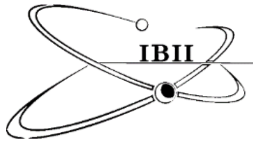

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Writing Success and Self Efficacy: The Student Perspective

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Abstract

Studies show that student revisions culminate in more expansive, finely researched, and effectively composed essays (Kolb, 1982, Bruner, 1970). While there has been much focus on how the amount and variety of teacher and peer feedback impacts student revisions, there has been little research focusing specifically on developmental composition students and the ways in which they process and utilize feedback and, consequently, the impact of feedback on both student essays and self-efficacy. This study, therefore, addressed these issues through the lens of the student perspective. Employing semi-structured interviews and observation, two developmental composition students and their instructor from a small, private university in Western New York participated in this qualitative study. Research sought to understand how teacher practices impacted developmental writing students' ability to interpret and respond to peer and teacher feedback, their use of secondary support systems, such as the writing center, how these things impacted the revision process, and how their learning experience influenced both student writing and self-efficacy. The results suggested that without foundational knowledge and modeling, feedback was cursory and unproductive, leaving students unable to make meaningful revisions to essays. This, to some extent, led to low self-efficacy and fear of writing.

Keywords: Developmental writers, feedback, modelling, revision process, college-level composition, teacher practices.

Introduction

Millions of teenagers begin college each year, and the vast majority of those freshmen are required to take a composition class. Here, students are taught the finer points of persuasion, how to compose thought-provoking, compelling essays. They learn about scholarly research and the ethical use of information. These students also gain insights about clear, logical organization and audience impact. Perhaps most foundational, these students are taught the writing process, a process which entails non-linear steps such as pre-writing, drafting, revising, and proofreading. Revising is, potentially, one of the most important aspects of the writing process. William Zinsser (2006), author of 18 books, including *On Writing Well,* believes, "Rewriting is the essence of writing well—where the game is won or lost". For the average student, while perhaps less than riveting, the class serves its purpose. Undergraduates master the skills necessary for success in composition class, and perhaps more important, they now have the tools for success throughout college. College enrollment, however, is not exclusively limited to average and above-average students.

As of 2011, only 26 percent of college undergraduates fit the profile of "traditional" students, while the remainder and overwhelming majority, 74 percent, might be labeled non-traditional (Garcia Mathewson, 2015). These students may postpone entrance or attend on a part-time basis, or they might be considered financially independent and may have dependents of their own. A number of these non-traditional students have even foregone earning a high school diploma, opting for either a GED or other certificate of completion (Bruch et al., 2004, p.12). These characteristics, however, are not what educational institutions are concerned about. Instead, it is the level of preparedness these students, both traditional and non-traditional, arrive with. According to Mario Fusaro (2009), only 32 percent are ready to handle the academic challenges they will face (p.1). Without the necessary support, few of these students will successfully complete a degree. Some assistance comes in the form of developmental classes, most often Reading, Writing, and Math. In 2011, over 33 percent of incoming freshmen required some form of remediation, and the numbers are even higher at community colleges (U.S. DOE, 2017). According to Remedial Education in Higher Education Institutions (1998), 41 percent of incoming freshmen are likely to enroll in remedial courses (p.3). Many of these students will be

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placed in developmental composition classes where they must acquire skills for academic success; effective composing processes and critical thinking. Without these skills, students are unable to participate fully in the feedback process, and without benefit of rich, meaningful feedback and reflection, substantive revision does not occur. This gap in learning not only hinders writing, it can leave students feeling frustrated and incapable. Believing themselves incapable, they might well attempt to circumvent future writing tasks and avoidance can signal academic disaster. This concern acted as the impetus for research. Because developmental learners too often arrive at college having experienced little success in writing, it is of paramount importance that teachers identify and utilize theory and methods that serve to strengthen student skills, and in doing so, we may find their self-efficacy rise proportionately. This study, then, sought to better understand the needs of developmental writing students and how those needs, met or unmet, impact student writing and self-efficacy.

Research Questions

Research questions that guided this study include:

1. How does task understanding and strategy acquisition impact student drafting and feedback?
2. How do students perceive the quality and usefulness of teacher and peer feedback?
3. How productive was the revision process, both real and perceived?
4. How confident are students about future writing projects?

Theoretical Framework

Although little research focuses on developmental composition specifically, there is an abundance of theory surrounding and supporting current pedagogy in writing classes. Because my primary interest was in how student learning impacts feedback, and how that feedback impacts writing, and consequently self-efficacy, I referred to Vygotsky's social development theory which espouses social learning, along with incremental assistance by both instructors and peers. In concert, these methods, theory says, allow for knowledge acquisition and self-sufficiency. Bruner's scaffolding theory builds on Vygotsky's theory, addressing the merits of student feedback specifically. The writing process plays a pivotal role, helping students to identify and meet goals while immersed in thought and composition, while Dewey's inquiry- based learning theory addresses the need to connect writing to the lived worlds of students. Bandura's social cognitive theory and Zimmerman and Bonner's Social Cognitive Model of Sequential Skill Acquisition point to the importance of modeling for writing success and self-efficacy.

Vygotsky's Social Development Theory

Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory maintains that learning occurs socially. Community plays a decisive role in the process of "meaning making" for a child. Learning is constructed socially, and points away from the traditional instructionist model of education; where teachers transmit information, and students act as receptacles. In opposition, Vygotsky's theory maintains the need for active learning, creating a classroom environment in which teacher and student act as collaborators, facilitating meaning construction for the student and yielding reciprocal learning for both parties. While the teacher's task is altered, the part they play in the learning process is of paramount importance. In a writing class, this translates into a community of trust and respect, essential elements for productive draft critiquing.

Vygotsky (1978) also believed that "more knowledgeable others" (MKOs), including teachers and "more competent peers", can aid in student development (p.86). This belief underlies Vygotsky's principle of the ZPD, the zone of proximal development. "What a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (p.87). This is an important concept in regards to writing ability, even at the college level. Bearing in mind the number of freshmen who lack the skill and training necessary for utilizing and composing scholarly research that informs, encouragement and guidance from more skilled partners has the potential to assist in cognitive transformation and knowledge expansion. A quintessential example of how MKOs aid in student learning is through the use of scaffolding.

Bruner's Scaffolding Theory

Vygotsky never actually used the term "scaffolding". Instead, it was Jerome Bruner, a follower of Vygotsky, who coined it. (Clay & Cazden, 1990). According to Harris and Hodges in their The Literacy Dictionary (1996), scaffolding is:

> In learning, the gradual withdrawal of adult (eg teacher) support, as through instruction, modeling, questioning, feedback etc., for a child's performance across successive engagements, thus transferring more autonomy to the child.

The feedback from both teachers and peers, referred to by Clay & Cazden (1990), might include elucidating activities such as posing pertinent questions, offering insights and suggestions, and, as students actively participate, both offering and receiving thoughtful, thought-provoking responses, bridges between reading, writing, and thinking are built. Students gain academic independence as their level of knowledge, confidence and self-efficacy increases.

The concept of scaffolding is quintessential to the writing process, but neither scaffolding nor the writing process was practiced until the 1970's. Before that, following rhetorical traditions dating back to the nineteenth century, students would be assigned essays in the forms of description, narration, exposition, or argument. Teachers would school students on the ideal written product, their focus on words, sentences, and paragraphs as component parts, with the emphasis on style and usage. These essays, these finished products, were graded on the merit of compliance to form and conventions (Hodges, 1991). Thankfully, process theory of composition marked the beginning of a major pedagogical paradigm shift in writing education and this sort of antithetical approach to writing was soon abandoned.

Writing Process Theory

Composition scholars such as Janet Emig, Peter Elbow, and Donald Murray envisioned writing as a process, a process that focused on student interest, voice, and personal technique (Murray, 2011). Murray (2011) contended, “Instead of teaching finished writing, we should teach unfinished writing, and glory in its unfinishedness” (p.4). Contrary to traditionalists, Murray’s process theory emphasized, “…the process of discovery through language” (p.5), and while Janet Emig (1971) broke the writing process down to distinct parts, it was Murray who simplified it, creating a three-step process: Prewriting, writing, and rewriting (also called "revision"). Participation and experimentation during the process allows composition students to find their voices, hone persuasive skills and exercise meaningful reflection.

Dewey’s Inquiry-Based Learning Theory

Confucius (450 BC) is credited with the proverb, "Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand". This seems to mirror Dewey’s rationale for inquiry-based learning which focuses on learning-by-doing rather than rote memorization and instruction. Predating Vygotsky by some thirty years, Dewey (1902) envisioned the classroom as neither entirely child-based nor entirely curriculum-centered. Instead, he maintained, "The child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process. Just as two points define a straight line, so the present standpoint of the child and the facts and truths of studies define instruction" (Dewey, 1902, p. 16). It was this line of reasoning that propelled Dewey to become one of the most famous and vocal proponents of hands-on learning (Dewey, 1902, p. 13-14). Though written more than a century ago, Dewey (1897) seems to respond to the topic of teacher feedback, encouraging instructors to act as facilitators: “The teacher is not in the school to impose certain ideas or to form certain habits in the child, but is there as a member of the community to select the influences which shall affect the child and to assist him in properly responding to these influences” (p. 9). Perhaps then, we, as teachers, should be focused less on what our students believe and more focused on helping them identify why they believe what they do, and how to most effectively persuade readers of the validity of those beliefs. This can only be accomplished with well researched, effectively composed essays, the kind that feedback and revisions yield.

Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory

At its core, social cognitive theory maintains that people learn from observing others (Bandura, 1988). Originally concerned with modeling as it relates to aggressive behavior, social cognitive theory also pertains to the process of knowledge acquisition from the observation of models. Effective modeling teaches general rules and strategies, including those used in composition. In education, it is the teacher who acts as the model. This precipitates learning acquisition and also aids in building students’ self-efficacy through acknowledgement and praise for incremental improvement.

Zimmerman and Bonner’s Social Cognitive Model of Sequential Skill Acquisition

This model posits that students learn through a developmental progression which begins socially, through modeling, and culminates in self-regulation, a student’s ability to employ and utilize knowledge (Zimmerman, 2000). In order to acquire necessary skills, first teachers must model, in this case writing, then imitation; student exploration. These activities, according to the model, cause skills to become internalized, represented as self-control. Eventually, self-regulation allows students to act independent of socially-driven motivators. This translates well in writing class where after modeling, students become immersed in self-envisioned, self-created works of writing.

4 Literature Review

Teacher Feedback

Teacher feedback is of paramount importance for both student writing and student revisions (Peterson & Kennedy, 2004; Sommers, 2006; Stagg, Peterson & Kennedy, 2006; Stern & Solomon, 2006). Do students care about receiving feedback on their writing? Research answers with a resounding “Yes!” In a longitudinal study, Nancy Sommers (1982) followed 400 Harvard undergraduates through their college careers to understand the role that writing plays in undergraduate education. While considered by many to be a seminal study, she revisited the subject some 25 years later in a continuing attempt to ascertain ways to improve composition instruction. Referring to her 1982 study, she reflects:

> What emerged in every conversation we had with students about their college writing is the power of feedback, its absence or presence, to shape their writing experiences. As one student told me, “Without a reader, the whole process is diminished”. That students care deeply about the comments they receive was revealed in our survey of 400 students, who were asked as juniors to offer one piece of advice to improve writing instruction at Harvard. Overwhelmingly-almost 90 percent-they responded: urge faculty to give more specific comments (p.251).

While research on feedback during the composition process is sparse, there is overwhelming evidence that students are looking for feedback, whether during or upon completion of projects and many students believe feedback they receive to be inadequate. Literature emphasizes students’ frustration with feedback lacking details and suggestions for improvement (Higgins et al., 2001), as well as feedback that’s difficult to interpret (Chanock, 2000). Studies out of the UK reflect the same level of student dissatisfaction. Scott’s 2006 study focused on students across 14 Australian universities. 90 percent of those polled believe instructor feedback needs improvement. Some of the problems cited include the quality and quantity received, as well as inconsistencies. The report also suggested that quality control was especially in need of attention within higher education. Conversely, instructors are frustrated by how little revision reflects feedback offered by these faculty members. Research by Mutch (2003), Lea and Street (1998) and Ivanic et al . (2000) maintains that, contrary to popular belief, minimal adherence to revision suggestions is not due to

slovenly work ethics but lack of understanding. Instructor feedback, "…is codified in the 'expert' language of academic disciplines" (Orrell, 2006, p.441). Not only does Orrell (2006) find much of the feedback blurred by the language, but that which is understood focuses on errors rather than potential strengths. This has a detrimental effect on student egos (p.441).

Peer Feedback

Peer assessment is defined as "…an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality, or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status" (Topping, 1998, p. 250). That is what teachers hope students will consider in responding to peers but how equipped for the task are they? While research on the benefits of peer feedback is abundant, there is an equivalent dearth of research on the subject of student preparation for the task of responding to peer essays. Flower et al. (1986) identify four functions of peer feedback: analysis, evaluation, explanation, and revision. In order to critique an essay adequately, one need analyze it and provide ample explanations. The receiver needs concrete, understandable arguments, from which revision will be executed. In a rare study conducted by Van den Berg et al. (2006), seven designs of peer assessment were tested for effectiveness among 168 students and nine teachers at Utrecht University, one of the oldest in the Netherlands. Ultimately, their research pointed to an optimal model which incorporates six important design features:

1. Product: the size of the writing is five to eight pages. The reason is that students will not be willing to invest enough time in assessing larger products.
2. Relation to staff assessment: there must be sufficient time between the peer assessment and teacher assessment, so that students can first revise their papers on the basis of peer feedback, and then hand it in to the teacher.
3. Directionality: two-way feedback is easier to organize for teacher and students, as it is clear that the assessor will in turn be the assessee, which makes it easier to exchange products. Oral feedback during class will not take much time, because the feedback groups can discuss simultaneously.
4. Contact: verbal explanation, analysis and suggestions for revision are necessary elements of the feedback process; these require face-to-face contact.
5. Constellation assessors/assessees: the size of feedback groups has to be three or four. In that situation, students have an opportunity to compare their fellow students' re marks, and to determine their relevance. A group of two students is too small, because of the risk that the partner might not perform properly.
6. Place: oral feedback must be organised during contact hours, because it is difficult to ascertain if students will organise this themselves when out of class. ICT -tools can be used to enable students to read the peer feedback before discussing it. (p.34-35)

Note the extensive considerations given to how maximized feedback might be cultivated. Conversely, consider too how little might be gained if similar consideration is not given. All feedback is not created equally. Research conducted by Yang's 2006 study determined that, in consideration of performance, while students believed they benefitted from peer feedback, participants benefitted more from teacher feedback in the areas of both impact and improvement. Before feedback, however, sound pedagogical practices lay the foundation for successful writing. Without adequate instruction and modeling, especially in developmental composition classes, students may be ill-equipped to craft first drafts or offer feedback that yields substantial revision. Success or failure during the writing process has profound implications for students' sense of self efficacy.

The Impact of Feedback on Self Efficacy

Although not the only determiner, feedback that teachers offer can either positively or negatively impact student motivation and engagement in learning (Alderman 2004; Brophy 1981; Dolezalt et al. 2003; Mastropieri and Scruggs 2004; Pintrich and Schunk 2002; Stipek 2001). Schunk et. al's 1993 study investigated how progress feedback, along with goal setting, affected both self-efficacy and writing achievement. Research concluded that feedback, especially in concert with progress goal setting, strongly impacted self-efficacy. This study is pertinent because it considered the complex relationship between strategy acquisition, feedback, self-efficacy and writing performance. Drawing on Bandura's social cognitive theory, Schunk found that as students meet goals, self-efficacy increases. This increased sense of agency acts as a motivator in future endeavors, hence impacting the quality of writing. Self-efficacy was, in turn, highly predictive of writing skill and strategy use. While Cynthia Ozick is credited with saying writing is an act of courage, teachers need to be cognizant of the fear many students harbor, especially in relation to their writing abilities. As May and Rizzardi (2002) stated, "Half the battle in teaching is just getting children to take a chance with their self-esteem and try new tasks. If students feel they cannot be successful, the result will typically be what is termed 'work avoidance'" (p. 331). Lack of self-efficacy not only signals failure for that student, it also impacts their willingness and confidence to offer feedback to classmates, feedback that stimulates cognitive development and strengthens critical analysis abilities for both reader and writer. Research by Smith et al. (2005) shows peer review aids students in improving not just their critical thinking and evaluative skills, but also the precision with which they express their thoughts and ideas. As students' master language and subject knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence increases. As cognitive development is enhanced, both attitude towards the course and their satisfaction is increased (Goldschmid and Goldschmid, 1976; Topping, 1996; Secomb, 2007). In other words, the literature overwhelmingly suggests that students generally perceive the peer review process as positive; it improves the quality of the essay, and their learning is increased (Dunn, 1996; White and Kirby, 2005). This outcome, of course, is subject to the quality of peer feedback.

Method

This study used a qualitative methodology and Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) constructivist-interpretive approach to provide insight into "…the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). I also drew upon Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. When I originally began this project, the research attempted to ascertain the impact of teacher and peer feedback on student writing. During the research process, several issues arose that caused me to re-examine my data. What analysis pointed to was far more complex; to wit, an examination of not just the impact of feedback on writing but the impact of writing on self-efficacy. The roadmap created by later analysis led me to consider the relationship between requisite knowledge, feedback, revisions, and how these impact self-efficacy.

Research Site and Participants

All research, multiple observations and interviews, was conducted on the campus of a small, Catholic, liberal arts university in Western New York. Undergraduate enrollment includes approximately 3,300 students. Of the roughly 800 freshmen, approximately 120, or 15 percent, were identified as in need of remediation in composition. Placement of these students in developmental composition classes is based on a number of factors, including SAT scores, English Regents exam scores, and their final grades in English class.

Participants included one freshman developmental composition teacher and three of her students. The instructor, Ms. H., has been employed by this university on a part-time basis since 2010. She teaches two composition classes on campus; one regular and one developmental. She also teaches part-time at another local university. There, she teaches four sections of freshmen English Literature, which was her focus in college and reflects her Master's degree. The three students were chosen on the basis of their placement in developmental composition. It should be stated that while six freshmen are enrolled in this developmental level class, only three of the students came to class the day I observed. All three students who attended on this day brought the first drafts of their essays, as requested by their instructor, Ms. H. Two of the students, one a Caucasian male, and the other, an African American female, are athletes, participating in DI sports on campus, and both are receiving athletic scholarships. The third student, a Caucasian female, neither plays intercollegiate sports nor receives any tuition assistance.

The sampling method was intentional. I too am employed by this University. I too teach developmental composition. We two are the only developmental composition teachers employed here. Because of my long-standing affiliation with this University, gaining access to both the developmental instructor and her class was expedient and pertinent to my focus. I am committed to examining standard practices in developmental composition classes as they greatly impact student outcome. Data provided by the Department of Education's National Education Longitudinal Study reports that developmental students in four-year institutions suffer from substantially lower graduation rates than their non-developmental peers; 52 percent versus 78 percent (Brock, 2010,p.115). It was and is my hope that findings from this limited research might prove insightful for other educators, and might yield better, more effective strategies I can implement in my own classroom.

Data Collection

For this study, data was gathered from multiple sources. All observations and interviews took place on the University campus. Ms. H., the instructor, was interviewed twice; once before first drafts were handed in, and again, after final grades for revisions were completed. Each semi-structured interview took approximately one hour to complete. She allowed both conversations to be audio-taped. I acted as an active participant while observing three of Ms. H.'s students conduct a peer response workshop, a session which took 60 minutes to complete. Ms. H. was not present in class that day. I then observed as Ms. H. held 15 minute individual conferences with each of these three students. All participants allowed audio-taping of their conversations. In individual, semi-structured interviews, I chatted with two of the three students twice; once after they had completed their first drafts and the peer response workshop, and again, after Ms. H. returned their final, graded essays to them. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes. Although the third student agreed to meet and discuss her writing, she failed to keep appointments on two separate occasions, and I decided to limit interviews to the two students who were more amenable to participating. To maintain trust and confidentiality, I interviewed each of these students without the other one present. For the purposes of this study, these students will be referred to as Nicki and Zeke; not their real names. Each audio taped session was transcribed and then coded to allow for later analysis of data to be done. In order to code, I first focused on all sentences that reflected words related to writing such as revision, essay, proofreading, drafting, thinking… Then I coded for sentences relating to communication and input, words such as feedback, offered, helped, suggested… I also separated all sentences that contained words relating to feelings such as happy, frustrated, confused, confident… Although many sentences contained both academic and visceral words, this was not always the case. There were three majors considerations; task understanding, their ability to utilize feedback purposefully for essay revisions, and how this knowledge and ability impacted their writing and self-efficacy.

Data Analysis

Audio tapes were transcribed immediately after each observation or interview. Non-verbal gestures noted during these sessions were added. I first attempted to code for student understanding of feedback received and offered using the following categories: (a) Nature of feedback (positive or negative), (b) Scope (general or specific), (c) Focus (higher or lower order concerns), (d) Category addressed (focus, development, organization, purpose/audience), and (e) Non-verbal cues. It quickly became apparent that this type of coding was insufficient for significant synthesis and understanding of what I sensed was really consequential. At that point, I took a step back and allowed each narrative to speak to me. I first listened to the tapes, then repeatedly read the transcripts. At the end of this process, I was able to code according to the themes that emerged. The first category reflected task understanding and strategy acquisition. To that end, I located and studied sentences using words related to composition such as drafting, organizing,

revising… The second set of codes reflected feedback. All sentences containing words such as offered, asked, peers, response… were included in this group. The third was coded for visceral reactions and focused on feelings, hopes, insecurities, and beliefs. This group includes such words as hope, like, fear, hate… I identified three major themes that characterize student writing engagement. The first theme to emerge was the relationship between knowledge acquisition and feedback and drafting ability. The second theme which emerged was the impact of feedback on student revisions. The third and potentially most interesting theme which emerged was how this writing experience impacted student self-efficacy in regards to future writing assignments.

Limitations

Because half of the students failed to complete assignments and attend class, the number of respondents is very small. Findings, however, should not necessarily be discounted solely on this basis. I focus on instructor methods and teacher-student interaction in order to identify best, most effective practices. Note The Effect of E-Journaling on Student Engagement, published in the *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science, 5(7), 13-27* (Halm, 2017). Findings support the importance of purpose and context for students; “When I care about what I'm learning, I pay attention and I get it. I take the time to understand it” (Halm, 2017, p.28). Student response also points to the need for instructor feedback; “I knew what I wanted to say, but I didn‟t know exactly how to say it,

and Professor P. would write things and try to help…I think that helps” (Halm, 2017, p. 28). Therefore, I believe the anecdotal findings from the current study build on and strengthens findings from previous studies

Findings

In this section, we will first discuss the relationship between task understanding and strategy acquisition on student drafting and feedback. Next, we will discuss how teacher and peer feedback impacted revisions, both real and perceived. Finally, we will consider how this writing experience impacted student confidence and self-efficacy in composing future writing assignments.

Impact of Task Understanding and Strategy Acquisition on Student Drafting and Feedback

In my first conversation with each student, we discussed their recently completed first drafts. It was clear from our discussion that neither Zeke nor Nicki understood task expectations. In answer to, “What kind of writing project have you been working on?” there was silence. I attempted to rephrase for understanding, “Is it a position piece or a problem-solution essay, perhaps a causal analysis?” Neither student could actually label the assignment specifically. I considered the relationship between task understanding and component pieces. Experts embrace modeling as a key element of social cognitive theory, which “examines the processes involved as people learn observing others and gradually acquire control over their own behavior” (p.234). This could explain students' inability to revise when they're unsure about the considerations and components of the writing task. Zeke told me, “Um, I mean, I just never really understood it to begin with so I kinda just wrote it”. In a follow-up conversation with the instructor, I asked about assignment genre and her modeling activities. After a long, thoughtful pause, she said she would call it a position essay. Ms. H. reiterated that she provided many modeling activities, drawing examples from published essays. I asked if she could offer an example of modeling and she immediately offered tense consistency. She added that she also modeled for characteristics such as first person narrative. She'd read such a passage and then ask for feedback about the impact of using the style. Wanting to fully understand the depth and breadth of modeling, I asked specifically about issues like thesis statements, organization and development strategies. These things, she believed, needed no teacher modeling. Instead, the texts acted as models for student writing. “Any issues needing to be addressed”, she added, “…could be handled in individual conferences”.

It was clear that these two students did not grasp their purpose in writing, nor did they understand what revising called for. The instructor's modeling included exhibiting characteristics of good writing, as well as potential pitfalls. I understood her rationale because I internally interpreted and recoded her word choices, her language. This, potentially, is something students lacking in requisite knowledge are unable to do. For example, in our first interview, Ms. H. told me that one example of a class lesson included cautioning students against using “cliché statements”, and she would explain to the class “why they aren't particularly effective”. She did not, in our conversation, identify clichés as one form of fallacy. Because of her explanation, I have no reason to believe students were provided with either a definition of fallacy or examples of other forms of fallacy. In a follow-up conversation, the teacher informed me that in an attempt to build on students' prior knowledge, there was discussion on when they might have heard/read such fallacies, allowing them to understand the inherent flaws. According to the instructor, she modeled just one type of fallacy, potentially lacking context and without full explanation. She also pointed to “lack of connecting”. She lamented that, “Students rarely have a solid understanding of what they're saying at this point and therefore cannot demonstrate the logic and relationships between ideas”. Lack of connecting could mean two things. The first issue is development, writing which includes history and details that allow readers to understand the importance of the topic. She could also mean organization. How are paragraphs/section related – logically, temporally, chronologically? Zeke, in particular, mimicked the teacher's words; “connections” and “lack of connections” several times during both interviews, though when asked to define, he was unable to do so. He seemed unsure about the meaning. These issues explain, at least in part, Zeke and Nicki's uncertainty.

This instructor is obviously dedicated, and strives to help. While she seemed to embrace a team approach and the need for independence, during our conversation she also stressed the importance of guiding writers. If necessary, she'll “… guide them the whole way through”. These two goals might seem at odds. She adds, “While this is a technique I find effective, I also see it as a specific task of the course; if they cannot figure these things

out for themselves by the time they leave my class, I have not helped them acquire the tools they need for success". Ms. H. told me she begins a unit by reading an essay, and follows up with a discussion about aspects of the writing which are fruitful, as well as those aspects that should act as examples of counter-productive methods. Students are to choose a topic and write an essay similar to the one they've read. She may be reading a position essay, as was the case with this assignment. However, according to the teacher, she failed to identify this as a position essay. She was hoping "… to achieve these goals in a way that makes them [students] realize the above through their own thought process". Her philosophy led her to rely upon students' ability to connect the dots for themselves. While this may work in her regular sections of writing, the method appears far less productive for developmental learners. During private interviews with each of the two students, interviews conducted immediately after first drafts had been responded to by instructor and peers, both seemed unclear about what had been learned or what the task requirements included. There is little evidence of theory in Ms. H.'s class.

The Impact of Teacher and Peer Feedback on Revisions

Zeke offered examples of instructor feedback, and attempted to explain his plans for revisions. The teacher, he said, told him he needed to fix, "The tie-ins, the connections, making connections". Unable to expand or offer clarification, it was not until I asked, "Do you mean development of your topic and the way you organize your information?" that he said, "Yeah". He was much quicker to offer input about assistance from peers. According to Zeke, he got nothing from his partners. Nicki too had problems defining issues that had been pointed to. From peers, she learned, "This intro is lengthy, blah, blah, blah", and I was like "Oh my God, it is. Like I do need to fix it". Unsure about revisions on her introduction, Nicki thought perhaps there were problems with her thesis statement. Though the peer review process was unproductive for these students, research points to the many benefits; "…students craft more diverse, complex final products—which deserve a wider audience than the teacher. As learners critique one another's work, they might notice praiseworthy points or pose questions that the instructor has not thought of. A student might ignore feedback from a teacher but suddenly pay attention to the class". Good response, however, calls for students' "…dynamic participation. Listeners must not only attend to each presentation, but also offer concrete suggestions for its improvement while commending aspects of the work that they appreciate" (Reynolds, 2009). I cannot definitively point to the reasons the process failed; inadequate written prompts or inadequate composition knowledge. What deserves focus is the juxtaposition of the two students. While Zeke believed the instructor to be more helpful than his peers, Nicki found the little feedback offered by peers more beneficial than her conference with the instructor.

There was a discrepancy between what the instructor said she did and what I witnessed during my conference observations. Though Ms. H. said, "I circle, highlight, underline, restructure, draw arrows, etc in text so that the students see specific instances of weaknesses/strengths throughout their writing", she never looked at drafts before conferences, which were held in the center of the Student Center. During our interview, she added, "I generally go through one paragraph extensively with them, then have them do the same to the following paragraph with me so that I can help guide them, but they demonstrate understanding and capability". This did not happen. While both students brought first drafts, as the teacher instructed, she did not look at them. Instead, she referred to the written comments on first assignment essays, and read them aloud, pointing to problematic issues that existed on these revised essays.

In total, the instructor spent approximately eight of the fifteen minutes discussing Nicki's first draft with her, and only two minutes discussing Zeke's first draft. Although Zeke told me he believed Ms. H. wanted him to work on "making connections", the instructor never pointed to additional organization or development necessary on Zeke's essay accept in regards to the previous assignment. In response to a question about the difficulty of his first draft, Zeke laughingly told his teacher he had "… literally woke up at 7 A.M and did it and surprisingly , they [peers] said it was really good, so surprisingly there was a 7A.M paper and I wrote 5 pages before I went to class". The teacher moved on to the next question without comment. No specific observations or comments were made for revision strategies on either of the students' essays. Although this didn't bother Zeke, the same cannot be said of Nicki. She was underwhelmed by feedback from her instructor. "I would, I don't know, I would feel better if like she liked looked it over, I just really do. Personally, I think the teacher knows best. Like your peers know but the final result is you're a teacher so I really do think she should read it". About what she might revise, she added, "Probably my thesis because the thesis is really the main start to the paper. I feel like I'm gonna make the same mistake. That's why I kind of wish that Ms. H. did read it so she could help me". To the contrary, Zeke seemed to think revisions would take minimal energy, only requiring more "add-ons and connecting". The amount of effort called for may have been underestimated because of the positive feedback on a draft written in two hours, directly before class the day it was due. The teacher did not take exception to his method which could be interpreted as tacit approval. The next topic discussed in interviews with each student focused on final grades as they compared to expectations and students' perceptions about the quality of their revisions.

Both students received "B-/B". Neither student knew which grade would be recorded for this assignment. Nicki shared, "I would want a single grade. Like, where am I? Is it in the middle or what?". Zeke said, "So I don't know exactly what that means, if it's in the middle somewhere…". Perhaps more telling, neither student was able to reflect on what changes were actually made during the revision process. Nicki thought it was research. She used three sources, although the teacher did not mandate research. When pressed, she told me the research had been included in the first draft, and no expansion was included in her revisions. The only change in text related to her misinterpretation of the Iraq war. Her facts were wrong; a point her father called to her attention. Zeke, as in previous conversations, said revisions focused on,

"Umm, just making better connections like she said on my first one". Zeke explained the revision process as, "Just, whatever your topic is, write more off of that instead of writing more about the topic". Neither student sought assistance from tutors at the Writing Center, but both Nicki and Zeke did solicit help from family members at home. Asking for feedback from a teacher, friend, or even family member may help in substantive revisions, but in this case, that was not true. Both Zeke and Nicki concurred about what feedback they asked for and received; proofreading resulting in sentence-level corrections.

The Impact of Writing on Learning, Confidence and self-Efficacy in Future Writing Tasks

In an effort to better understand how progress impacted their sense of self-efficacy, I asked each of the students, in individual interviews, what strategies and insights had been accrued through the writing process. Nicki was quicker than Zeke to respond. "…I always use three different tenses, and I remember trying to keep it, well, I forget which one, but I tried to keep it the same". She was not sure about tense appropriateness, just that tense should remain consistent. She deduced that she must be improving because she received C on her first assignment and at least a B- on the second. Nicki did not seem to associate learning with improvement. Instead, it was the grade that answered this question. Although she received higher marks on this assignment, Nicki innately understood the need for more knowledge. She told me her organization needed to be worked on, though she wasn't sure why or how. Zeke too looked at grades as the measure of learning. He believed he had made great strides on his writing because his first essay assignment "…only earned C-/D and this one was marked B-/B". Despite the higher mark he received, Zeke could not identify why he revised as he did. "I just assumed that it needed to be expanded". "I just added another paragraph, but that was it; just a little bit more length and that was it". He added no additional research, nor was there reorganization. Little thought, he said, went into expanding. "I added more text" (he needed to meet the 4 page requirement). The revised essay was returned with feedback from the teacher. Unable to specify what he'd learned, Zeke was happy because "There's a lot less writing, like on the margins and then on the back of it too, like lots less". "And what did it say?" I asked. "It was just basically like repetitiveness. I can't even remember about it. I just looked at it real quick". Going forward, unlike Nicki, Zeke feels both motivated and empowered.

"I'm already like, basically done with it so I just have to hand in the draft or whatever 'cause this weekend I had a religion one to do so I just knocked them out both". The instructor recently sent students to the library for help gathering scholarly research, and annotations are due before first drafts are to be composed. Lacking research, Zeke felt confident in writing because "The second paper, yeah, you needed to focus on something, but I just feel like the third paper, I just feel like it's ours so we get to pick what our topic and our argument is. So I just feel like that's even easier. Just because you get to write about whatever". While unsure about exact requirements, he had yet to use six sources which he believed to be the minimum required. He explained the topic as "Just how popular sports aren't popular in the rest of the world so we try to branch off and push them on other cultures".

Nicki felt far less prepared for the assignment. Her motivation to complete the upcoming assignment centered on her love of dance and her experience as a ballet dancer. While she wanted to write about ballet dancers, she was unsure about what to write and had found few acceptable articles. Nicki was counting on guidance and information from the instructor to fill the many gaps she believed to exist, but she was dubious about the amount of help she would receive.

While both students would love to receive A on their final assignment, neither could describe what excellence means, what attributes an A paper embodies. The same was true for their last assignment. I asked each student why, did they think, they had not earned a higher grade – what was missing from their essays. Although he said he had no plans of actually asking the instructor, Zeke answered, "I honestly have no idea". Nicki's response was much the same, "I honestly don't know". This doesn't bode well for their levels of learning, writing, or self-efficacy.

Discussion and Conclusions

Impact of Task Understanding and Strategy Acquisition on Drafting and Feedback

According to a social cognitive model of sequential skill acquisition (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000, 2002),

> The first of four sequential levels, observation, is necessary for acquisition of new writing skills. Modeled reading and writing in which the teacher models, verbally, to the students, a writing process or strategy, might allow students to identify the components of effective writing, components they can begin to consider as they draft essays, as well as during the peer feedback process. Modeling is defined as "…changes in people that result from observing the actions of others" (Eggen and Kauchak, 2001, p.236).

These experts embrace modeling as a key element of social cognitive theory, which "examines the processes involved as people learn observing others and gradually acquire control over their own behavior" (p.234). Social cognitive theory was ignored by the instructor despite the potential benefits of modeling and scaffolding activities for knowledge acquisition of writing (Bandura, 1986: Zimmerman, 2000). Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978) suggests that students learn best when learning is situated in a context in which they engage in a meaningful way with each other and the teacher. Genre writing is socially constructed. Helping students to identify and create different genres reinforces reflection of writer purpose and audience needs (Martin & Rothery, 1986). Teaching writing through a focus on genre supports familiarity with the both conventions and expectations of a genre. In a social approach to learning, the teacher aids students in composing texts, and methods such as scaffolding can eventually culminate in the ability to compose independently. After exposing students to examples of a genre, an

instructor can model writing that engages students in shared writing (Gibbons, 2002). Ms. H.'s practices failed to reflect pedagogical theory which espouses writing as a process, focusing on student interest, voice, and personal technique (Emig, 1971; Elbow, 1973; Murray, 2011). Lacking the requisite knowledge and foundation necessary for essay composition, these students were unsure what the task required. This left both students reliant on peer and teacher feedback. Unfortunately, those same shortcomings in preparation negatively impacted their ability to offer substantive response to one another or seek feedback that might allow for meaningful revision.

The Impact of Teacher and Peer Feedback on Revisions

Despite literature that shows the productivity of peer feedback, (Dunn, 1996; White and Kirby, 2005), neither student was able to identify what input they actually received or how this could improve their writing. Studies show teacher feedback is of paramount importance in teaching students to write (Peterson & Kennedy, 2004; Sommers, 2006; Stagg, Peterson & Kennedy, 2006; Stern & Solomon, 2006). Treglia (2009), author of Teacher-Written Commentary in College Writing Composition: How Does It Impact Student Revisions? believes "Teacher-student interaction is crucial in getting students involved in the process of revision as Mina Shaughnessy reminds us: writing is an act of confidence". Further hindering their progress was the absence of specific feedback from the instructor who responded not to drafts but revised essays. An abundance of research supports direct and specific feedback in response to student writing. The absence of this feedback leaves students unable to identify shortcomings and productively hone essays (Peterson & Kennedy, 2004; Sommers, 2006; Stagg, Peterson & Kennedy, 2006; Stern & Solomon, 2006). While one student was overtly insecure about revisions and unsure how to proceed, the other seemed to have a simplistic view of both the composition and revision process, unaware of any demands other than expansion. While neither student sought assistance from the Writing Center, both called upon family members for feedback. What both received was input on comma splices and other sentence-level issues. Final essays were marked with two grades, leaving their understanding of potential progress unclear. Comments written on final essays were global in nature and cited only progress of those shortcomings present in previous essays as they pertain to the most recent assignment. In contrast, Vardi's 2009 study pointed to the most productive feedback being specific in nature. Neither student was able to identify attributes of exemplary essays, nor were they able to label the genre of essay they had just completed.

The Impact of Learning on Confidence and self-Efficacy

According to Zimmerman and Bonner's Social Cognitive Model of Sequential Skill Acquisition,

> Self-efficacy is defined as the perceived capability to perform at designated levels (Bandura,1986). Writing outcomes provide process-proficient writers with the ultimate criterion by which their skill can be measured. With increasing levels of self-regulation, writers are expected to experience greater self-motivation, such as more positive self-efficacy beliefs and self-reactions, and greater intrinsic interest in the particular form of writing (Zimmerman, p.242).

In other words, writing allows students an opportunity to acquire skills. Grades reflect mastery, and good grades act to positively impact self-efficacy which in turn increases motivation and interest in writing. Conversely, little skill, coupled with grades commensurate with minimal mastery might negatively impact self-efficacy. On the upcoming assignment, one student felt insecure and ill-prepared while the other felt a strong sense of self-efficacy, so motivated that he had completed the first draft before the research process had been completed. Nicki and Zeke, it seems, have become fluent with the steps of the writing process, but neither utilized these steps in ways that might deepen their subject or writing knowledge. Over the course of this assignment, neither Nicki nor Zeke learned how to identify elements essential to the chosen genre of writing or gained understanding about the foci or strategies of effective peer feedback practices. Perhaps due to a lack of feedback, neither student made meaningful changes during the revision process. While a grade of B-/B signaled success to Zeke, to Nicki, it signaled failure. Zeke, feeling empowered, was motivated to move on to the next project immediately, while Nicki's sense of self-efficacy was diminished, leaving her insecure and far less motivated to begin again.

Implications

Student self-efficacy stems from task success. In order to be successful in writing, students must, first and foremost, understand genre requirements. In order to accomplish this, instructors should model, for the students, examples of genre writing, especially examples produced by students. This activity helps students to envision outcomes, and allows knowledge to become internalized (Zimmerman, 2000). Subsequent scaffolding, including cooperative and active learning, fosters academic growth and incremental independence (Clay & Cazden, 1990; Dewey, 1902; Vygotsky, 1978). Teaching the writing process allows students to find their voices, develop writing techniques, and pursue topics of interest. This process emphasizes "…discovery through language" (Murray, 2011). Productive feedback is only possible when students are vested and informed. Modeling examples of substantive feedback can aid in this goal. As a composition teacher, I find that students respond to peers' writing in much the same way as I respond to them. Utilizing Vygotsky's "MKOs" (more knowledgeable others) serves two purposes; collaboration and reciprocal learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Conversely, students must receive feedback from the instructor which is timely, understandable, and specific in nature (Sommers, 2006; Stagg, Peterson & Kennedy, 2006). Revised essays should be returned with feedback about progress, as well as areas in which further revisions might have been fruitful, thus initiating reflection and deeper understanding. Lacking in such knowledge, Nicki felt ill-equipped and insecure in her own abilities.

Further studies of developmental classroom practices should be conducted. Due to the complex nature of student writing, teachers should be cognizant of pertinent theories and effective methods. Freshman courses, including developmental composi-

tion, are often taught by adjunct faculty. The American Association of Community Colleges reported that in public two-year colleges, as many as 67 percent have adjunct status. More telling perhaps, only 20 percent of those institutions require any kind of specific training for those full-time faculty teaching developmental students, and only 17 percent of colleges require such training for their part-time faculty (p.4). While approximately 20 percent of faculty at two-year colleges teach developmental classes, only 12 percent were hired specifically for this task (Outcalt, 2003, p.8). As was the case with Ms. H., some instructors, though well-meaning, lack the pedagogical knowledge required for optimal practices. Further, larger studies should be conducted. Because of constraints, only two students participated, allowing only limited insights into student perspectives and perceptions. Additional research focusing on the impact of teacher preparation in developmental writing philosophies and practices would also prove, potentially, enlightening.

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