback, or general feedback for the entire class, which is directed at the "common" problems made by "most" students. Graham and Perin (2007) explore strategies in which common writing issues are addressed and writing assignments are collaborative.

Forms of feedback commonly used in K-12 classrooms, such as peer editing, often leave students on their own or in the hands of their peers, who typically do not have the background knowledge or writing experience that would enable them to make difficult corrections or to propel the writing process to its final stage, the final product, and beyond the final product by enabling student writers to be able to set goals and to carry knowledge of the reasons for these corrections with them into their next writing

assignment. That is not to say peer feedback should not be used, but using peer feedback as the only form of feedback limits or may even halt the writing process.

Peer feedback. Literature does exist regarding peer feedback in the secondary classroom, and actually there exists more literature discussing feedback in the forms of peer and written feedback than paper conferences. A vast majority of what I encountered discussed the use of peer feedback, but there exists a lack of meaningfulness in the conversations that took place around the classroom during the use of peer editing and feedback. For example:

> As I observed Ellen's lesson unfold, I found myself in familiar territory. When I began teaching high school, I created files of rubrics for different writing assignments, each with corresponding peer-response worksheets or checklists. I had visions of students engaged in meaningful conversations, improving their writing and expanding their sense of audience beyond me, the teacher. I knew Ellen shared these hopes for her students. Yet, as I watched Ellen's students, and as I reflected on my early practice, I was struck by the lack of authentic discussion about writing. (Dawson, 2009, p. 66).

The glimpse of Ellen's classroom is all too familiar. Educators have hopes and dreams of students engaging in meaningful and purposeful conversations about writing and that students will feel passionate about the process. Unfortunately, that just is not a reality. Students must be prompted to think in meaningful and purposeful ways about writing and the writing process. Unless the students are prompted and guided by the teacher's expertise, the conversations will most likely flat line. I personally had similar experiences in my secondary classrooms. Students tend to stay focused on the surface of writing,

possibly due to their lack of understanding, and the conversations that I hoped would develop and foster, regarding their writing, never did. They just do not possess the experience and knowledge needed to take their conversations to that next level, a level in which the peer editing can actually become meaningful.

Paper conferencing. Paper Conferencing is a potentially effective form of verbal teacher feedback for the revision process. Conferencing can provide an opportunity for the student and teacher to have a meaningful conversation regarding the paper and the revisions that need to be made. Paper Conferencing also eliminates the issues presented with written feedback, because the teacher can help the student one-on-one to understand the meaning of the feedback, and help the student set goals to improve writing. The teacher can also hold the student accountable for accepting and understanding the feedback during discussion. "Students may not understand what the teacher writes about the feedback; therefore, conferencing allows both students and the teachers explore the errors arising from students' writing and feedback and then develop strategies for the subsequent revised writing" (Pei Wu & Ju Lin, 2015, p. 291).

Chia Pei Wu and Huey Ju Lin (2015) conducted a study, "Examining the Effects of Conferencing and Reflection Paper in an EFL Writing Class," and their study found Paper Conferences to contribute to students' writing process. Their qualitative study was conducted in a sophomore EFL (English as a First Language) writing class, and the students were given specific writing assignments: a narrative and an expository essay. The researcher used conferencing and reflection journals, which were based on the student-teacher conference conversation. "After having twice conferenced with the instructor, fifteen of student writers (54%) reported that they fixed the organization and

content problems; while 8 student writers (29%) presented that they added more information or eliminated unimportant ideas. Student writers concluded that conferencing facilitated their ability to outline a second draft (Pei Wu & Ju Lin, 2015). Overall, the study showed that the use of conferencing was helpful as a means of feedback in the writing process for both first language writers and second language writers.

A lack of literature on Paper Conferencing in K-12 classrooms suggests this approach is not commonly used in the K-12 school setting; however, an examination of existing literature does describe other forms of feedback being used in the K-12 setting. One possible explanation for teachers' not utilizing this approach to providing feedback may be the perception of conferencing as unrealistic in the K-12 setting. The following statement sheds light on a possibly common perception of Paper Conferencing:

> The writing conference also often seems naïve in its ideals, in its purity as a teaching moment. Instead, we know that student and teacher each brings ideologies, assumptions, and expectations to the writing conference that can potentially clash and make the work grind to a halt. (Lerner, 2005, p. 203)

It is important to understand that Paper Conference sessions should be built in a way that allows student and teacher to work together as a team and toward a common goal.

Another possible explanation for why Paper Conferences do not seem to be a common practice in the K-12 setting is that genuine discussions about writing are not the norm in secondary education; instead, recitation practices dominate (Dawson, 2009). An example of recitation practice would be the teacher asking the students general questions about writing and the students trying to come up with the "correct" answer.

Some college professors opt for the use of paper conferences. For example, Ruszkiewicz (2011) uses paper conferences at the college and university level, meeting with his students, one-on-one, in his office. It is during Ruskiewicz's (2011) keynote address at the annual Upper Peninsula Writing Conference that I discovered the idea of paper conferences. I later adapted his ideas to fit into my own secondary (grades 6-12) classrooms.

The idea of meeting face-to-face about a piece of writing, on a regular basis, in the secondary classroom, was something I had never heard of before, but I was convinced it could greatly contribute to the teaching of writing in my classroom. However, this idea of meeting face-to-face is not normal in secondary classrooms; it is rare. Dawson (2009) discusses that research shows authentic discussions about writing are not common in the secondary classroom and that other practices are used. It is through paper conferencing that these authentic conversations about writing can exist. Regrettably, writing conferences and authentic conversation regarding writing are not common in the secondary classroom. Additionally, due to the lack of use of authentic conversations and paper conferences in the secondary classroom, the research is also minimal.

Using Paper Conferences as Meaningful Feedback in the Classroom

I have conducted Paper Conferences in classrooms for grades seven through twelve, and I have worked with colleagues who have adopted the use of Paper Conferences in their secondary (grades 6-12) classroom. From my initial learning about Paper Conferences from Ruszkiewicz (2011), and through six years of teaching, I have come to understand Paper conferencing in the K-12 classroom as a way to provide the student and teacher with an opportunity to sit down, as a team, and discover what lies

within the student paper. Ideally, each paper conference session is set up similarly, allowing the students to become familiar with the conferencing process. Additionally, the teacher provides students with a rubric before they begin writing, and communicates to students that the elements on the rubric will be covered during the conference session. During the conference session, the teacher and student slowly make their way through the paper; this allows both the teacher and student to make written comments and notes for future use. Most of the time, the comments from the teacher are verbal and not written, but it is also not uncommon for the student to be taking notes during the conference or for the teacher to jot down comments and notes as well. Conferencing is an opportunity to collaborate, build relationships, set goals, gain insight (both teacher and student), learn new techniques in writing, and ultimately see the writing process come full circle.

I have also come to understand how K-12 educators might hastate to embrace the use of Paper Conferences in their classrooms. The whole idea of Paper Conferences may seem lofty, unrealistic, or ambitious. As Lerner (2005) aptly notes:

> The goals for conferencing—whether stated or not—have always been ambitious. On one level, the purpose was simply to teach writing more effectively. On another, it was to work against a dominant norm that saw learning as passive memorization or dutiful recitation. On yet another level, conferencing was a way to create meaningful relationships with an increasingly diverse student body or at least one that was increasingly different from the teaching class. Ultimately, it seems all of these goals remain unfulfilled, given the preponderance of lecture in writing classrooms, the reliance on (no computerized) grammar worksheets, and

> the dependence on part-time, contingent labor. It has always been a case of too many students, too little time, too much writing, too few dollars. (p. 203)

The goals for Paper Conferencing might be ambitious and lofty, but nonetheless, teachers must be ambitious with their writers and writing assignments, for it is ambition that propels forward movement. This process can be time consuming, but if set up properly, can be worth the time spent. While the teacher and student are conferencing, the other students can be doing the following: making corrections on their papers, working on grammar, sustained-silent-reading (SSR) and journaling, or working on something assigned by the teacher. By no means is Paper Conference time free time for the students who are not conferencing. I will draw upon my experiences with my seventh and eighth grade classrooms as an example.

When conducting Paper Conferences in my seventh and eighth grade classrooms, the students were required to choose an autobiography or biography, with my approval, to independently read while conferences were taking place. While reading, the students were asked to keep learning logs. Learning Logs are a form of journaling that allow students to explore their chosen book even further and to think critically. The logs are also a meaningful way for me to check in on their reading progress and thinking and to answer any questions that may have come up during students' reading.

It is important to understand that time spent paper conferencing is not time wasted. All classroom students can be actively engaged in the subject of Language Arts, even while the teacher is conferencing one-on-one with other students. The fact is, Paper Conferences can be time consuming. First, the teacher must limit the amount of time spent with each student during the conferencing sessions. Secondly, the time used on

Paper Conferencing is time well spent if the other students are engaged in something meaningful as well. Language Arts learning can still be happening, even while the teacher is conferencing with other students.

The autobiography/biography assignment provided the students with a meaningful assignment that could be completed on their own, thus maximizing class time, allowing for additional reading, which all students need, and also giving way to student-driven learning. Loss of time is a concern that often surfaces when discussing the use of Paper Conferences in the classroom, but this extra time can be an excellent opportunity to try something different and new in the Language Arts classroom.

It is essential that students are challenged and asked to step outside of their comfort zone, and additionally, asked to engage in conversations about writing that will enhance their writing skills. "Authentic discussions about writing are the sorts of conversations that professional or experienced writers might have, where writers explore purpose, effect, clarity, and interpretation" (Dawson, 2009, p. 67). The idea is that students are not just mimicking writing skills, but they are practicing and discovering skills at a higher level (Dawson, 2009). Conferencing with a teacher encourages students to grasp ideas and concepts that can enhance their writing skills. Writing skills are not learned through the regurgitation of facts, but through example and exploration of one's work, exploration that can often reach unchartered territories when facilitated by a teacher.

Even further, Paper Conferencing inspires the student and teacher to cover all aspects of the student-written paper, piece by piece. This process of conferencing can eliminate confusion for both the student and the teacher. "Students may not understand

what the teacher writes about the feedback; therefore, conferencing allows both students and the teachers explore the errors arising from students' writing and feedback and then develop strategies for the subsequent revised writing" (Pei Wu & Ju Lin, 2015, p. 291). Oftentimes, this confusion can hinder the student's progress in the writing process. Clearly if the student cannot understand the teacher's written feedback, the student cannot move forward unless the feedback is clarified and questions are asked. How often do students seek this clarification on their own?

Conferencing with students in the classroom can provide the opportunity for teacher guidance to come alive. Both student and teacher can work together in this "performance art" to achieve something incredible.

> Back in the museum of Composition Practices, teacher-student conferencing has a permanent installation, but not as artifact. Instead, it is performance art, with both the potential for the happening envisioned by Sirc and the reproduction of dominant literacy practices described by Black. The writing conferencing is a window into our hopes and dreams as teachers, into our successes and failures, into the limits of writing instruction and its endless possibilities. (Lerner, 2005, p. 206)

Writing Conferences open up the door to the realm of writing for both the teacher and student. Conferences can encourage writing instruction to become something that is limitless, because with the teacher's guidance and face-to-face help, the student brought to a higher level of writing, a level that is unattainable on their own.

Chapter Summary

Writing is a complex process that takes time and expertise. Feedback in the revision process is vital to completing the writing process and allowing it to come full circle. With thoughtful feedback in the revision process, students are able to polish their final piece of writing and set goals for future writing. Conclusions from existing literature on feedback in the revision process remains vague in K-12 education, as teachers are using multiple methods and have multiple purposes for student writing, in general.

Paper Conferencing offers a potentially effective means to providing teacher feedback on student writing. Paper Conferencing is not widely used in the K-12 classroom; other options, such as direct or indirect written feedback or whole-class recitation, are more commonly used in the classroom as a means to providing teacher feedback. Due to the lack of documented use, there exists very little literature about using Paper Conferencing as the main source of teacher feedback on student writing.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This research was conducted through a Case Study approach. Creswell (2007) describes case study research as the study of an issue that is investigated through one or more cases in a bounded system. In order to understand and to provide an in depth description of the experience of Paper Conferences in a secondary (grades 6-12) setting, I selected a single eighth classroom of Language Arts students and their teacher as the case. During the Paper Conferences sessions, six students were purposefully selected for in-depth observation in order to gather rich observational data about the experience and potential meaningfulness of Paper Conferences. Again, the issue at hand is Paper Conferences and the whole middle school classroom of students (N=22) and their teacher were studied to help illustrate the issue at hand. Multiple perspectives were necessary to gather data that could describe both the classroom experience of Paper Conferences and individuals' experiences with Paper Conferences in their own personal way. I searched for trends throughout all of these experiences.

My research was conducted in a Midwestern middle school classroom. The classroom of 22 students was comprised of eighth grade students, most of whom were Caucasian. There were two at-risk students. The teacher participant had been teaching for thirty-four years at both the elementary and middle school levels. During my first year of teaching at this particular school, I worked very closely with most of the English teachers. The school was in need of a change to their writing program, because it was clear that students were struggling with writing after viewing the district-wide writing scores, so it was at this point we discussed the possible use of Writing Conferences. At the time of the investigation, the teacher, whose classroom I observed, was using Paper

Conferences for the fourth year in a row. She used them in both her Social Studies and English/Language Arts classes. She used Paper Conferences in her classroom because she loves the idea of the students being apart of the grading process. As she explained, it is no longer a matter of putting a grade on a paper, but it becomes a process in which the students can transform their writing and talk their way through changes and improvements.

This is a case of one middle school classroom using Paper Conferences as means for feedback in the process of writing. "Cases. The object (target) of a social inquiry is seldom an individual person or enterprise. Unfortunately, it is such single objects that are usually thought of as 'cases'" (Stake, 1978, p. 7). The classroom situation is the general "case" being studied in this case study. This particular group of eighth grade students is the "bounded system", a reference used by Stake (1978), of interest.

Overview of the Study

This case study is designed to examine a potentially effective way to evaluate and provide feedback on student writing. Through meaningful evaluation, the writing process for secondary students could be more holistic, could better prepare students for college writing. In this research study, students were observed participating in Paper Conferences, in their natural classroom setting. Paper Conferences were a regular classroom activity. The students also took part in a survey, which consisted of open-ended questions. I also interviewed the teacher of these students, to gain teacher perspective on the meaningfulness of Paper Conferencing.

The goal of this research was to understand the experiences of Paper Conferences and to gain perspective on the meaningfulness of Paper Conferences to students and

teachers alike. Teacher feedback on student written work is absolutely vital to the overall writing process and also to improving writing. Meaningful feedback allows students to develop as writers. "Reader feedback on the various drafts is what pushed the writer through the writing process on to the eventual end-product"(Keh, 1990, p. 294). Keh (1990) also states: "Feedback is a fundamental element of a process approach to writing" (p. 294). Teacher feedback through written comments is proven to be ineffective, so Conferencing is a form of feedback that might allow students to receive effective and much needed teacher feedback.

Setting and Participants

Creswell (2007; 2013) mentions the use of purposeful maximal sampling, which is used in cases that have different perspectives on the problem or process being portrayed. In this particular study, purposeful maximal sampling was used to gain different perspectives on Paper Conferences. The student participants were purposefully selected to help me, the researcher, gain as many perspectives as possible. Some of the students selected were known for being well prepared and for having exceptional writing. On the contrary, other students were not prepared and struggled with their writing. Table 1 describes student participant numbers.

Table 1

Student Participant Numbers

Total Number of Students In Participating Class	Number of Students Observed During Paper Conference Sessions	Number of Students Who Chose to Participate in Survey
22	6	14

The population from which the sample was chosen for this research is middle school students. From the population of middle school students, one eighth-grade class was chosen as the sample. These students were chosen from a middle school in a small city with a population near thirty thousand, located in the Midwestern United States. These particular middle school students were somewhat familiar with paper conferencing, having experienced them in the past. The school hosts grades five through eight, with approximately fifteen to twenty-eight students in a single grade-level.

The population from which the adult sample was chosen for this research is middle school teachers. From the population of middle school teachers, the chosen teacher has used Paper Conferences in the past. She was familiar with the process and was first prompted to use Paper Conferences in her Language Arts classroom four years ago by myself, her co-worker at the time. The selected teacher was a former co-worker of mine, and I can trust that she will be honest and straightforward with me.

Data Collection

"The data collection in case study research is typically extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information, such as observation, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials" (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). There were three sets of data or three sources, which were analyzed during this research study. The table below, Table 2, shows the exact dates on which the different types of data were collected.

Table 2

Data Collection Timeline

Date	Data Collected
September 24, 2015	Observed Paper Conferences
September 25, 2015	Observed Paper Conferences
October 15, 2015	Observed Paper Conferences
December 22, 2015	Interviewed Teacher (Leader of Conferences)
November 20, 2015	Collected Survey Data via Qualtrics (Open-ended Post Survey)

Observable data and written field notes. The first set of data was observable data. I, the researcher, observed Paper Conferences taking place. While observing, I took note of the student interaction and engagement with the teacher and also the feedback provided to the student. I looked for trends and similarities that emerged during the process of the Paper Conferences.

Open-ended post-survey. The second set of data was collected through the student participants taking an open-ended survey using Qualtrics software. Qualtrics software allowed for easy access to the survey for the students, and I had prior experience with using the Qualtrics software. This data was analyzed using Creswell's (2013) analytic strategy for qualitative research. I looked for specific themes to emerge that support and show how Paper Conferences are meaningful to the students. During the coding process, three specific coding strategies were used: open coding, axial coding and constant comparative coding. Corbin and Strauss (1999) explain the three coding strategies. Open coding was used for the purpose of looking for similarities and

differences through comparing the Paper Conference sessions. Axial coding was used for the purpose of developing categories and searching for indicators. Finally, constant comparative coding, which is explained by Creswell (2013), was used for the purpose of taking information from the data collection and comparing it to developing categories. While coding the survey data, some of the themes emerged rather quickly as the student participants directly stated them. The figures below (Figure 1 and Figure 2) show, to some extent, how the themes "Explanations Needed" and "Examples Needed" emerged.

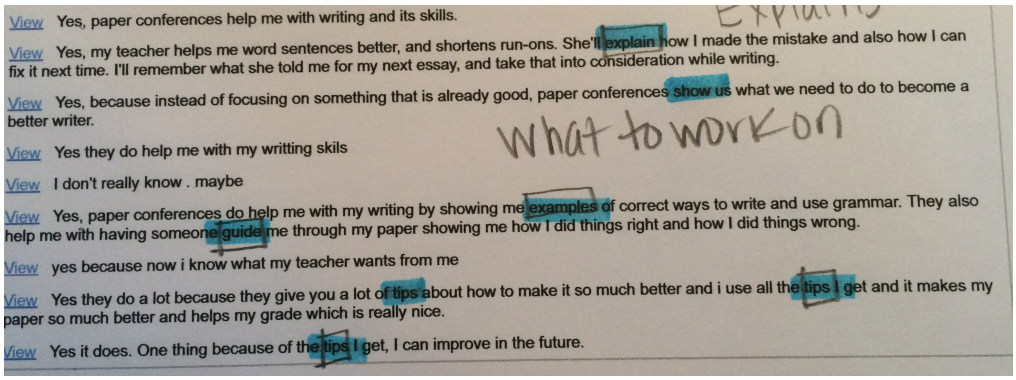


Figure 1

Example of Trends and Similarities from Survey Data

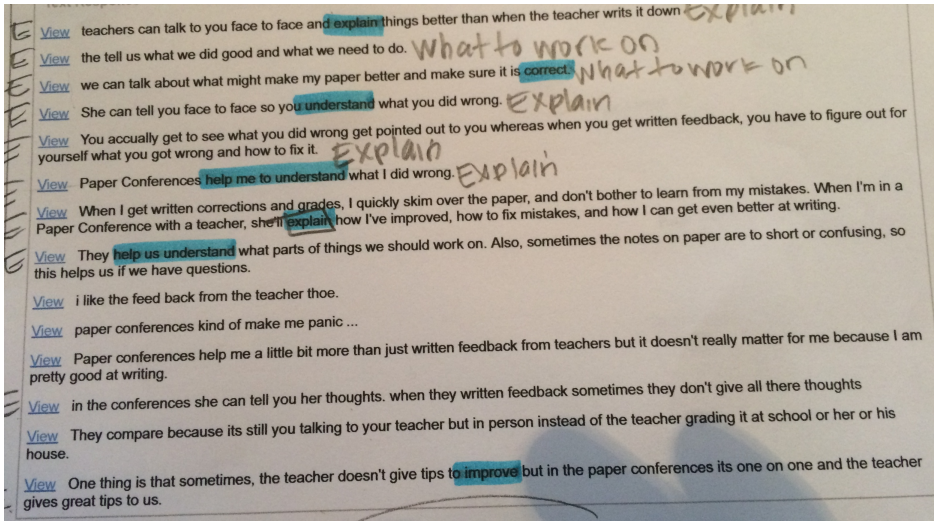
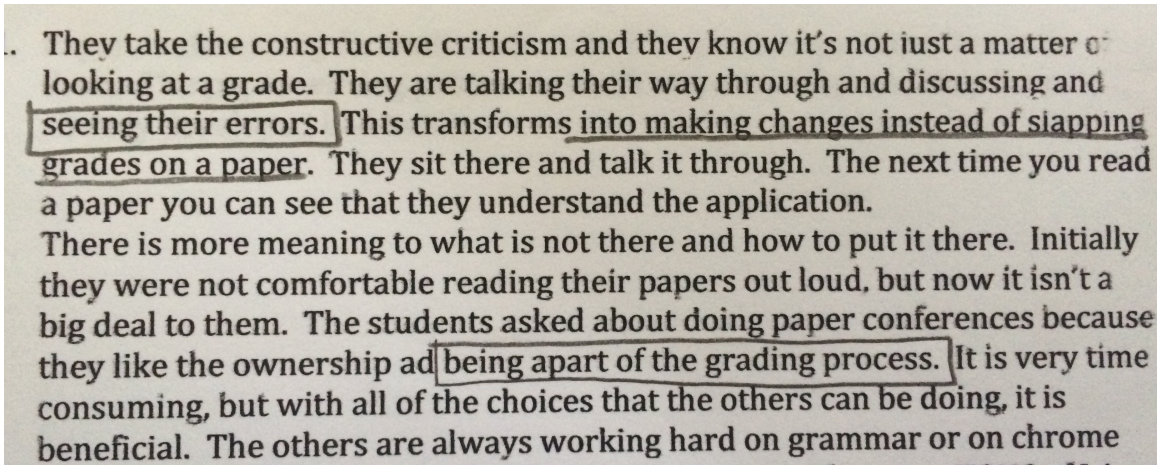


Figure 2

Second Example Trends and Similarities from Survey Data

Teacher interview. The third set of data was collected through an audio-recorded interview comprised of open-ended questions: Tell me what it is like to experience Paper Conferencing; To what extent are Paper Conferences meaningful to you and your students; Can you describe a typical Paper Conference session; and Where there specific Paper Conferences that you feel really made an impact on a student's writing or progression in their writing process? The selected teacher participant engaged in a meaningful interview, which was more like a conversation about the use of Paper Conference (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I analyzed this data by searching for comments, which show how Paper Conferences could potentially be meaningful to the teacher. Figure 3 shows an example from the teacher interview notes, specifically noting the comments that show potential meaningfulness (of the Paper Conference) to the teacher.



They take the constructive criticism and they know it's not just a matter o looking at a grade. They are talking their way through and discussing and seeing their errors. This transforms into making changes instead of slapping grades on a paper. They sit there and talk it through. The next time you read a paper you can see that they understand the application.
There is more meaning to what is not there and how to put it there. Initially they were not comfortable reading their papers out loud, but now it isn't a big deal to them. The students asked about doing paper conferences because they like the ownership ad being apart of the grading process. It is very time consuming, but with all of the choices that the others can be doing, it is beneficial. The others are always working hard on grammar or on chrome

Figure 3

Example from Teacher Interview

Analysis Procedures

Throughout the data analysis process, I used the "Analytic Strategy" outlined in Creswell (2013). The strategy includes "sketching ideas, taking notes, summarizing filed notes, working with words, identifying codes, reducing codes to themes, counting frequency of codes, relating categories, relating categories to analytic framework in literature, creating a point of view, and displaying the data" (p. 181). Creswell (2013) states, "These are the core elements of qualitative data analysis" (p. 180).The results section, Chapter Four, discusses what the data says as a result of using the above strategy.

Each student through my observing his or her Paper Conference, and through his or her survey of open-ended questions provided data. Taking a closer look at each Paper Conference and the overall case, I identified trends and themes that contribute to the overall meaningfulness of Paper Conferences. The teacher perspective, gathered through the interview, also allowed for another, important perspective to emerge. Triangulation (Creswell, 2013) was another strategy used in this case study. Three sets of data were purposefully collected in hopes that the data sets would support one another, and this is

exactly what happened. Figures four, five and six depict the note taking, summarizing, working with words, and emerging of themes.

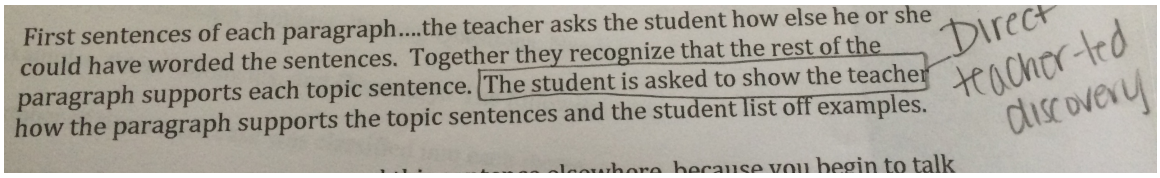


Figure 4

Example of a Discovery Moment during Paper Conference

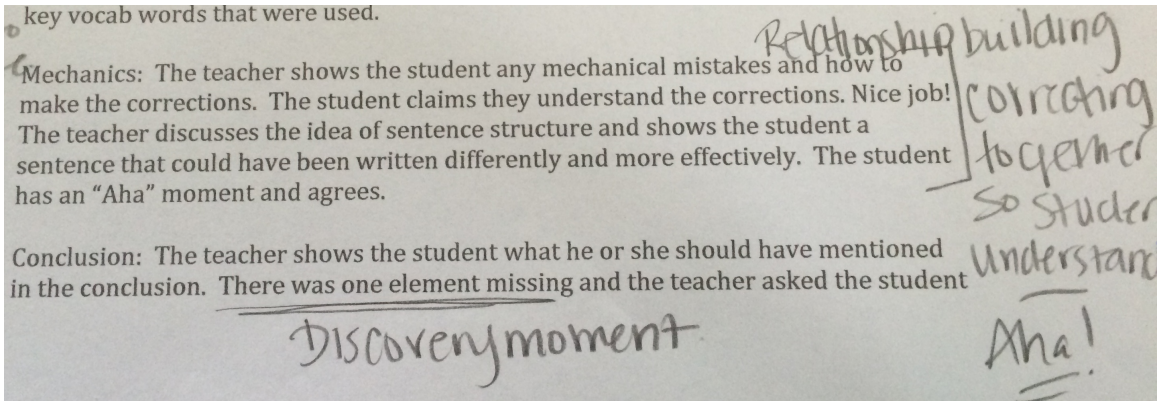
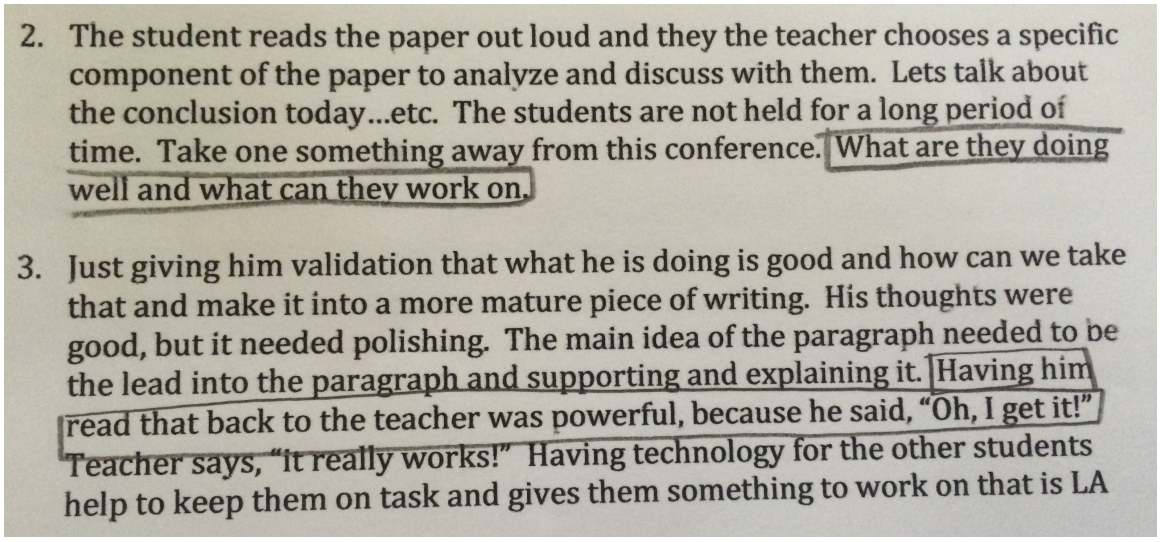


Figure 5

Example of an "Aha" Moment During Paper Conference



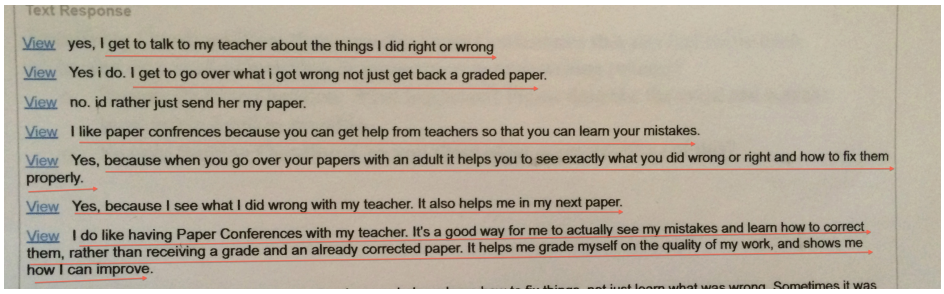
2. The student reads the paper out loud and they the teacher chooses a specific component of the paper to analyze and discuss with them. Lets talk about the conclusion today...etc. The students are not held for a long period of time. Take one something away from this conference. What are they doing well and what can they work on.

3. Just giving him validation that what he is doing is good and how can we take that and make it into a more mature piece of writing. His thoughts were good, but it needed polishing. The main idea of the paragraph needed to be the lead into the paragraph and supporting and explaining it. Having him read that back to the teacher was powerful, because he said, "Oh, I get it!" Teacher says, "it really works!" Having technology for the other students help to keep them on task and gives them something to work on that is LA

Figure 6

Teacher Example of Themes Emerging

"The final phase, where the data is interpreted, the researcher reports the meaning of the case" (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). In the final phase of this research study, the overall meaning of the collected data was clear. The data collected through this investigation suggests that Paper Conferences are truly meaningful to students and teacher alike and in fact, similar themes emerged from both the teacher and the student. Figures seven, eight, and nine show similar themes that emerged throughout the different data sets. The similarities are an example of data support through the use of triangulation.



Text Response

View yes, I get to talk to my teacher about the things I did right or wrong

View Yes i do. I get to go over what i got wrong not just get back a graded paper.

View no. id rather just send her my paper.

View I like paper confrences because you can get help from teachers so that you can learn your mistakes.

View Yes, because when you go over your papers with an adult it helps you to see exactly what you did wrong or right and how to fix them properly.

View Yes, because I see what I did wrong with my teacher. It also helps me in my next paper.

View I do like having Paper Conferences with my teacher. It's a good way for me to actually see my mistakes and learn how to correct them, rather than receiving a grade and an already corrected paper. It helps me grade myself on the quality of my work, and shows me how I can improve.

Figure 7

Example of Student Themes that Parallel Teacher Themes

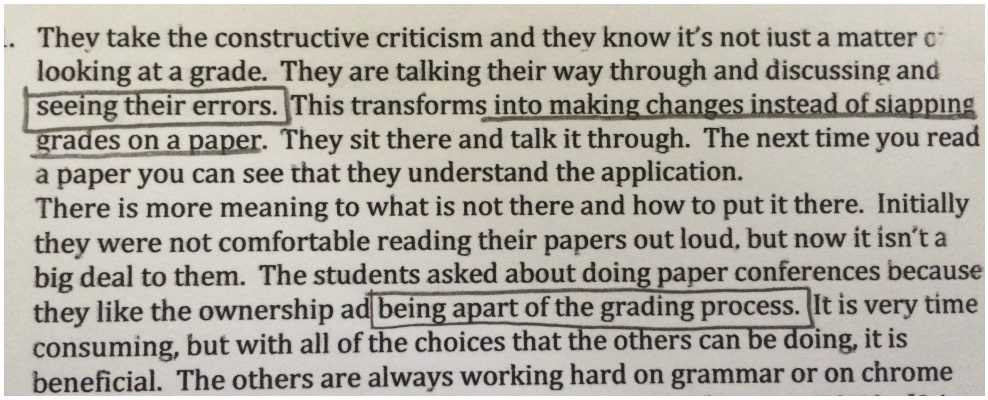
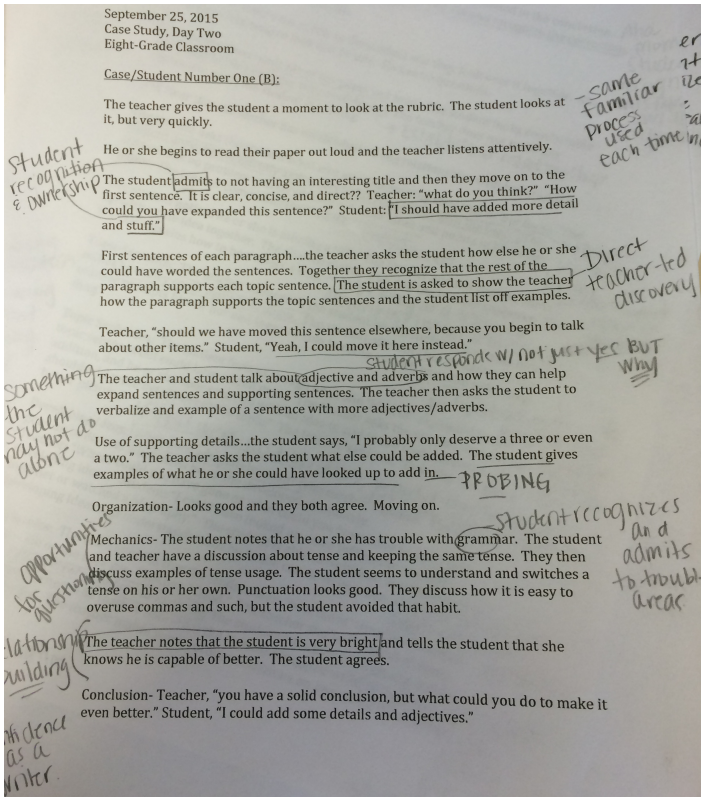

They take the constructive criticism and they know it's not just a matter of looking at a grade. They are talking their way through and discussing and seeing their errors. This transforms into making changes instead of slapping grades on a paper. They sit there and talk it through. The next time you read a paper you can see that they understand the application.
There is more meaning to what is not there and how to put it there. Initially they were not comfortable reading their papers out loud, but now it isn't a big deal to them. The students asked about doing paper conferences because they like the ownership ad being apart of the grading process. It is very time consuming, but with all of the choices that the others can be doing, it is beneficial. The others are always working hard on grammar or on chrome

Figure 8

Example of Teacher Themes that Parallel Student Themes

Below, Figure 9 is an example of the sketching ideas and taking notes process. First, I read through the data multiple times. After I knew that data well, I began sketching notes and ideas on to the actual page of data. An important piece of this data analysis process was summarizing the main ideas within the notes. This made it easier to pinpoint key words that continuously emerged. For example, the word "admits" continually appeared when a student admitted visually seeing something wrong or needing a correction in their writing: "The student admits to not having an interesting title and then they move on to the first sentence." After working with this word, it was clear that students were recognizing and taking ownership of their work. This is a theme that emerged from both the student and the teacher data: "Aha Moments."



September 25, 2015
Case Study, Day Two
Eight-Grade Classroom

Case/Student Number One (B):

The teacher gives the student a moment to look at the rubric. The student looks at it, but very quickly.

He or she begins to read their paper out loud and the teacher listens attentively.

The student admits to not having an interesting title and then they move on to the first sentence. It is clear, concise, and direct?? Teacher: "what do you think?" "How could you have expanded this sentence?" Student: "I should have added more detail and stuff."

First sentences of each paragraph....the teacher asks the student how else he or she could have worded the sentences. Together they recognize that the rest of the paragraph supports each topic sentence. The student is asked to show the teacher how the paragraph supports the topic sentences and the student list off examples.

Teacher, "should we have moved this sentence elsewhere, because you begin to talk about other items." Student, "Yeah, I could move it here instead."

The teacher and student talk about adjective and adverbs and how they can help expand sentences and supporting sentences. The teacher then asks the student to verbalize and example of a sentence with more adjectives/adverbs.

Use of supporting details...the student says, "I probably only deserve a three or even a two." The teacher asks the student what else could be added. The student gives examples of what he or she could have looked up to add in.

Organization- Looks good and they both agree. Moving on.

Mechanics- The student notes that he or she has trouble with grammar. The student and teacher have a discussion about tense and keeping the same tense. They then discuss examples of tense usage. The student seems to understand and switches a tense on his or her own. Punctuation looks good. They discuss how it is easy to overuse commas and such, but the student avoided that habit.

The teacher notes that the student is very bright and tells the student that she knows he is capable of better. The student agrees.

Conclusion- Teacher, "you have a solid conclusion, but what could you do to make it even better." Student, "I could add some details and adjectives."

Figure 9

Example of Sketching Ideas and Taking Notes

Summary

Having personal involvement in the collection of data can be a powerful experience. "I believe that it is reasonable to conclude that one of the more effective means of adding to understanding for all readers will be by approximating through the words and illustrations of our reports, the natural experience acquired in ordinary personal involvement" (Stake, 1978, p.5). Participants in the study were eighth-grade, language arts students from a local middle school, located in a small town in the mid-west. Of the twenty student participants, five students were purposefully selected for detailed observation of their experiences during a Paper Conference. The case study at hand included three sets of data: observable data, an open-ended survey, and an interview

using open-ended questions. I gathered observable data through note taking while observing student interaction and engagement with the teacher during Paper Conference sessions. I collected the second set of data through a survey using Qualtrics Software. Students took the survey during their regularly scheduled computer lab time. Lastly, I conducted the interview using open-ended questions after all Paper Conferences had taken place. The selected teacher participant engaged in a meaningful interview conversation about the use of Paper Conferences and the Paper Conference sessions.

The Analytic Strategy (Creswell, 2013) was used as a guide for analyzing the data in the case study. The strategy includes "sketching ideas, taking notes, summarizing filed notes, working with words, identifying codes, reducing codes to themes, counting frequency of codes, relating categories, relating categories to analytic framework in literature, creating a point of view, and displaying the data" (p. 181). The data analysis process is further illustrated in Chapter Four as I reveal how the themes emerged.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Overview of the Study

The goal of this research was to understand the experiences of Paper Conferences and to gain perspective on the meaningfulness of Paper Conferences to students and teachers alike. Teacher feedback on student written work is absolutely vital to the overall writing process and also to improving writing. Meaningful feedback allows students to develop as writers. "Reader feedback on the various drafts is what pushed the writer through the writing process on to the eventual end-product" (Keh, 1990, p. 294). Keh (1990) also states: "Feedback is a fundamental element of a process approach to writing" (p. 294). Teacher feedback through written comments is often ineffective for improving students as writers; conferencing is a form of feedback that may allow students to receive effective and much needed teacher feedback.

Overview of the Chapter

Findings from this investigation demonstrate what made the experience of a Paper Conference meaningful to eighth-grade students (N=14), to their Social Studies/Language Arts Teacher, and to the teaching of writing. This case study is exploring the following question: To what extent are Paper Conferences meaningful to teachers and students in the process of writing? Chapter four identifies and describes the findings resulting from this inquiry. The chapter begins by describing the Paper Conferences students experienced in the case study classroom before focusing on what made the Paper Conferences meaningful to eighth-grade students. The second focus is on the eighth-grade Social Studies/Language Arts teacher and how the data portrays the meaningfulness of Paper Conferences from her perspective. Lastly, this chapter will

discuss what the data says about Paper Conferences being meaningful to the teaching of writing in general.

Paper Conferences in an Eighth Grade Classroom

The teacher participant used the exact same procedure for each student during the paper conference sessions. The teacher began each Paper Conference by allowing the student to take a quick look at the rubric, which they should have already be familiar with. Next, the student read his or her paper out loud to the teacher. After the reading, the teacher and student picked apart the paper from the title followed by the opening paragraph and eventually made their way to the conclusion. The focus of this investigation was not on the process of the Paper Conference itself, but the teacher did use the same procedure for each Conference. The consistency was clear as the teacher began each conference and allowed the conference to unfold. Five out of the six students were able to read their paper out-loud to the teacher with a strong, steady voice. Their papers were read as if they knew them well. One of the cases read their paper quietly and slowly. After the reading of the paper, the conferencing began. During the conference the student and teacher engaged in conversation, asked questions, laughed, smiled and high-fived. It was clear that the teacher had established and was further establishing relationships with each student individually.

What Made Paper Conferences Meaningful to Students

Toward the beginning of each Paper Conference, the teacher inquired what process the student used in writing his or her paper. The student was able to explain whether or not they used an outline, peer editing, parent editing, a dictionary, etc. The student explanation provided to the teacher brought to light many issues in these six

observed conferences. One particular student struggled with organization, and told the teacher that he or she just could not figure out what should go where. The teacher explained the purpose of using an outline and how the outline can assist with organizational issues. The conversation about outlines continued to unravel with the student asking questions. By the end of the conversation, the teacher and student were both in agreement that an outline must be used in the process of writing.

During each conference, the teacher asked the student to recognize something that was missing in a specific area of their paper. All of the students were able to state exactly what was missing; they took ownership of their mistake after being prompted by the teacher. Further, the teacher asked each student to make numerous specific corrections during the paper conference, and each student, at least once, needed the teacher to provide an example of how the mistake could be corrected. At one point during each conference session, the student was stumped and the teacher provided an adequate example, which allowed the student to correct his/her mistake. Additionally, students were able to experience an "aha" moment through the recognition of their own mistakes. The teacher would state something similar to the following, "What might be wrong with this sentence here?" At one point during each conference the student was able to recognize the problem on their own and even how to fix it. Simple mistakes are often missed but easily recognized in the Paper Conference.

Throughout the conference, the teacher used specific writing terminology: chronological order, plurals, punctuation, etc. When the teacher mentioned these terms, the student sought further questioning. "Well what does that mean?" or "How can I use that?" The teacher was able to explain how the terms applied to the student writing. At

one point during a conference, the teacher used the word "adequately." The student looked directly at the teacher and said, "I don't even know what that word means." The teacher provided a definition and example to help the student understand the meaning of the word and how it applied to the paper.

One of the more amazing aspects of observing the Paper Conferences was the number of questions asked by both the teacher and the student. The teacher frequently asked the student questions to help her better understand the purpose and meaning of pieces of the paper, while the student frequently asked the teacher unprompted questions. For example, the teacher might ask, "Why did you choose this word?" or "If you came across a book with this title, would you pick it up?" The students would ask questions such as the following, "What word could I use here?" or "How can I support my topic sentence better?" One specific and simple question that was very frequently asked by each student during the conference was "Why?" The following table (Table 3) shows the trends identified during the collection of student data.

Table 3

Trends Identified

	Consistency	Relationship Building	Probing Questions	Needed Explanations	Needed Examples	"Aha" Moments	Discovery
Student One	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Student Two	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔
Student Three	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	
Student Four	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔
Student Five	✔	✔		✔	✔		✔
Student Six	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔

The student surveys were taken during the students' regularly scheduled lab time, during their language arts class. Six open-ended questions were asked, and there were a total of 14 students who provided responses, out of the 22 students in the eighth-grade classroom. The survey was taken via Qualtrics Software. The questions used for the student survey were: *Do you like Paper Conferences?; Why or why not?; What happens during a Paper Conference session?; Do Paper Conferences help with your writing and writing skills?; How do Paper Conferences compare to written feedback from teachers?;*

When a Paper Conference is finished, do you feel ready to correct your paper?; and When a Paper Conference is finished, do you feel ready to reach new goals for your next paper?. Questions two and four were not yes or no questions. They were open-ended, and asked students to do some reflecting on the process as well as other types of feedback.

Consistency. "Consistency" means that the teacher orchestrated a clear and consistent Paper Conference that was the same as previous conferences. The teacher used a clear procedure for each Paper Conference session. As briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, the teacher began each Paper Conference session by allowing the student to take a quick look at the rubric, which they should already be familiar with. Next, the student read his or her paper out loud to the teacher. After reading the paper, the teacher and the student picked apart the paper from beginning to end, focusing on the positives and negatives. Again, the focus of this investigation was not on the process or the procedure used, but at the same time, it is important to note that the teacher was able to provide the students with a clear, consistent procedure when orchestrating the Paper Conference. When the students walked up to the Conference table, they knew what to expect, and they knew what was expected of them. This consistency was observed in each and every Paper Conference that took place while I was in the room. Further, the teacher noted that she used the same procedure each time, so that the students always knew what to expect, and there were no surprises.

Relationship Building. The "relationship building" theme refers to the moments when the student and teacher were smiling, laughing, high-fiving, or making clear relationship connections. Similar to consistency, relationship building was not a key

focus of this investigation, but rather it is something important that emerged from all of the Paper Conferences that took place. There were numerous interactions that took place during the Paper Conferences, which contributed to the growth of the student teacher relationship. Here are a few examples taken from the Paper Conference observations: "The teacher notes that the student is very bright" and "They talk about the conclusion paragraph, and they both laugh, because neither of them like it." Every observed paper conference entailed an interaction between student and teacher that resulted in laughter or smiles.

In one particular situation, the teacher was joking with the student by saying, "Would you choose a book if this was the title of it?" The student replied, "No way! Ha-ha!" Their interactions are important, because it is during these crucial moments that teacher and student get to know each other better. They are able to let down their guard, work as a team, and at the same time laugh and smile. Further research could potentially show that each Paper Conference session builds a stronger relationship, and stronger teacher/student relationships might foster a better classroom atmosphere and contribute to the overall learning.

Probing Questions. The "probing questions" theme refers to moments where the teacher asked the student a question that dug deeper into a problem or issue with the student's writing. Probing questions are pertinent to learning. If the teacher can prompt the student to take their learning and their writing to the next level, the writing process can come full circle. This investigation revealed that probing questions played an important role in the Paper Conference experience. For example, in one Paper Conference session, the teacher commended the student on one of their sentences and

then proceeded to ask the student how he or she could make the sentence even stronger. This is only one example of the many probing questions the teacher asked her students during the observed Paper Conference sessions.

During the observed Paper Conferences, when the teacher asked her students probing questions, she was asking them to look beyond something they already knew. She would direct them to something they were familiar with, and then ask them to build further on that information. This is important in that the students can deepen their writing skills through the teacher's probing. The students are looking past the knowledge they have, and they are being guided to seek new knowledge about their writing and writing in general.

Needed Explanations. The "needed explanation" theme refers to moments in the Paper Conferences when the student could not make or recognize the correction on their own and needed an explanation as to why something is the way it is. Each and every student needed at least one explanation during his or her Paper Conference session. For example, during one of the conference sessions the student was struggling with organization. The teacher explained the importance of organization and the proceeded to walk the student through the organization guide, ensuring that he or she understood the purpose of organization and also how to organize. The students required a vast amount of explanations during the Paper Conference sessions. The face-to-face setting of the Conferences allowed for the teacher to directly help and guide her students with explanations pertaining to their writing.

Additionally, the surveys taken by the students also divulged a great need for explanation. Fourteen of the twenty-two students elected to participate in the survey.

Question number four asked the students: How do Paper Conferences compare to written feedback? Thirteen of the fourteen students expressed that Paper Conferences allowed the teacher to explain or to help the students understand the issues of their papers and writing. Clearly the students need explanations in the feedback process of writing, because not only did all of the students ask for explanations during the Paper Conference sessions, but they also expressed that the ability to receive explanations from the teacher was one of the highlights of having a Paper Conference.

Needed Examples. "Needed examples" signifies instances when the student was not able to make a correction on their own and needed the teacher to provide a specific example. Again, during the Paper Conference sessions, every student needed an example at least once. For example, during one of the Conference sessions the teacher noted that the student was struggling with sentence structure. The student confessed that s/he was confused as to how s/he could fix her/his sentences, so the teacher showed the student how to rearrange some of his/her sentences to improve the structure. Sometimes an explanation is not enough, and the teacher must take the initiative to show his or her students an example, which will solidify the lesson being taught.

Similar to needing explanations, all of the students needed a teacher example at least once during their Paper Conference session. The surveys also showed that Paper Conferences helped with writing because the teacher is available to provide examples and to show the students what is needed in their writing. The face-to-face interaction again demonstrated the ability to provide students with what they need to deepen and strengthen their writing skills. Without the ability to ask questions and seek examples,

students are unable to advance to the next level of their writing; the writing process is halted.

"Aha" Moments. The "aha moments" are happenings when the student makes a deep connection and understanding with his or her paper. This investigation showed that "aha" moments were taking place during the Paper Conference sessions; students were learning and writing was improving. For example, during one of the Paper Conference sessions the main topic was not mentioned in the conclusion paragraph. While reading through his or her paper, the student recognized this, took note of it, and made the correction. In another example, the teacher asked the student why he or she wrote a particular sentence that was in his or her paper. The student started to explain the reason why and realized that he or she should have written what was said in his or her paper. These moments are "aha" moments because the student was realizing something about his or her writing that was not known before. These realizations took place under the guidance of the teacher, and through these realizations, the student was able to progress in his or her writing.

Discovery. "Discovery" was when a student learned something new with the help of the teacher or with teacher guidance. While discovery is comparable to the "aha" moments, they are actually different. The "aha" moments were not about the discovery of *what* was missing that should be in the paper, but the moments when a student was reading or examining his or her work, with the teacher's guidance, and *understanding why* something was wrong or did not work in his or her writing. Discovery happened when the student recognized that something was missing from his or her writing and understood why that needs to be there.

For example, during one of the Paper Conference session the teacher showed the student what he or she should have mentioned in their conclusion paragraph. There was one element missing and the teacher asked the student to identify it. The main topic was not mentioned in the conclusion paragraph and the student was able to point this out and recognize the correction. Out of the six Paper Conference sessions, five of the students had discovery moments. Five students were able to recognize an element that was missing in their writing, which means that five students were able to learn something new about their writing, and hopefully they will apply it to future writing assignments.

Outliers. The observed conference for student one was the only instance where each theme was not observed. However, the other cases many of the same themes. Only two conferences had specific, noted "aha" moments during their paper conference. During two of the conferences there was no specific moment where the teacher asked a probing question to prompt further thinking about a specific element for the student. These two specific students did not come to the conference as prepared as the other students; they did not use the rubric or an outline to organize their writings. The teacher was able to modify the Paper Conference and Paper Conference routine to suit these two less-prepared students. Part of this modifying was asking less probing questions and focusing on the greater issues at hand, as these students were not ready for probing questions.

The adverse responses received in the survey were minimal to none. The following are the survey questions that were used: Do you like Paper Conferences?; What happens during a Paper Conference session?; Do Paper Conferences help you with your writing and writing skills?; How do Paper Conferences compare to written feedback from

teachers?; When a Paper Conference is finished, do you feel ready to correct your paper?; and When a Paper Conference is finished, do you feel ready to reach new goals for your next paper? One questions generated two "no's", two questions generated one "no", and the final yes/no question generated zero "no's". Again, the students did not respond to the questions with great depth, so the reason for the "no" answers is unknown. Of course, there are some general reasons as to why students do not respond well to paper conference; here are a few possibilities: they do not enjoy language arts/writing, the student/teacher relationship is weak, the student struggles with writing, the student does not value writing, the student is tired or having a bad day.

The two other questions, the non-yes/no questions also generated minimal to no alternate responses. Questions two: *What happens during a Paper Conference session?* produced one unsure response: "My writing is corrected, I think". While questions number four (*How do Paper Conferences compare to written feedback from teachers?)* produced one particular comment that can be considered an outlier, but is not necessarily negative: "Paper conferences kind of make me panic." Further research could address the possible barriers such as: "Paper conferences kind of make me panic."

The Classroom Teacher's Perspective on What Makes Paper Conferences Meaningful

The open-ended teacher interview was conducted two months following the observed Paper Conference sessions. It was conducted in a very casual setting, a café, and the teacher chose the location. Over coffee and bagels, we discussed, to some depth, the Paper Conferences. The casual atmosphere of the interview allowed for comfortable, easy conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I did not want the interview to feel like a

formal interview or a series of questions but rather an expressive conversation regarding the overall experience. Again, the purpose of this case study is to examine whether Paper Conferences are meaningful. The main idea behind the interview was to see the teacher's perspective on Paper Conferences. The interview centered on the introduction question: "Tell me what it is like to experience Paper Conferencing." Beyond the one introduction question, there were three specifying questions to give the conversation depth: (1). "To what extent are Paper Conferences meaningful to you and your students?" (2). Can you describe a typical Paper Conference?" and (3). "Were there specific Paper Conferences that you feel really made an impact on a student's writing or progression in their writing process?" Beyond the three specifying questions were probing questions (see Appendix E), which were used as follow-up questions to the specifying questions.

The interview was analyzed in the same fashion as the student cases and the open-ended questions. The data was organized, read, and notes were taken. The data was then interpreted and classified into codes, which became themes. "Interpretation in qualitative research involved abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data. It is a process that begins with the development of the codes, the formation of themes from the codes, and then the organization of themes into larger units of abstraction to make sense of the data" (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). I also wanted to ensure that these so called larger units that were discovered match the themes that emerged from the other data sources. Essentially, I was searching for themes in the interview that confirmed, dissented from, or matched the themes discovered in the student data, and this proved to be an easy task.

After completing the analysis process, it was easy to see that the teacher comments matched up with many of the student comments. The data from the teacher interview was analyzed in the same way that the Paper Conference field notes were. The Analytic Strategy was used. I first began by reading over the notes numerous times. After reading and re-reading the notes, I was able to take more notes and summarize my field notes. Similar words began to emerge and after working with the words, codes were identified and themes developed. For example, the teacher stated her students frequently said, "Oh! I get it." This moment was very similar to the "Aha" theme, where the students were admitting to a mistake in their paper. These statements can be reduced to codes, such as "recognizing and understanding mistakes", and eventually the code became the theme: "Aha Moment.. This process allowed for the themes to emerge easily. While reading through the interview transcript and marking it up, I could see that the teacher and students were grasping for the same outcomes and experiences in the Paper Conference sessions. Even though the student and teacher both sit on opposite ends of the table and play vastly different roles during the conference, their hunger was the same; their experience was much the same. The concept of triangulation was purposefully used to support the data collected in this study, and clearly, the three sets of data support one another.

The teacher made some incredible statements that immediately alluded to the themes. In Table 7, I match statements from the teacher interviewed with emergent themes.

Table 4

Emergent Themes and Statements Made by Teacher

Emergent Themes	**Statements Made by Teacher**
Recognizing Mistakes	"They are talking their way through and discussing and seeing their errors."
Team Grading	"The students asked about doing paper conferences because they like the ownership and being a part of the grading process."
Discovery	"There is more meaning to what is not there (in the paper) and how to put it there properly."
"Aha" Moments	"Having him read that back to me was powerful, because he exclaimed, 'Oh! I get it!'" –In reference to a specific student and conference moment.
Asking Questions	"This transforms into asking questions and making changes instead of slapping grades on a paper."
Improvement	"The next time you read their paper, you can see that they understand the application and the changes are there."

Recognizing Mistakes. The teacher was watching her students recognize and take ownership of their mistakes during the Paper Conference sessions. If the process of writing is going to come full circle, the students need to be able to recognize their own mistakes and take ownership of them. During the teacher interview, the teacher specifically mentioned that the students were actually seeing their own errors: "They are talking their way through and discussing and seeing their errors." With the student and the teacher sitting right in front of one another, it allowed for the teacher to watch these moments evolve and unfold. The teacher was able to see the confusion on her students' faces, and hear the confusion in their voices as they read or examined their own papers.

Further, the teacher was able to hear the words of her students as they explained the recognition of their mistakes.

Team Grading. The students were not the only ones to mention the opportunity of having input on their final grade through Paper Conferences. The team grading theme also emerged during the teacher interview: "The students asked about doing paper conferences because they like the ownership and being a part of the grading process." The student and teacher worked as a team to accomplish the goals of a Paper Conference, and through this teamwork, a final grade was realized, not just by the teacher, but by the student too. The teacher guided the student through the positives and negatives of her/his writing, allowing her/him to understand not only that the mistakes are there, but how to correct them. Through this understanding, a team effort developed, and the student was able to take part in the grading process by knowing that her or his paper is not perfect and why. This is very unlike the strategy of written feedback, where the student receives his or her paper, often with a final grade written at the top. In situations such as these, students have no say and take no part in the process of determining that grade.

Discovery. It was clear that both the teacher and the student are making discoveries during the Paper Conference sessions. There were definite moments where the student was able to make a discovery about his or her paper with the teacher's guidance, and similarly, the teacher was making discoveries about her students and their writing at the same exact time. During the interview the teachers stated, "There is more meaning to what is not there (in the paper) and how to put it there properly." The discovery moments were when the student was actually able to see and to understand what was missing from his or her paper that should have been there all along. The

student could then decide how to make the correction or addition to his or her paper. These discovery moments are extremely important in that the student is learning about what is not in their paper that should be. This is all made possible through the one-on-one, face-to-face guidance, which the student is receiving from the teacher during a Paper Conference.

"Aha" Moments. The discovery moments are not to be confused with the "aha" moments, even though they are similar. The "aha" moments are not about the discovery of what is missing that should be in the paper, but the moments when a student is reading or examining their work, with the teacher's guidance, and understanding why something is wrong or doesn't work in their writing. During the interview the teacher stated, "Having him read that back to me was powerful, because he exclaimed, 'Oh! I get it!'" – In reference to a specific student and conference moment. These moments are magical. It could be argued that some teachers actually enter the teaching profession just to hear these words muttered from the mouths of their students. The teacher was able to watch her students read and examine their own writing and not understand something, and then, with her direction, the student was able to finally comprehend what the problem was and why. It sounds cliché, but she was able to witness confusion on the faces of her students and then watch the confusion wipe away as the light bulb, in their brain, slowly flickered and then shone brightly; what an amazing moment to see.

Asking Questions. It was through the asking of questions that students learned and were able to make necessary corrections in order to further their learning and specifically the writing process. Paper Conferences allowed for exactly that to happen. If students are to learn from the mistakes in their writing and further to make necessary

changes to improve their writing, they must be able to ask essential questions about their writing. The teacher mentioned this during the interview: "This transforms into asking questions and making changes instead of slapping grades on a paper." During the Paper Conference sessions the teacher noted that students were asking questions and making changes to their writing, and all of this was a part of not just the Paper Conference but also the actual grading process. Unlike written feedback, which oftentimes encompasses a student receiving a grade on his or her paper, the Paper Conference allowed the student to ask any questions that came to mind about his or her specific piece of writing, and then the student was able to make the necessary changes, which evolved through the asking of questions. The teacher was clearly able to recognize this transaction taking place, and she also noted the significance of it, "…making changes instead of slapping grades on a paper."

Improvement. Improvement is something both students and teachers strive for in the process of writing. If there is no improvement, there is no process; there only exists one, stagnant piece of writing. If the writing is not continually evolving and changing, learning is not taking place. Through the interview process, the teacher was able to show, through examples from her experience, that she can and does see improvements in her students' writings: "The next time you read their paper, you can see that they understand the application and the changes are there." Paper Conferences allowed for the teacher and the student to see the process that leads to improvement in writing. The teacher was also invested in the student writing and was able to make connections to past writing, which allowed her to see clear improvements.

The Researcher's Perspective on the Meaningfulness of Paper Conference to the Teaching of Writing

The Paper Conference experience was not only meaningful to the students and the teacher, but also to the actual teaching of writing. The findings from this investigation show that Paper Conferences greatly contributed to the teaching of writing through the themes that developed for both the students and the teacher, and these themes speak for themselves in the writings above. What exactly does "the teaching of writing" mean? If writing is actually being taught, students should be learning, and in order for students to learn, a series of elements must be present. The elements that can be attributed to propelling student learning are the themes that emerged in this investigation: consistency, relationship building, probing questions, needed explanations, needed examples, "aha" moments, and discovery.

A successful learning environment fosters strong relationships, consistency and trust between both the teacher and student. Without an established and successful learning environment, learning can be hindered. Next, if writing is to be taught successfully, students need the opportunity to ask questions when they are confused. Through the asking of questions, mistakes can be corrected and writing can improve. Writing can also improve through the teacher providing examples and explaining the elements of writing to an individual student. Oftentimes asking questions may not be enough, and the students require examples and further explanation, which Paper Conference can and do provide the opportunity.

Additionally, "aha" moments and discovery propel the teaching of writing to the next level. The face-to-face Paper Conference allowed the "aha" moments and discovery

moments to unveil and take place; conferences created a safe place, a safe space for teacher student interaction, which enmeshes powerful moments such as “aha” and discovery. It was through these elements that students were able to recognize what was missing in their writing and also their mistakes. Once these were realized, the student was able to make connections, make corrections, and improve their piece of writing. These newly found skills can and likely will be used on future writings as well.

Significance of Findings

The observation of the Paper Conferences provided opportunities for detailed observation and analysis, and interestingly, similar codes materialized from each individual observed conferences, allowing for a strong base of themes to exist. The following themes were recognized or discovered through the analyzing of the Paper Conference Cases: Consistency; Relationship Building; Probing Questions; Needed Explanations; Needed Examples; “Aha” Moments; and Discovery. These themes were significant in the sense that each inspires the potential for improvement of student writing, therefore suggesting that the observed Paper Conferences were meaningful experiences.

Similarly, the interview revealed themes that were observed in the student cases. It is notable that the teacher and the students both had similar experiences with the Paper Conferences and similar ideas and outcomes. The interview showed that the teacher could see what the student was experiencing; the teacher was aware of the interactions, progressions, and improvements taking place during the conference sessions. The teacher and students were able to similarly identify what was positive and negative, although there was little to no negativity noted) in the Paper Conference sessions and in

turn show whether or not Paper Conferences were meaningful in these six observed experiences and for these specific students.

Further, the fourteen sets of student survey responses cemented the ideals brought about from the other two data sources. It is absolutely notable that again, similar themes emerged, and additionally few students commented negatively about the Paper Conference sessions. The surveys were anonymous, allowing for the students to project their truest thoughts and feelings about the Paper Conferences and the idea of Paper Conferences in general. The questions were open-ended questions, allowing students to respond in a way in which they were most comfortable. The *yes* or *no* questions also provided more direct data in support of the meaningfulness of Paper Conferences.

"Students may not understand what the teacher writes about the feedback; therefore, conferencing allows both students and the teachers to explore the errors arising from students' writing and feedback and then develop strategies for the subsequent revised writing" (Pei Wu & Ju Lin, 2015, p. 291). After analyzing the data, it is clear that there are circumstances where students absolutely do not understand what the teacher is asking of the student when it comes to making corrections to errors and the improvement of a paper. One of the themes that continued to surface in the data sets was the idea of needing explanations, needing examples and asking questions. In written feedback, where is the opportunity for asking questions and seeking clarification?

The theme "discovery" was very exciting, because again, it popped up more than once. Discovery is what teachers yearn for in the classroom. When students discover, they learn, improve, and grow. In this case study, data from both students and the teacher indicated "discovery" to be one of the most important emergent themes in the case study.

The idea is that students are not just mimicking writing skills, but they are also practicing and discovering skills at a higher level (Dawson, 2009, p. 67). If students are to practice and discover skills at a higher level in writing, they need direct guidance and instruction, similar to that of which a Paper Conference offers. "Authentic discussions about writing are the sorts of conversations that professional or experienced writers might have, where writers explore purpose, effect, clarity, and interpretation" (Dawson, 2009, p. 67). If teachers can promote authentic discussion, students are able to experience and explore at levels of writing in which they could never do on their own. With the guidance and help of their instructor, through Paper Conferences, students work at a professional level, pushing them to be better—better students, better writers.

Relationship building is another important aspect of Paper Conferences that is often ignored or deemed less important in the grand scheme of teaching writing skills. However, the theme of relationships did not go unnoticed in this case study. During the teacher interview, the teacher stated, "The students asked about doing paper conferences because they like the ownership and being apart of the grading process." Her students had an interest in working with her, as a team, to reach a final goal or grade. Similarly, the student surveys revealed that the teacher and student could review and correct together as a team. Whether it is personally recognized or not, the students and teacher are deepening their relationships with one another as they work like a team to accomplish writing tasks and goals. "On yet another level, conferencing was a way to create meaningful relationships with an increasingly diverse student body or at least one that was increasingly different from the teaching class" (Lerner, 2005, p. 203).

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Overview of the Study

This case study is designed to examine a potentially effective way to evaluate and provide feedback on student writing. Through meaningful evaluation, the writing process for secondary students could be more holistic, could better prepare students for college writing. In this research study, students were observed participating in Paper Conferences, in their natural classroom setting. Paper Conferences were a regular classroom activity. The students also took part in a survey, which consisted of open-ended questions. I also interviewed the teacher of these students, to gain teacher perspective on the meaningfulness of Paper Conferencing.

The goal of this research was to understand the experiences of Paper Conferences and to gain perspective on the meaningfulness of Paper Conferences to students and teachers alike. Teacher feedback on student written work is absolutely vital to the overall writing process and also to improving writing. Meaningful feedback allows students to develop as writers. "Reader feedback on the various drafts is what pushed the writer through the writing process on to the eventual end-product"(Keh, 1990, p. 294). Keh (1990) also states: "Feedback is a fundamental element of a process approach to writing" (p. 294). Teacher feedback through written comments is proven to be ineffective, so Conferencing is a form of feedback that might allow students to receive effective and much needed teacher feedback.

My research was conducted in a middle school classroom in the Midwestern United States. The teacher of this particular classroom had been teaching for thirty-some years at both the elementary and middle school levels. During my first year of teaching

at this particular school, I worked very closely with most of the English teachers. The school was in need of a change to their writing program, so it was at this point we discussed the possible use of writing conferences. The teacher, in whose classroom I observed, was using Paper Conferences for the fourth year in a row. She had used them in both her Social Studies and English/Language Arts classes. She uses Paper Conferences in her classroom because she loves the idea of the students being a part of the grading process. According to this teacher, providing feedback is no longer a matter of putting a grade on a paper; it had become a process in which the students can transform their writing and talk their way through changes and improvements.

This is a case of one middle school classroom using Paper Conferences as means for feedback in the process of writing. "Cases. The object (target) of a social inquiry is seldom an individual person or enterprise. Unfortunately, it is such single objects that are usually thought of as 'cases'" (Stake, 1978, p. 7). The classroom situation is the general "case" being studied in this case study. This particular group of eighth grade students is the "bounded system", a reference used by Stake (1978), of interest.

The goal of this research was to understand the experiences of Paper Conferences and to gain perspective on the meaningfulness of Paper Conferences to students and teachers alike. Teacher feedback on student written work is absolutely vital to the overall writing process and also to improving writing. Meaningful feedback allows students to develop as writers. "Reader feedback on the various drafts is what pushed the writer through the writing process on to the eventual end-product" (Keh, 1990, p. 294). Keh (1990) also states: "Feedback is a fundamental element of a process approach to writing" (p. 294). Teacher feedback through written comments is proven to be ineffective, so

Conferencing is a form of feedback that might allow students to receive effective and much needed teacher feedback.

"I believe that it is reasonable to conclude that one of the more effective means of adding to understanding for all readers will be by approximating through the words and illustrations of our reports, the natural experience acquired in ordinary personal involvement" (Stake, 1978, p. 5). Participants in the study were eighth-grade, language arts students from a local middle school, located in a small town in the Midwestern United States. Of the twenty-two student participants, six students were selected using purposeful sampling, and these students were observed during their Paper Conference session. Of the twenty-two student participants, fourteen students provided responses to the open-ended survey. The case study at hand produced three sets of data: observable data, an open-ended survey, and an interview using open-ended questions. The observable data was gathered through note taking while observing student interaction and engagement with the teacher during a Paper Conference session. The second set of data was collected through a survey using Qualtrics Software. Students took the survey during their regularly scheduled computer lab time. Lastly, the interview using open-ended questions was conducted after all Paper Conferences had taken place. The selected teacher participant engaged in a meaningful conversational interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) about the use of Paper Conferences and the Paper Conference sessions.

The Analytic Strategy (Creswell, 2013) was used as a guide to analyze the data in the case study. The strategy can be summarized as follows: "sketching ideas, taking notes, summarizing filed notes, working with words, identifying codes, reducing codes to

themes, counting frequency of codes, relating categories, relating categories to analytic framework in literature, creating a point of view, and displaying the data" (Creswell, p. 181). The Analytic Strategy allowed for organization and analysis of the collected data and outcomes.

Observations of Paper Conferences provided data from six different participants for analysis, and interestingly, similar codes materialized from each individual participant allowing for a strong base of themes to exist. The following themes were recognized or discovered through the analyzing of the Paper Conference Cases: Consistency; Relationship Building; Probing Questions; Needed Explanations; Needed Examples; "Aha" Moments; and Discovery. These themes were strong in the sense that each allowed for the potential improvement of student writing, therefore suggesting that the Paper Conferences were meaningful experiences.

Similarly, the interview sparked themes that were recognized in the Paper Conference observations. It is notable that the teacher and the students both had similar experiences with the paper conferences and similar ideas and outcomes. The interview showed that the teacher could see what the student was experiencing, proving that the teacher was aware of the interactions, progressions, and improvements taking place during the conference sessions. The teacher and students were able to similarly identify what was positive and negative, although there was little to no negativity noted) in the Paper Conference sessions and in turn showed that paper conferences were meaningful in these observed conferences and for these specific students.

Further, the survey questions cemented the ideals brought about from the other two data sources. It is absolutely notable that again, similar themes emerged, and

additionally little to no students commented negatively about the Paper Conference sessions. The surveys were anonymous, allowing for the students to project their truest thoughts and feelings about the Paper Conferences and the idea of Paper Conferences in general. The questions were also worded in a way that they were open-ended, allowing students to respond in a way in which they were most comfortable. The *yes* or *no* questions also provided more concrete data in support of the meaningfulness of Paper Conferences.

"Students may not understand what the teacher writes about the feedback; therefore, conferencing allows both students and the teachers explore the errors arising from students' writing and feedback and then develop strategies for the subsequent revised writing" (Pei Wu & Ju Lin, 2015, p. 291). After analyzing the data, it is clear that there are circumstances where student absolutely do not understand what the teacher is asking of the student when it comes to making corrections to errors and the improvement of a paper. One of the themes that continued to surface in the data sets was the idea of needing explanations, needing examples and asking questions. In written feedback, where is the opportunity for asking questions and seeking clarification?

The theme "discovery" was very exciting, because again, it popped up more than once. Discovery is what teachers yearn for in the classroom. When students discover, they learn, improve, and grow. In this case study, both student and teacher showed "discovery" to be one of the most important emergent themes in the case study. The idea is that students are not just mimicking writing skills, but they are practicing and discovering skills at a higher level (Dawson, 2009, p. 67). If students are to practice and discover skills at a higher level in writing, they need direct guidance and instruction,

similar to that of which a Paper Conference offers. “Authentic discussions about writing are the sorts of conversations that professional or experienced writers might have, where writers explore purpose, effect, clarity, and interpretation” (Dawson, 2009, p. 67). If teachers can promote authentic discussion, which they can, because I saw it, students are able to experience and explore at levels of writing in which they could never do on their own. With the guidance and help of their instructor, through Paper Conferences, students work at a professional level, pushing them to be better—better students, better writers.

Relationship building is another important aspect of Paper Conferences that is often ignored or deemed less important in the grand scheme of teaching writing skills. However, the theme of relationships did not go unnoticed in this case study. During the teacher interview, the teacher stated, “The students asked about doing paper conferences because they like the ownership and being a part of the grading process.” Her students had an interest in working with her, as a team, to reach a final goal or grade. Similarly, the student surveys revealed that the teacher and student could review and correct together as a team. Whether it is personally recognized or not, the students and teacher are deepening their relationships with one another as they work like a team to accomplish writing tasks and goals. “On yet another level, conferencing was a way to create meaningful relationships with an increasingly diverse student body or at least one that was increasingly different from the teaching class” (Lerner, 2005, p. 203).

The Meaningfulness of Paper Conferences

The purpose of this case study was to discover whether or not Paper Conferences are meaningful to students and teachers. Teachers battle with giving proper feedback to students in the classroom. It is clear that there are a vast number of ways in which

teachers can provide feedback to their language arts classrooms and writing students. The point is, however, that the students use the feedback given to them; that they find it worthwhile, and further, students should be continually improving their writing and writing skills and allowing the process of writing to come full circle. What is the point of feedback if the students neglect it? What is the point of feedback if the students do not understand it? What is the point of feedback if the students do not know how to apply it?

While watching the paper conference sessions, the conversation between student and teacher was easy and natural. Being an observer, I could see when the student was confused, and they would ask a question. Their eyes would light up when they made a teacher-led discover or had an "aha" moment. And similarly the teacher would look confused at times while covering different aspects of the paper; in these moments the student would explain his or her purpose, and together, student and teacher would work toward mending the mistakes and perfecting the paper. It was during these observations that I realized teachers similarly have "aha" moments and moments of discovery and questioning while grading papers. This easy and natural conversation is not only a conversation, it is also a truly meaningful way to provide feedback to a student, and even further, to build the student-teacher relationship.

Asking questions is vital to improvement in all areas and aspects of life. Problems can be solved simply by asking questions, and one can get from point *A* to point *B* by simply asking questions. Without questions, one cannot move forward or make improvement. The amount of questions that flowed from teacher to student and from student to teacher was incredible. This alone is notable; without the existence of the paper conference, all of these questions from both student and teacher are potentially

unasked and go unanswered. That is a vast amount of problems unsolved, hindering one's ability to move forward in the process of writing or grading.

The students' (N= 14) survey responses shed additional light on the class's perspective of the Paper Conference experience. It was interesting to see into the assumed to be honest thoughts of the students who experienced the paper conferences. I say "assumed to be," because the students took the survey on their own and could answer the questions in any which way they want to whether that be to tell the truth or to fabricate. The low number of negative responses and comments toward Paper Conferences and the idea of Paper Conferences in general were not shocking; there were little to no negative responses or *no*'s in response to the survey questions. The vast majority of students noted a both positive and meaningful experience with Paper Conference sessions. The themes emerging from the surveys were: learning from mistakes; improvement; explanation; understanding; and teacher and student working together. Each of these themes was also observed in the Paper Conference sessions. The following themes were recognized or discovered through the analyzing of the Paper Conferences: Consistency; Relationship Building; Probing Questions; Needed Explanations; Needed Examples; "Aha" Moments; and Discovery. Each of these themes intertwine, relate, and rely on one another.

So, What Now?

There exists many reasons as to why Paper Conferences should be used in the secondary classroom, and here are some of them: to help complete the writing process; to create better college bound writers; to build teacher-student relationships; and simply to improve the writing skills of secondary-level students. After additional research and

teacher training, Paper Conferences could be a main source of teacher feedback in the writing process in secondary classrooms. Right now, Paper Conferences are not a common font of feedback in the secondary classroom. Teachers are relying on written feedback, peer feedback, or feedback directed to the class as a whole. The following statement sheds light on a possible common perception of Paper Conferencing: "The writing conference also often seems naïve in its ideals, in its purity as a teaching moment. Instead, we know that student and teacher each brings ideologies, assumptions, and expectations to the writing conference that can potentially clash and make the work grind to a halt" (Lerner, 2005, p. 203).

There exist a vast number of options for providing feedback in the K-12 classrooms, and many of them are considered norms for one reason or another. Teachers may provide a certain type of feedback because they are familiar with it, because they were given that type of feedback themselves as a student, or because it is easy. In some cases, the school operates under a pre-determined system of feedback that may be part of an adopted curriculum. For example, Matsumura, Patthey-Chavez, Valdes, and Garnier (2002) observed teacher written feedback on student drafts of work, which is used in urban third-grade classrooms in Los Angeles. Teachers may opt to provide students with written feedback, peer-editing feedback, or general feedback for the entire class, which is directed at the "common" problems made by "most" students. Graham and Perin (2007) explore strategies in which common writing issues are addressed and writing assignments are collaborative.

There are different types of written and verbal feedback that can be given to students such as direct and indirect feedback. Frodesen (2001) discovered that the

indirect teacher's feedback helped students' writing more than direct correction feedback. Indirect feedback can be described as a moment when the teacher shows an error to the student, but lets the student make the correction instead of providing a direct answer as to how to correct an error. Direct feedback is exactly the opposite. Direct feedback is given when the teacher provides the corrected form for students if students need to make a correction for their final version (Pei Wu & Ju Lin, 2015). While indirect feedback provides students with the opportunity and task to make required corrections, some students may not fare well with independently figuring out an answer to fix their mistakes.

Allowing Paper Conferences to become a vital part of the writing process would be a leap towards creating better writers at the secondary level. It is not uncommon to think of writing as a process, and in fact, writing has been thought of as a process for years. Donald M. Murray (1982) said, "And once you can look at your composition program with the realization you are teaching a process, you may be able to design a curriculum which works" (p. 14). Writing is a complex process that takes ample time. "The writing process itself can be divided into three stages: prewriting, writing, and rewriting" (Murray, 1982, p. 15). These stages are often referred to by different names, but no matter what they are called, it is the writing process.

If educators view writing as a process, which they should, the writing process is a continuous circle, which does not end when the student receives teacher feedback. In fact, it is exactly at that moment when the process of writing should pick up momentum, and the student should be understanding and using the teacher feedback to improve their current writing piece and to set goals for their future writing assignments. Implementing

Paper Conferences as a means to provide feedback on student writing would ensure that students understand and even further, use teacher feedback.

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APPENDIX A

HSIRB Approval

IRB Proposal HS15-681

IRB Approval Dates: 9/1/2015-9/1/2016**
Proposed Project Dates: 9/1/2015-5/1/2016
"Instructor Feedback on Student Writing in the Secondary Classroom"

APPENDIX B

Student Consent Form

September 1, 2015
Father Marquette Middle School
414 West College Ave.
Marquette, MI 49855

Dear Middle School Student:

I am inviting you to be in a research study. Your parent(s)/guardian(s) have said it is O.K. for you to be in this study if you would like to, and it is your choice to participate or not to participate. I am planning to observe you and your teacher during a Paper Conference session in your Language Arts Class, because I would like to find out whether or not students like Paper Conferences. Paper Conferences are a quick conference between teacher and student about a student written paper. You being in this study will help me decide if teachers should use Paper Conferences to help students with writing papers.

I would like you to be in this study because you are currently in an eighth grade social studies and English class that will participate in paper conferences. I will be observing your class as you participate in this Paper Conference. After the conferences take place, I will ask you to answer some short questions on the computer. The questions will ask you about whether or not you liked the paper conferences and why.
I will keep the information you share with me private. The survey questions you answer on the computer will not have your name on it, and there is no way to tell which answers belong to whom.

Nothing in the research should hurt you. Nothing in the research can help you. I hope to help other kids in the future with their writing from what I learn from this study.
You do not have to be in this research study if you do not want to. If you do not want to be in this study, or if you do not want to be in the study any other time, you won't' be in trouble.

I have read this paper. I know what I am supposed to do. I know I will not be hurt. I know I do not have to be in the study. I can stop being in the study whenever I want to. I know this paper will be kept in a different place so no one can tell if I was in the study. Only the person running the study can see this paper.

Child's Signature Date

Thank you very much for your thinking about being in our study.
Returning this signed "Informed Consent Statement" will signify your willingness to participate in the study.
Thank you,

Jessica Betz
EdS/EdD Student, NMU

APPENDIX C

Parent Assent Form

September 1, 2015
Father Marquette Middle School
414 West College Ave.
Marquette, MI 49855

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I, Jessica Betz, a student in the Ed Specialist Program at Northern Michigan University, am writing to invite your child to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research study is to explore the extent to which Paper Conferences are meaningful to students and teachers. Paper Conferences are a quick conference between teacher and student regarding a student written paper. The conference allows for teacher feedback on a student written paper to be verbalized, and the teacher and student can discuss strengths and weaknesses in writing and set future writing goals.

I am inviting your child to be in this study because they are currently in an eighth grade social studies and English class that will participate in paper conferences, which is a regular classroom practice. I will be observing your child's class as they participate in this Paper Conference. After the conferences take place, I would like to ask the students to answer a few short questions about the conferences. I would like to know whether or not the conferences help with their writing.

Agreeing to participate means that your child will voluntarily take part in completing a survey composed of open-ended questions pertaining to their experience with Paper Conferences. If your child does not wish to take part in this survey process they can simply verbalize they do not wish to do so. If your child does participate in the survey, they are free to not answer any questions that they would prefer not to answer.

The information your child provides will remain confidential; however, federal regulatory agencies and the Northern Michigan University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Any information collected for this study will not include your name. I will use a pseudonym (a made up name) to protect your child's identity. The list of pseudonyms and matching actual names will be kept in a password-protected file on my computer. The list will be deleted at the end of the study. If I write a report about this study I will do so in such a way that you cannot be identified.

There are no known risks from being in this study, and your child will not benefit personally. However we hope that others may benefit in the future from what we learn as a result of this study.

The parent of the child will not have any costs for being in this research study.

The parent of the child will not be paid for being in this research study.
Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you decide for your child to not take part in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, your child will not' be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.

If you have any further questions regarding your rights as a participant in a research project you may contact Dr. Brian Cherry of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee of Northern Michigan University (906-227-2300) bcherry@nmu.edu. Any questions you have regarding the nature of this research project will be answered by the principal researcher who can be contacted as follows: Jessica Betz, jbetz5565@gmal.com

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I have read the above "Informed Consent Statement." The nature, risks, demands, and benefits of the project have been explained to me. I understand that I may ask questions and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without incurring ill will or negative consequences. I also understand that this informed consent document will be kept separate from the data collected in this project to maintain anonymity (confidentiality). Access to this document is restricted to the principle investigators.

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Subject's Signature Date

Thank you very much for your consideration.
Returning this signed "Informed Consent Statement" will signify your willingness to allow your child to participate in the study.

Sincerely,

Jessica N. Betz
EdS/EdD Student
Northern Michigan University

APPENDIX D

Teacher Consent Form

April 19, 2015
Name of Middle School
414 West College Ave.
Marquette, MI 49855

Dear Eighth Grade Teacher/Advisor:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research study is to explore the extent to which Paper Conferences are meaningful to students and teachers. Paper Conferences, as you are aware, are a quick conference between teacher and student regarding a student written paper. The conference allows for teacher feedback on a student written paper to be verbalized, and the teacher and student can discuss strengths and weaknesses in writing and set future writing goals.

I am inviting you to be in this study because you are a teacher who has used and still uses Paper Conferences. You and your students are the only participants in this particular study.

Agreeing to participate means that you will take part in a one-on-one interview in which you will be asked what it is like to experience Paper Conferences as a teacher. Any other questions asked will be very open-ended and will pertain to the overall question mentioned above. The interview process should take approximately one hour.

Participation in this interview process is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part in this interview process you can verbalize or email that you do not with to do so. If you do participate in the interview, you are free to not answer any questions that you would prefer not to answer. I may contact you again via email with questions that will help clarify any answers that were given, by you, during the interview process. Again, the response to the follow-up email is completely voluntary, and you may choose to not respond.

The information you provide will remain confidential; however, federal regulatory agencies and the Northern Michigan University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Any information collected for this study will not include your name. I will use a pseudonym (a made up name) to protect your identity. The list of pseudonyms and matching actual names will be kept in a password-protected file on my computer. The list will be deleted at the end of the study. If I write a report about this study I will do so in such a way that you cannot be identified.

There are no known risks from being in this study, and you will not benefit personally. However I hope that others may benefit in the future from what I learn as a result of this study.

You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to be in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, you won't' be penalized or lose any benefits.

If you have any further questions regarding your rights as a participant in a research project you may contact Dr. Brian Cherry of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee of Northern Michigan University (906-227-2300) bcherry@nmu.edu. Any questions you have regarding the nature of this research project will be answered by the principal researcher who can be contacted as follows: Jessica Betz, jbetz5565@gmail.com

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I have read the above "Informed Consent Statement." The nature, risks, demands, and benefits of the project have been explained to me. I understand that I may ask questions and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without incurring ill will or negative consequences. I also understand that this informed consent document will be kept separate from the data collected in this project to maintain anonymity (confidentiality). Access to this document is restricted to the principle investigators.

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Subject's Signature Date

Thank you very much for your consideration.
Returning this signed "Informed Consent Statement" will signify your willingness to participate in the study.

Sincerely,
Jessica N. Betz
Graduate Assistant, School of Education, Leadership, and Public Service
EdS/EdD Student
Northern Michigan University

APPENDIX E

Teacher Interview Protocol and Questions

The purpose of this study is to understand the extent to which Paper Conferences are meaningful to teachers and students in the process of writing. Tell me what it is like to experience Paper Conferencing.

- Specifying Question: To what extent are Paper Conferences meaningful to you and your students?
    - Sample Probing Question: What specifically makes you feel this way? Please describe a specific conference where something significant evolved.
    - Sample Probing Question: Can you share other examples like / of this?
    - Sample Interpreting Questions: Do you mean that…? or Is it correct that you feel that…?

- Specifying Question: Can you describe a typical Paper Conference session?
    - Sample Probing Question: What happened? Please describe a specific conference where something significant evolved.
    - Sample Probing Question: Can you share other examples like / of this?
    - Sample Interpreting Questions: Do you mean that…? or Is it correct that you feel that…?

- Specifying Question: Were there specific Paper Conferences that you feel really made an impact on a student's writing or progression in their writing process?
    - Sample Probing Question: What happened? Please describe the event and context in as much detail as possible.
    - Sample Probing Question: Can you share other examples like / of this?

APPENDIX F

Survey Questions

The purpose of this study is to understand the extent to which Paper Conferences are meaningful to teachers and students in the process of writing. Tell me what it is like to experience Paper Conferencing.

- Question: Do you like Paper Conferences?
- Question: What happens during a Paper Conference session?
- Question: Do Paper Conferences help you with your writing and writing skills?
- Question: How do Paper Conferences compare to written feedback from teachers?
- Question: When a paper conference is finished, do you feel ready to correct your paper?
- Question: When a Paper Conference is finished do you feel ready to reach new goals for you next paper?