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## A Qualitative Case Study Examining the Impact of Teacher Feedback During the Research Writing Process in a Ninth Grade Honors Class

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**A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF TEACHER  
FEEDBACK DURING THE RESEARCH WRITING PROCESS IN A NINTH  
GRADE HONORS CLASS**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education, Literacy

By

Jessica Mattson

May 2017

**A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF TEACHER  
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GRADE HONORS CLASS**

Reading, Foundations & Technology

Missouri State University, May 2017

Master of Science in Education

Jessica Mattson

**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the impact teacher feedback had on ninth grade English honors students during the research writing process. This study examined student writing and the corresponding teacher feedback during the outline, rough draft, and final draft of a formal research essay to examine how the feedback helped improve student writing skills and overall ability to meet the learning targets. Based on the results of the study, the number of student errors decreased significantly in the final draft of the essay after using the outline and rough draft teacher feedback, suggesting that the feedback did have an impact on student writing. Further research should be conducted to examine how teacher feedback impacts the writing of non-honors students, as well as whether students perceive the impact of the feedback to be different when it is handwritten instead of given electronically.

**KEYWORDS:** teacher feedback, modeling, formative assessment, student self-concept, learning targets, performance criteria

This abstract is approved as to form and  
content

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Dr. Kayla Lewis  
Chairperson, Advisory Committee  
Missouri State University

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May 2017

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## INTRODUCTION

Classroom assessments measure how closely students come to mastering specified learning targets. The feedback provided by the instructor illustrates how close students were to meeting the standards, as well as the thinking or learning that needs to occur for the student to improve overall performance (Brookhart, 2008; Irons, 2008; Sadler, 1989). The effectiveness of the feedback given can influence how students move forward in the learning process and the concept the students develop of themselves as learners (Johnston, 2012). For students to have the greatest chance at making improvements in their work in order to better meet the specified learning targets for an assessment, specific and detailed feedback should to be given in a timely manner (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Thomas & Sondergeld, 2015; Wiggins, 2012).

Studies have been conducted that examine the relationship between instructor feedback and student performance (e.g. Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sadler, 1989; Thomas & Sondergeld, 2015). This study examined the impact teacher feedback had on students during the research writing process. Student work was examined during various points of the writing process (prewriting, outlining, drafting) to determine the overall impact of the feedback given and the improvements the students were able (or not able) to make because of that feedback. The students also participated in an individual survey (Appendix A) and focus group interview (Appendix B) about their perceptions of the instructor feedback, as well as the influence it had throughout the writing process. During this time, notes were taken to capture the ideas and reflections shared on their research writing.

In the academic world, student performance is evaluated using a variety of assessments. While some assessments are more formative and gauge step-by-step learning, others are summative and are meant to examine a student's overall understanding of a concept. Regardless of the assessment type, performance should be measured against a set of standards or learning targets. For this study, analysis focused on feedback given with a formative writing assessment. Irons (2008) explained that the "primary focus of formative assessment (and formative feedback) is to help students understand the level of learning they have achieved and clarify expectations and standards" (pp. 16-17). Feedback during formative assessments provides students with information about "how successfully something has been or is being done. . . so that aspects associated with success or high quality can be recognized and reinforced, and unsatisfactory aspects modified or improved" (Sadler, 1989, pp. 120-121).

Feedback in general does not automatically lead to student learning. Feedback can be effective or ineffective; it can drive the learning process or it can derail it (Brookhart, 2008). To ensure that students have the greatest chance for improvement based on instructor feedback, Wiggins (2012) explained that feedback should focus on the learning goals, and be concrete and obvious, actionable, specific and personalized, given in a timely manner, ongoing, and consistent. According to the research of Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), the following seven principles should be present for feedback to be categorized as effective:

1. Helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards);
2. Facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning;
3. Delivers high quality information to students about their learning;

4. Encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning;
5. Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem;
6. Provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance;
7. Provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching. (p. 205)

Although similarities and trends may occur that follow the principles of effective feedback as outlined above, the types of feedback given played a more central role in the analyzed commentary given during the research writing process with high school students.

It should be noted, however, that the feedback process could begin before any student work is even submitted. Instructors may introduce an assessment by modeling the expectations to the students using exemplars or student work samples that clearly meet the specified learning targets. According to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), modeling is an integral step in the formative process, because it provides a clear set of standards and expectations against which students can measure their own work. In addition, implementing the use of a model can answer student questions such as *What does the target look like?* or *How will I know how close I get to reaching the learning target?* (Brookhart, 2008). Having these exemplars in place can enrich the learning process, as well as the teacher-student dialogue surrounding the feedback being given.

The research from this study echoed some of the steps in previous studies that examined, defined, and illustrated feedback practices, as well as the influence that feedback had on student learning (Brookhart, 2008; Sadler, 1989). It did, however,

specifically address feedback and its impact during the research writing process with high school students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the impact teacher feedback had on student writing from the beginning to the end of the research writing process. Six focus students were selected from a group of English I Honors students for the study. Feedback at all stages of the writing process were examined to determine what kind of impact it had on students moving from one phase of writing to the next.

### **Research Question**

The primary question guiding this research was: What impact does teacher feedback given to students during the research writing process have on students' ability to improve writing skills and meet the learning targets?

### **Rationale for the Study**

If student growth is measured at each grade level through standardized testing, it is implied that students are meant to improve each year. The ways in which teachers guide this growth may have an impact on whether or not the improvements occur.

It is, therefore, important to investigate the guidance teachers give during the research writing process in the form of feedback to examine the impact this feedback has on student growth.

Writing teachers often spend an exorbitant amount of time writing comments on student papers about how to make changes, edits, and revisions. This study examined the feedback given to students on a research outline, a rough draft, and a final draft research essay to determine the differences in the student's ability to meet the assignment standards between each stage of writing and what impact, if any, the feedback had. This shed light on the types of feedback students found most beneficial, as well as which points during the writing process students felt the feedback was most useful.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative case study design was used to examine archival data in the form of graded assignments, as well as surveys and interviews of students. The feedback on the research writing process was analyzed to determine the different types of feedback given by the English I Honors teacher to six focus students. The types were dictated by the feedback itself and included categories such as word choice, mechanics, and support. Representative samples were provided to illustrate the various types of feedback observed during the study, and then the samples from the teacher were placed alongside the survey comments from the students to illustrate which types had the greatest impact on the writing process.

A qualitative design was used, and the primary data source was observations made from a body of feedback given to six focus students during the research writing process and information gathered from surveys with all the students. Of the 63 students enrolled in the three sections of English I Honors, the writing of six total students was analyzed. The six students selected completed and received feedback on the outline,

rough draft, and final draft stages of the research writing process through Google Classroom. After the assignments were submitted, data were compiled to track the types of feedback observed. The final drafts were then examined alongside the feedback given at previous stages of writing to determine what impact it had on improving the writing and meeting the learning targets.

In addition to completing an individual survey (Appendix A) about the teacher feedback, four basic questions were asked of all six participants (Appendix B) during a focus group interview, and follow-up questions were asked as necessary to garner further information. During the discussion, participants had the opportunity to look back at the three submitted drafts of the research writing process, as well as the feedback given by the teacher.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

The following assumptions were made:

1. Students gave honest answers to the questions about feedback.
2. The six student participants were representative of typical honors freshmen students.

The following were limitations of the study:

1. The researcher was also the teacher giving the feedback to and conducting the interview with the students.
2. The study was limited to one grade level at one high school in southwest Missouri.
3. The focus group interview was conducted after all three assignments were submitted for feedback and class surveys were given.

## Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions are used throughout the study:

1. Actionable Feedback: Specific feedback that is concrete and useful and provides learner with steps to take action towards improvement (Wiggins, 2012).
2. Feedback: “Information about how successfully something has been or is being done” (Sadler, 1989, p. 120).
3. Formative Assessment: “All those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged” (Black & William, 1998, pp. 7-8).
4. Learning Target/Performance Criteria: “Student-friendly descriptions—through words, pictures, actions, or some combination of these—of what you intend the students to learn or accomplish in a lesson. They’re connected to a performance of understanding...as well as to accompanying criteria for good work that students use to gauge their progress toward the goal” (Brookhart, 2012, p. 24).
5. Modeling: The act of showing students how to meet the learning targets using examples and/or exemplars that make “explicit what is required and define a valid standard against which students can compare their work” (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, pp. 206-207).
6. Self-concept: “The way students understand themselves...and how they perceive themselves as [learners]” (Johnston, 2012, p. 65).
7. Specific Feedback: Commentary about the work not the student. This feedback “focuses on one or more strengths...and provides at least one suggestion for a next step” (Brookhart, 2012, p. 27). The student should know what to do next to make improvements based on neutral, goal-related facts (Brookhart, 2012; Wiggins, 2012). Specific feedback should not be overwhelming or corrections of every single mistake (Fisher & Frey, 2012).
8. Timely Feedback: Feedback that is given while both the instructor and student remember the assessment expectations and learning targets (Brookhart & Moss, 2015) that “allows students to correct misconceptions or mistakes before further ingraining them into practice” (Thomas & Sondergeld, 2015, p. 86).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact teacher feedback had on student writing from the beginning to the end of the research writing process. This literature review is divided into four main topics: (a) elements of feedback, (b) the impact of feedback on students, (c) changing the feedback process, and (d) the importance of modeling.

### **Elements of Feedback**

Feedback and assessment go hand-in-hand, as assessments are used to measure a student's learning and provide direction for the instructor on what to teach next. According to Irons (2008), "Feedback is a key aspect in assessment and is fundamental in enabling students to learn from assessment" (p. 1). Irons explained it like this: Formative assessments can be taken as any task that creates feedback to students about their learning....The primary focus of formative assessment (and formative feedback) is to help students understand the level of learning they have achieved and clarify expectations and standards (pp. 16-17). Sadler's (1989) study examined the nature and function of formative assessment as students develop and work toward proficiency or expertise and defines assessment as "any appraisal (or judgment, or evaluation) of a student's work or performance" (p. 120). Sadler also explained how formative assessment helps eliminate seemingly random, trial-and-error learning on behalf of the student. Feedback, therefore, according to Sadler, is a critical component to the formative assessment process, as it provides information to the student about whether or not the learning is successful,

allowing instructors the opportunity to reinforce successful practices or modify unsatisfactory ones. The feedback portion of the assessment is what is shared with the student to give an idea of what needs to happen for learning and growth to occur. Even if a teacher gives thorough, specific, sound, and relevant feedback, student learning is not guaranteed. Feedback can be highly effective or highly ineffective.

There is more to feedback, however, than simply giving an assessment and then letting the students know how they performed. Research on formative assessment and feedback by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) aimed to help students become self-regulated learners, making them a more proactive part of the feedback process.

Examining previous research on the topic, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick reinterpreted the information to identify good feedback as “anything that might strengthen the students’ capacity to self-regulate their own performance” (p. 205). Wiggins (2012) defined feedback as how well students are doing in their attempts to meet the defined learning goal.

Timeliness is consistently listed across research as a characteristic of quality feedback, although the definition of timeliness is somewhat vague (Brookhart & Moss, 2015; Wiggins, 2012). In a study that examined 82 rural middle school students and 16 pre-service teachers, Thomas and Sondergeld (2015) researched the impact of scaffolded feedback instruction provided through an undergraduate methods course. They found that if feedback is not given within a timely manner, it loses its potency and overall meaning, because if it is not timely students may not even be able to remember the initial learning task or their thinking behind it. Immediate feedback (given directly after a student has responded to or completed a task) works better for knowledge of facts

(spelling words, math problems), but delayed feedback might be more effective on complex tasks to allow the student time for reflection and thought. Delayed feedback may occur minutes, hours, weeks, or longer after the completion of an assessment (Shute, 2007). Feedback should move students forward, clearly presenting the next steps needed to reach the goal presented (Brookhart & Moss, 2015). Not to be overlooked, feedback is recognized as an integral component of learning because it helps learners see how they are doing, where they are in the learning process, and what needs to be done next to reach the learning targets (Thomas & Sondergeld, 2015).

For change in student thinking to occur, the feedback from the teacher needs to be perceived as valuable and relevant, despite the fact that the teacher and student may initially have different views on what the assignment should contain or how it should look (Wiggins, 2012). Effective feedback occurs when learners begin to see the difference between their ideas of performance and that of their instructors or peers (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Rudland et al. (2013) offer an alternate, learner-centered, approach to the current, educator-driven, feedback models. They suggested that realizing the differences between their ideas and those of their instructors or peers can act as a starting point for change in their learning, leading students to take a more active role in the feedback process.

Students need to be made aware of when their work is correct, as well as when it is incorrect in order to avoid making those same mistakes in the future. In a study on providing effective feedback in an online undergraduate Child and Adolescent Development class with 57 students, McVey (2008) explained that good feedback provides students with an avenue to take a more active role in their learning and should

provide steps on how this can be managed. However, a fine line must be drawn when giving feedback to avoid overwhelming the student and ensure that the feedback is, in fact, manageable. Brookhart (2012) warned that students are discouraged from taking a more active role in their learning when they receive overwhelming feedback, feedback that is too specific, feedback that does not match the learning target or performance criteria, or feedback seen as evaluative or simply a grade. Johnston (2012) argued that the central goal of all feedback should be to “improve the future possibilities for each individual learner and for the learning community... expanding, for every learner, the vision of what’s possible [and] the strategic options for getting there” (p. 66).

### **The Impact of Feedback On Students**

Across most research on feedback, there are commonalities about what constitutes good feedback (Brookhart, 2012; Brookhart & Moss, 2015; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Wiggins, 2012), but one element that should not be forgotten is whether or not the feedback is useful and meaningful to the student who is receiving the feedback. An important question to consider is whether the feedback is meaningfully received and then acted upon by the learner or not (Mayer & Alexander, 2011). All feedback should be examined to see whether or not it moves the student forward and leads to improvement.

According to Brookhart and Moss (2015), there are three lenses through which to view feedback: (a) the micro view to determine whether the feedback has effective qualities (descriptive, timely, right amount of information, compare work to criteria, focus on the work, positive and clear, specific but not too specific, professional); (b) the snap shot view to learn about whether or not the feedback will be received; and (c) the

long view to determine the next steps that will lead to improvements and provide clear directions of where to head next (Brookhart & Moss, 2015). However, according to Brookhart and Moss, simply giving the feedback does not guarantee learning, as the student must decide how to act upon receiving. The relationship between the instructor giving the feedback and the student receiving it is an important component of feedback that leads students to make improvements. The words the instructor chooses to relate to the student can have a profound impact on the way students see themselves. Johnston (2012) noted, “Feedback is not merely cognitive in reach, nor merely corrective in function. Like the rest of classroom talk, feedback affects the ways students understand themselves and one another—how they perceive themselves as writers” (p. 65). The feedback provided by a teacher can impact how students discover and define themselves (Johnston, 2012). Teachers may often quickly offer advice and give suggestions on how to make improvements, but it is important to first ensure that the learner has looked for and begin to accept the advice so that the he is not dismayed nor insecure about his own judgments (Wiggins, 2012).

Students should play an active role in the feedback process, but the importance of the teacher or instructor cannot be overlooked, as they are a critical component to the effectiveness of the feedback. What commentary the teacher provides is one foundation students may use to appraise forward progress, as well as their own understanding of learning goals and standards, therefore providing opportunities for self-regulated learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Failure to self-regulate can negatively affect self-motivation and self-esteem, which can, in turn, affect the way a student approaches the writing and learning process and teacher feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

One way to ensure that students are more actively engaged in the feedback process is to build a positive rapport with the student and differentiate feedback according to their learning or thinking style (Rudland et al., 2013). Building relationships with the student will assist the teacher in creating and promoting a safe educational environment that is more conducive for learning (Rudland et al., 2013). Feedback for growth involves an intentional differentiation of feedback so that the student is able to make meaning (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2014). According to Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano, when using the developmental approach to feedback, students may fall into one of four categories of differentiation. The first developmental approach is *instrumental*, which requires feedback supports with concrete suggestions, models, and examples. They need someone to tell them what needs to be done, as well as recognition of what went right and wrong. The second category is *socializing*, whose learners need appreciation for effort and contribution and validation of progress and personal qualities. These learners need to feel valued. The third category is *self-authoring*, which requires acknowledgement of competence and expertise and opportunities to discuss own ideas. The fourth and final category of developmental approach is *self-transforming*, whose learners need opportunities to reflect on practice. To provide all learners the opportunity to grow and improve, feedback should be ongoing, and recipients should be provided with opportunities to respond, reflect, and contribute (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2014).

Regardless of the learning and thinking style, the purpose of giving feedback is for it influence the learner to move him forward (Johnston, 2012). For this to happen, both the teacher and the student “need to listen to each other and value what’s said”

(Brookhart & Moss, 2015, pp. 27) and trust that the best interest of the learner is at the center of the feedback.

### **Changing the Feedback Process**

Feedback is often confused with the giving of advice, but the two are, in fact, different. For example, *You need more examples in your report*, or *You should have included a better title at the top of your paper* could be considered advice rather than feedback. While these statements certainly point out deficiencies in a student's work, they lack specificity. Unless statements are "preceded by descriptive feedback, the natural response of the performer is to wonder 'Why are you suggesting this?'" (Wiggins, 2012, pp. 4-5). It should also be noted that feedback is different than evaluation.

Evaluations are often associated with scores and, in the classroom, grades. While grades are necessary for transcript information, among other things, they are not the source of learning for most students. When a student sees a grade and a comment on an assignment, it is often the grade that wins his attention. Descriptive feedback, when accompanied by a grade, becomes an explanation of the grade instead of an opportunity for growth and learning. Descriptive feedback is more likely to be read as descriptive feedback if it is not accompanied by a grade (Brookhart, 2008). Removing the grade improves the likelihood of student learning, allowing effective feedback to move from value judgments to more actionable information (Brookhart, 2008). Wiggins (2012) suggested how to change the following comments:

- *Good work!*
- *This is a weak paper.*

- *You got a C on your project.*
- *I'm so pleased by your poster! (p. 14)*

Instead of ending after a simple, evaluative remark, comments can be recast into effective feedback by adding a mental colon after the statement that further explains the more generic feedback. Wiggins gives examples of the mental colon in the following:

- *Good work: Your use of words was more precise in this paper than in the last one, and I saw the scenes more clearly in my mind's eye.*
- *This is a weak paper: Almost from the first sentence, I was confused as to your initial thesis and the evidence you provide for it. In the second paragraph, you propose a different thesis, and in the third paragraph you don't offer evidence, just beliefs. (p. 14)*

The mental colon after the generic feedback allows the teacher to provide more descriptive and specific information on strengths and weaknesses in the student's work. Both examples, while specific, explicitly address the nature of the work and avoid judgments about the students themselves. The generic commentary (good work, this is a weak paper) do not provide the student insight on how to make improvements or move forward in the learning process. Effective feedback should also avoid focusing on the person producing the work and instead point out the body and quality of the work (Brookhart & Moss, 2015).

Another possible approach to improving feedback is to consider the amount of feedback being given. The commentary needs to be specific and relevant, but too much can be overwhelming for the student. If a student receives an assignment back that is covered in corrections and suggestions, he might not know where to begin making corrections, or even be able to make sense of the information, and simply ignore the feedback and accept the grade (Fisher & Frey, 2012). This can lead to frustration on both

sides of the learning opportunity—the student feels like his work was not valued and the teacher feels like her words were not valued, either.

Focusing on errors rather than on mistakes is one way to avoid this pitfall. Mistakes simply reveal fatigue or inattention and can be easily corrected, whereas, errors show a lack of knowledge. Even when closely focusing on the work, students may be unsure of how to fix errors (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Focusing on mistakes in students' work can be a poor use of time and often does not lead to greater understanding or improved performance. Fisher and Frey also suggested identifying patterns in student errors to shape and direct instruction to better meet the learning needs of specific students, distinguishing between global and targeted errors (directing instruction to the whole class or addressing individual students), and using prompts and cues that cause students to do cognitive and metacognitive work that shifts students' attention. Often, teachers' first inclination is to correct mistakes and fix the mechanics. While these corrections can be important to the final delivery and readability of a piece, they do little in comparison to effective feedback that advances the student as an actual writer (Brookhart, 2008).

Viewing feedback more as a dialogue rather than only a descriptive analysis of the teacher's thoughts can also elicit change in the feedback process. Feedback as dialogue means that students are provided the opportunity to “engage the teacher in discussion about that feedback...[and] can help the student develop their understanding of expectations and standards, to check out and correct misunderstandings and to get an immediate response to difficulties” (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 210). Conducting these conversations as quickly as possible after the work has been submitted

is crucial to their overall effectiveness in order to ensure that the original learning goal of the task is still in mind and that students still have some reason to work on the learning target (Brookhart, 2008).

### **The Importance of Modeling**

Students work on meeting a learning target by first identifying the specific learning target. This can be explained through the use of assessment criteria and/or standards that define different levels of achievement (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). The most straightforward way to introduce these criteria to students is through the use of instructional models or exemplars. These are effective because “they make explicit what is required, and they define a valid standard against which students can compare their work” (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, pp. 206-207). Modeling provides teachers the platform to illustrate standards and show students the expected product before they begin working on their own. Additionally, teachers are able to discuss, in detail, elements of the exemplar that represent high-quality work toward which all students should be striving (Thomas & Sondergeld, 2015). When feedback is given, the teacher can then focus her language on the terms used to describe the work and reference the model product as a means of facilitating self-directed student learning (Brookhart, 2008).

This step can then become part of the scaffolding process, gradually releasing students to independent work, and ensuring that students have a greater probability of understanding and meeting the learning target. Brookhart (2012) explains feedback will not work if students are not working toward a specific learning goal, as this goal directs how the student moves forward and gives meaning to the constructive conversations

about improvement. When the learning target, performance task, and criteria don't match or are not clear, students see teacher feedback as evaluation instead of an opportunity for learning. When the expectations and criteria do match, as can be emphasized through modeling and the use of exemplar texts, students are able to examine feedback in an actionable and useable way. Sharing a visual example of the learning target during student work time on an assessment helps students think ahead to the end-goal. "As students do their work, they make progress toward the target. This work produces evidence on which teachers can base effective feedback, which students can use, in turn, to self-regulate their learning" (Brookhart, 2012, p. 4). Modeling, therefore, enriches the feedback experience by empowering students to address the learning target in a tangible way, while offering opportunities for them to make connections between where they are at and where they need to be.

## **Summary**

This literature review explored the elements of effective feedback, as well as the impact feedback can have on student learning and self-perception. The research presented addressed how teachers can change the way feedback is given and the importance of modeling effective practices to increase student awareness of expectations and learning targets.

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact teacher feedback had on improving student writing during the research writing process. The study examined the feedback given from one English I Honors teacher to six students during various stages of the writing process, as well as the students' thoughts about the feedback and the impact it had on helping them meet the learning targets. Presented in this chapter of the methodology will be (a) instrument and design, (b) site of study, (c) participants, (d) procedures, and (d) data analysis.

### **Instrument and Design**

Qualitative case study was used to analyze the feedback data. The teacher feedback given to students during various stages of the research writing process was analyzed. Six total students out of the 63 English I Honors students were selected to participate in the study based on their completion and submission of all three stages of the writing process. Students also must have been present in class and completed the online feedback survey. The final list of six students was randomly selected from the total list of students meeting all the criteria.

The qualitative nature of the study allowed for the trends, patterns, and themes to emerge through the research and analysis of the feedback itself. The interview protocol was semi-structured in nature and consisted of four basic questions (Appendix B), allowing the participants to more openly provide answers. Follow-up questions were generated as needed and as dictated by the answers. The answers from the students were

compared against each other, utilizing the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) for any emerging trends, themes, or patterns in determining what impact the teacher feedback had on improving student writing and/or helping the students better meet the learning targets.

### **Site of the Study**

This study was conducted at a high school in southwest Missouri that will be referred to by the pseudonym Midwest High throughout the remainder of the study. At the time of the study, the five high schools in the district had an average enrollment of 1,425 students. The average free and reduced lunch population was 46.8%. All schools in the district were also predominantly White (81.4% average). Midwest High had an enrollment of 1,338 and a free and reduced lunch population of 62.6%. Midwest High was comprised predominantly of White students (78.4%), while Black students made up 10.76% of the student population, Hispanic 6.13%, Asian 2.39%, Indian 0.45%, and Multicultural 1.57%. In the 2015-16 school year, Midwest High recorded 56 total dropouts and a graduation rate of 95.9%.

As of October 2016, 384 of the 1,338 students enrolled at Midwest High were classified as freshmen, 63 of which were enrolled in three sections of English I Honors. These honors classes comprised of 15 male students and 63 females.

### **Participants**

Students were selected at random from a list of those eligible. To be categorized as eligible, each student must have been enrolled in one of the three sections of English I Honors class at a Midwestern high school. Eligible students must have submitted an

outline, a rough draft, and a final draft research essay through Google Classroom. Students must also have been present for, and participated in, a class survey about the feedback given during the writing process. In total, 63 student surveys were completed. From these, six focus students were selected to participate in the study. Students then had to gain parent consent to participate in the focus group interview. Students were at various skill levels when the assessment was given.

## **Procedures**

The online Human Research Curriculum training was completed before this study began. The proposal to the Human Participants Institutional Review Board at Missouri State University was approved (Appendix C), and all participants signed an informed consent document giving permission for the examination of previously submitted research writing, a reflective survey about the writing process, and their participation in a focus group interview about feedback practices.

The data for this study were analyzed using a constant comparative method, identifying a phenomenon and making decisions concerning data collection on initial understanding of this phenomenon without advanced planning (Glaser, 1965), to examine the impact teacher feedback had on the students during the research writing. Through the constant comparative process, newly collected data were compared with previously collected data, allowing for a more in-depth study of the feedback by looking at student writing, teacher commentary, student surveys, and interview responses side by side. Archival data from six English I Honors students was collected to provide examples of

feedback during the various stages of the writing process (the outline, rough draft, and final draft) and analyzed to determine what impact it had on improving student writing.

Participants in the study were students in the researcher's English I Honors classes. The 63 students enrolled in the class were first required to submit an outline of their research topics via Google Classroom that included a thesis statement, three topic sentences, and six pieces of evidence to support those topics. Comments were given by the teacher on the assignment and then returned electronically to the students prior to the submission of the rough draft. Next, all students submitted a rough draft via Google Classroom that allowed the teacher to give feedback and see the improvement from the outline to the next stage of writing. Students also used Google Classroom to submit final drafts of their research essays after the teacher gave the rough draft feedback.

Finally, all students enrolled in the three sections of English I Honors completed a survey (Appendix A) and the focus students participated in an interview (Appendix B) of the writing process and feedback given by the teacher. Students were asked to reflect on the research writing process and consider the feedback received on the outline, rough draft, and final draft, and they answered questions about how helpful they perceived the feedback to be and when during the writing process the teacher feedback was most beneficial in making changes. In addition to recording the audio of the interview, notes were also taken to allow for an examination of trends or variances. After all drafts were submitted, teacher feedback given, and surveys completed, work (with teacher feedback) from six of the 63 students was examined more closely to determine the impact the feedback had on the writing process. Once the six students were selected, 18 total writing and feedback samples were collected for examination, in addition to the six

surveys and recorded interview with notes. Using a digital format to provide feedback provided the students and the teacher the opportunity to look through all the stages of the writing process to find growth and improvement.

This archival data was analyzed for the types of feedback given and comparisons were made to determine if feedback from the instructor influenced each student's ability to meet the learning targets for the final draft of the formative assessment.

### **Data Analysis**

A qualitative case study design was chosen because it allowed the data to be revealed through observations after the student writing and teacher feedback had already been given. The categories for feedback types were determined by what the samples showed instead of being predetermined. As the impact of the feedback was revealed in the student samples, the student survey and interview responses were analyzed against the progression of work. Each student was assigned a letter (A-F) on the rough draft and corresponding final draft. The participants will be referred to throughout using the code "S" which represents student, followed by the appropriate letter (A-F). Teacher feedback is represented with "TF."

First, writing samples were collected and examined to observe any changes made according to the feedback given. This examination determined the impact the feedback had on helping students improve writing and meet learning targets. After collecting the writing data, inductive coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) was utilized to analyze the data from the feedback samples.

The feedback on the research writing was analyzed to determine the different types of commentary given by the English I Honors teacher to the six focus students using the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965). The types of feedback were then coded. The rough drafts were then read again. Each feedback category was assigned a different color highlighter, and each feedback comment or suggestion was examined to determine under which category it fell. Some comments were categorized as more than one type. Feedback was then counted for each category and each essay.

Second, a survey was conducted with all students in all three sections of English I Honors. The survey results were analyzed using the constant comparative method to identify obvious themes, as well as more subtle and hidden patterns in the dialogue. Finally, the focus group interview took place with the six students to triangulate the data. The audio of the interview was recorded and transcribed, and notes were taken during the speaking to highlight specific language used and recurring themes from question to question.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the impact teacher feedback has on student writing from the beginning to the end of the research writing process. The driving research question for this study was: What impact does teacher feedback given to students during the research writing process have on a student's ability to improve writing skills and meet the learning targets?

To begin this section, an overview of the methods used in the study will be presented. Next, feedback samples from each of the six rough draft research essays submitted by English I Honors students will be shared, along with the process of coding the feedback and the patterns that were found. After this section, the data regarding the six final draft research essays will be presented, as well as the results from the student feedback survey that was completed after final drafts were submitted. To present the findings in a way that addressed the research question, rough draft feedback and data will be referred to again during the discussion of the final draft feedback, showing the impact teacher feedback had on the writing process as a whole. This section of findings will conclude with a summary.

### **Methods Overview**

This study involved 63 ninth grade students, including six focus students, and one researcher. All participants were enrolled in English I Honors who had each completed and submitted a research outline, rough draft essay, and final draft essay. Additionally, all students present in the three sections of English I Honors, including the six focus

students, completed an online survey via Google Classroom about the overall feedback received from the teacher and its perceived impact on their writing. The six focus students were then interviewed by the researcher on the feedback given during the research process.

The data for this study were analyzed using inductive coding, specifically the constant comparative method to examine the impact teacher feedback had on the students during the research writing process. Archival data from the six students were collected to provide examples of feedback during the various stages of the writing process (the outline, rough draft, and final draft). Representative student samples were provided to illustrate the various types of feedback observed during the study, and then the samples from the teacher were placed alongside the survey comments and interview responses from the students to illustrate which types of feedback had the greatest impact on the writing process.

### **Analysis of Outline Writing and Feedback**

The first step of the research writing process was for students to submit a basic outline, detailing a proposed thesis and topic sentences. Each of the six participants was required to submit this outline electronically through Google Classroom. The purposes of the outline were (a) for the student and teacher to see progress in the gathering of preliminary research, and (b) for the student to begin developing a thesis and overall organization of the information. Therefore, the feedback was minimal in comparison with the more structured rough draft but was more focused on providing specific examples of how to more clearly state the thesis. The thesis statement, plus the feedback,

for each student's outline is detailed below. Teacher feedback follows the student example, labeled TF to help clarify.

Student A:

SA: Thurgood Marshall fought against racial discrimination, equal rights for African Americans, and victims of injustice.

TF: Great start! Let's make some changes in your word choice for the next draft.

Maybe something like:

Thurgood Marshall fought against racial discrimination in one of the most notable Civil Rights court cases of his time, standing up for victims of injustice and inequality during a tumultuous period in American history.

This would allow you to discuss the historical context, Brown vs. the Board of Education, and the impact he had on the treatment of black people in the court system.

Student B:

SB: Medgar Evers encouraged black voter registration, fought against the discrimination of black people, and his death made him a martyr of the civil rights movement.

TF: Great start! Let's make some small changes so that the last part of your thesis is parallel (weighted equally) to the rest:

Medgar Evers encouraged black voter registration, fought against the discrimination of black people, and his became a martyr of the civil rights movement after his death in \_\_ (you fill in the year).

Student C:

SC: As teenager he did not only begin his boxing career, he would begin to inspire many and become a national phenomenon.

TF: Great start! Let's work on making this a bit more specific for the next draft.

Maybe something like this:

As a teenager, Joe Louis began a boxing career that would label him a national phenomenon and symbol of hope for a nation at war.

You might even want to add something else about his legacy since that's your 3rd topic.

Student D:

SD: Adam Powell, previously known for being a minister, was the first black congressman from the east.

TF: Based on the topics below, I think you need to add a bit more detail to your thesis. Something like Adam Powell made his name as a minister but emerged from his pulpit in the church to take a stand on ending racial discrimination, eventually becoming the first black congressman from the east.

Student E:

SE: Madam C.J. Walker is a very successful and powerful women of her time because she had a rough childhood that made her into the first self-made female millionaire.

TF: Great start! Let's work on word choice for the next draft...something like Despite her rough childhood and upbringing, Madam C.J. Walker was a successful and powerful businesswoman who became the first self-made millionaire.

Student F:

SF: W.E.B Du Bois is well known as a pioneer for the American Civil Rights Movement, throughout this event his efforts achieved racial equality.

TF: Rephrase end to something like this:  
forming the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People as a platform for change and reform in the black community.

Of the six thesis statements on the outlines, five were changed on the next draft by using specific feedback and language from the teacher comments.

### **Analysis of Rough Draft Writing and Feedback**

The second step of the research writing process was for students to submit a detailed rough draft using formatting required of the Modern Language Association (MLA). Teacher feedback was given in a timely manner (one weekend) to allow students to examine the comments while working on final drafts. Each rough draft was attached

to its corresponding final draft to be assigned a letter to be used for identification purposes. The teacher feedback was then reviewed as archival data to determine patterns and trends. After reading through the rough draft feedback of all six essays, some categories seemed to emerge that were present in all six:

1. Clarification. Ideas needed to be clarified with a change of words, added information, or more detail (did occasionally overlap with word choice)
2. Word Choice. Sometimes focused on tense, sometimes focused on replacing weak word with more effective word, sometimes on replacing lengthy phrases with clearer language (did occasionally overlap with clarification feedback)
3. Support/Evidence. Ideas needed more development to better support or explain the thesis; ideas may not support or explain the thesis and needed to be moved or omitted (did occasionally overlap with clarification or omission)
4. Mechanics/Formatting. Punctuation errors, errors in basic MLA format
5. Omission. Excess information that caused confusion, veered off topic, wordy or repetitive
6. Organization. Transitions, new paragraphs, movement of points from one section to another, placement of thesis

Table 1 presents the findings for each category in individual and overall numbers.

Table 1. Feedback Categories and Rough Draft Results

| Category             | Essay A | Essay B | Essay C | Essay D | Essay E | Essay F | Total Numbers |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------------|
| Clarification        | 24      | 21      | 28      | 3       | 7       | 9       | 92            |
| Word Choice          | 17      | 33      | 31      | 11      | 27      | 29      | 148           |
| Support/Evidence     | 7       | 3       | 4       | 2       | 9       | 4       | 29            |
| Mechanics/Formatting | 13      | 19      | 17      | 3       | 12      | 24      | 88            |
| Omission             | 19      | 20      | 12      | 6       | 20      | 18      | 95            |
| Organization         | 1       | 6       | 1       | 2       | 2       | 2       | 14            |

The analysis of the data revealed that more feedback was given on student word choice than the other five categories. Some of this feedback suggested a change in verb tense. For example, SF switched from using past tense verbs like *was* and *attended* in paragraph one, to *is* and *believes* in paragraph three. The teacher feedback given via Google Documents eliminated the present tense verb and replaced it with the appropriate past tense choice, changing *is* to *was* and *believes* to *believed*. Other word choice feedback drew attention to how the student addressed the research subject. SC, for instance, repeatedly referred to Joe Louis Barrow as *Louis Joe* instead of simply *Louis*. Teacher feedback stated, “subjects should be referred to by last name after being introduced in academic writing.” The addition of Louis’ less familiar last name, *Barrow*, in this sentence was also confusing and needed clarification since it was not used elsewhere in the student writing. Additional word choice feedback pointed out overused words or phrases such as, *This quote shows* found in SB and *amazing* found in SC. Some of the feedback in this category overlapped with clarification and organization feedback. Student D’s writing over Adam Powell illustrated this in paragraph two:

Powell eventually became a political activist, however, he started out small. Born on November 29, 1908, in New Haven, Connecticut, he graduated from Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. Furthermore, earning a master's degree in religious education from Columbia University. Taking over his father’s position as a pastor at Abyssinian Baptist Church in 1937, and Powell worked as a fearless community activist for Harlem. By demonstrating his opposition to racial discrimination early, he was an instrumental in convincing several companies in New York to hire blacks.

Teacher feedback on word choice addressed adding the word *While* at the beginning to help transition the reader into the paragraph, clarifying what kind of political activist Powell was by adding well-known and powerful, transitioning between sentences by

replacing *Furthermore* with *later*, and clarifying *Taking over* with more specific information like *In 1937, he took*.

The analysis of the data also revealed that only 14 comments were made concerning organization in all six, student essays. Of these 14 comments, eight of them were directed toward transitioning between and within paragraphs. Student F ended the second paragraph with, *For the next 15 years he taught economics and history in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1896, he married Nina Gomer until her death in 1950*. Teacher feedback stated for the student to, *Provide a transition between these two ideas. Why is it important that he taught economics? Why is it important that he got married?* Further in the essay, SF ended paragraph five with, *His passport was confiscated in 1952 and he was not able to travel outside the country for the span of six year*. SF then began the concluding paragraph by saying, *Without W.E.B. Du Bois' voice, people would have been unaware would have not been educated correctly about the causes and what the outcome may be for Blacks Freedom*. The organization feedback for this example prompted the student to transition into the conclusion by using key words and phrases. While one organization comment was directed toward beginning a new paragraph (SA), the remaining five remarks addressed setting up and introducing quotes. Student B received feedback asking for more information about a source and its context before stating a direct quote.

The overall number for support/evidence feedback was fairly low at 29, but the comments carried more weight in helping the student meet the learning goals of the research assignment. Some of the comments asked guiding questions like, *Why? What spurred this? A change from his job? A change in the law? Social injustice? Be more*

*specific* (SF). Another repeated comment was *How so?* This often appeared after a direct quotation that was missing further analysis and connection to the thesis statement. Most of the support/evidence feedback was directed toward a lack of source citations. These comments were meant to bring the student's attention to potential plagiarism and how it could be avoided.

### **Analysis of Final Draft Writing**

The constant comparative method was used again to analyze the students' final draft research essays. The final drafts were placed directly next to the rough drafts, and every word and line was examined to determine what errors still remained in the writing that were addressed in the rough draft feedback. Working paragraph by paragraph, the writing was examined to determine what changes were made in the final drafts according to the rough draft teacher feedback. As students added information and edited their own work, however, some new errors emerged. Because these new errors were not addressed with feedback, they were not considered in the data.

Table 2 presents the findings for each category in individual and overall numbers. The numbers represent the remaining errors in comparison with rough draft feedback. They do not account for new errors found in the revisions or previously unmarked in the rough draft. This analysis of the data revealed there was a decrease in the number of errors students made in the final drafts after reading teacher feedback on the rough drafts. Fewer errors were made by all six students in all six categories of feedback in the final draft research essays. This suggests the teacher feedback did impact student writing during the research process. Student work samples and teacher feedback below show

Table 2. Feedback Categories and Final Draft Results

| Category             | Essay<br>A | Essay<br>B | Essay<br>C | Essay<br>D | Essay<br>E | Essay<br>F | Total<br>Numbers |
|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------|
| Clarification        | 1          | 0          | 1          | 0          | 1          | 1          | 4                |
| Word Choice          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 1          | 2          | 2          | 5                |
| Support/Evidence     | 1          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 1          | 1          | 3                |
| Mechanics/Formatting | 4          | 1          | 1          | 1          | 4          | 3          | 14               |
| Omission             | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 2          | 1          | 3                |
| Organization         | 0          | 2          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 2          | 4                |

the changes made through the writing process. Rough draft work is listed first, followed by teacher feedback labeled TF, and, lastly, the students' final draft work.

### **Clarification**

SA: The main goals that Thurgood Marshall wanted to accomplish and worked hard and tirelessly for was ending racial discrimination, equal rights for African Americans, and ending segregation.

TF: Reword in a clearer and more concise manner

SA: Thurgood Marshall worked hard to end racial discrimination, segregation, and obtain equal rights for African Americans.

### **Word Choice**

SB: This reveals that Medgar Evers himself was put face to face with the horrors the black people were put through and dealt with it himself.

TF: Replace: "himself was" with "willingly"

Add: "himself"

Replace: "were put through" with "endure"

SB: Medgar Evers willingly put himself face to face with the horrors black people endured and dealt with it himself.

## **Support/Evidence**

SC: This had engraved his reputation with the American people.

TF: How so? Follow up with another sentence or two of explanation.

SC: This had engraved his reputation with the American people. Louis had become an iconic boxer amongst the nation. Joining the military had just solidified his popularity among Americans.

## **Mechanics/Formatting**

SD: By demonstrating his opposition to racial discrimination early, he was instrumental in convincing several companies in New York to hire blacks.

TF: Source? Make sure to give credit for where this information is from

SD: Through his fearless voice, he was instrumental in convincing several companies in New York to hire blacks (Kranz).

## **Omission**

SF: When 83 year old, William Edward was charged after he was arrested charged and tried by the federal government for being an agent of the Soviet Union, the government still continued to harass him.

TF: Remove: “year old, William Edward”

Remove: “was charged after he was”

Remove: “the”

Remove: “still continued to”

Remove: “him”

SF: At the age of 83 he arrested, charged, and tried by the federal government for being an agent of the Soviet Union. It seemed he was unable to ever escape government harassment.

## **Organization**

SE: Gale Encyclopedia of U.S. Economic History acknowledges, “Throughout her career she used her economic clout and notoriety to further her ideals in the profession and community. She made large charitable donations and worked on political issues of the day.”

TF: Integrate this quote without using the source as an introduction.

SE: Because of her powerful role she was able to influence many people in the black community, "...she used her economic clout and notoriety to further her ideals in the profession and community. She made large charitable donations and worked on political issues of the day." (Walker).

### **Student Responses to Feedback Survey**

All of the students enrolled in English I Honors at Midwest High were asked to complete a survey (Appendix A) about the teacher feedback upon submission of the final draft research essay. This survey provided students an opportunity to be more actively engaged in the feedback process while also building trust and rapport between student and teacher (Rudland et al., 2013). The primary purpose of the survey was to examine the impact of the feedback from the student's perspective. A total of 63 surveys were taken.

Questions addressed whether or not all three assignment components (outline, rough, final draft) were submitted on time, as well as if the student actually looked at the feedback. In total, 80.3% of the students selected *yes*, indicating they had viewed the feedback on the outline. The remaining 19.7% selected *no*, indicating the outline feedback was not viewed. The rough draft feedback had a slightly higher rate of viewing at 83.9% with 16.1% not viewing the feedback.

This analysis of the data suggests that students do take the time to read commentary provided by teachers during the research writing process, although students were not prompted to give further information about how much time was spent looking at the feedback or whether or not every comment was viewed. When asked, *Do you feel like your writing improved because of the teacher feedback you received during the*

*research process?* most students felt that it did. In fact, 77.4% of the 63 students surveyed selected *yes*. When asked how likely they would be to use this feedback on future writing assignments, 50% of the students answered *extremely likely* and 27.4% answered *likely*. This correlates with the findings in Table 2, showing that errors in student writing decreased when the specific teacher feedback was addressed.

In response to the survey question, *In what ways do you feel your writing improved because of the teacher feedback you received during the research process?* students replied in the following ways:

I thought more about my word choice, in-text citations, and the transitions I used.

My teachers feedback showed me how to do what I was actually capable of. It gave great detail of the specifics that she wanted me to do during the process of writing a final draft essay.

More detailed and made more sense.

It sounded and looked better and just flowed better through the whole essay.

I think her feedback gave me a better understanding of what she was looking for.

I learned to think a lot more about the decisions and organization of my writing.

The feedback on my rough draft helped me change a lot of the transition and evidence issues I had in my writing.

Yes. It was very helpful in correcting formatting issues and expanding on points where necessary.

The analysis of the data correlates with the previous findings concerning the feedback on the rough and final drafts. Five of the six focus students made specific changes from the outline to the rough draft, and all six students made changes from the rough draft to final draft, suggesting that the teacher feedback did in fact have an impact on the research writing process.

Among all students who completed the survey, 77.4% expressed the likelihood of using the teacher feedback as a tool on future writing assignments, implying not only an application, but also a synthesis, of the commentary.

### **Student Responses in Focus Group Interview**

Of the six student participants in the study, four were able to participate in the focus group interview. To triangulate the data, questions were asked about the impact feedback had on the research writing process, when during the writing process students preferred to receive teacher feedback, what feedback students felt was most helpful, and what kinds of feedback students wanted to receive more often. The responses supported the findings from the feedback analysis and student survey responses that teacher feedback did have an impact on the writing process and helped the students improve their writing in the final draft.

The audio of the interview was recorded and transcribed. The commentary below highlights responses to four questions from all four student participants:

Question 1: How does teacher feedback influence and impact you as a writer?

SF: You have a more professional perspective because you have more experience with writing. We don't always know correct grammar, punctuation, and phrasing. So I think that really helped me because I had to do a lot of rephrasing.

SB: With feedback from you, I feel more obligated to think about stuff more, like my word choice and my sentence structure and stuff I wouldn't normally pay attention to.

SA: I remember the citing, ah, feedback that you gave me, and um, I was kind of sad because I thought it was good, but it made me realize that, there was like, I needed to put more thinking into it. And so I feel like you encourage us to think outside of the box and stuff like that.

Question 2: What kinds of feedback are most helpful to you during the writing process?

SB: I think just mostly like grammar stuff and if you can have a direct quote or if you can actually use your own words to say it better than the people.

SC: I feel that, when you have like a paragraph, or like a sentence, and you help us rewrite it to make it sound better, it makes our writing sound a lot better.

SF: I think it helps improve our writing, and also we want our writing to flow and sometimes we don't know how to make it flow. And also the thesis. Sometimes we have trouble.

Question 3: When do you prefer to get teacher feedback during the writing process? During the outline, the rough draft, the final draft? Other?

SB: I think the rough draft. Because the outline, we're still trying to get our thoughts together and the rough draft is kind of laid out there and you're just changing stuff we didn't see. The outline feedback made us think about the thesis more than we normally would because you have to have a strong thesis to have a strong paper.

SA: The rough draft feedback helps, but it makes me want to go back to my outline.

(All four students agreed that intense feedback during the rough draft was helpful, especially since they all received a completion grade for having the draft completed.)

Question 4: What feedback would you like your teacher to give more often?

SB: Grammar.

SA: Positive feedback and encouragement. If I feel like I'm doing bad, bad, bad I'm going to want to quit.

(All four students agreed that they needed constructive and positive feedback during the rough draft.)

SC: Since we don't really read over our papers, when you have like simple spelling mistakes, or when you repeat a work twice on accident because you're not really paying attention, because you're typing so fast, that helps.

SF: A little text box where I can ask how I can make something better.

The analysis of this data correlates with the analysis of the rough draft feedback and the decrease in errors on final drafts. Students were more likely to listen to the feedback

because the teacher, who is deemed the *professional* on writing within the classroom, gave it. Students commented on feedback that corresponded with all six of the feedback categories: clarification, word choice, support/evidence, mechanics/formatting, omission, and organization, although the exact language was not always used in the responses.

### **Summary**

The data analysis revealed that teacher feedback does have an impact on student writing during the research process. All six focus students made changes in the final drafts using the specific feedback given by the teacher. Student errors in each of the six feedback categories (clarification, word choice, support/evidence, mechanics/formatting, omission, and organization) also decreased in number from rough to final drafts. The student interview supports this data analysis, as students also voiced a perceived impact from the teacher feedback. This suggests that teacher feedback can help students better meet learning targets and improve students' writing skills.

## **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the impact teacher feedback has on ninth grade student writing from the beginning to the end of the research writing process. The examination was done in an attempt to answer the question, what impact does teacher feedback given to students during the research writing process have on a student's ability to improve writing skills and meet the learning targets? Presented in this section will be: (a) conclusion, (b) discussion of findings, and (c) recommendations for future study.

### **Conclusion**

To the extent the subjects were representative of typical ninth grade honors students and based on the findings of this study, the following conclusion appears warranted:

Teacher feedback given to students during the research writing process does have an impact on the student's ability to improve writing skills and better meet the learning targets.

### **Discussion of Findings**

A qualitative case study was conducted to determine if teacher feedback given to students during the research writing process impacted a student's ability to improve writing and meet learning targets. Brookhart and Moss (2015) explained that feedback should move students forward, clearly presenting the next steps needed to reach the goal presented. Feedback is also recognized as an integral component of learning because it

helps learners see how they are doing, where they are in the learning process, and what needs to be done next to reach the learning targets (Thomas & Sondergeld, 2015). The feedback given by the teacher in this study was meant to improve students' writing and overall understanding of the research writing process. The findings from the study support what Thomas and Sondergeld (2015) and Brookhart and Moss (2015) report feedback should do: move the student closer toward meeting the learning goals.

After examining the student writing and teacher feedback in the outline, rough draft, and final draft, an overall improvement in student writing was observed. The teacher's feedback on the outlines emphasized the development of the thesis statement and initial organization of the essay. Specific commentary was provided that illustrated how to reword a thesis statement for clarification and focus, but simply providing the feedback did not guarantee whether the feedback was meaningfully received and then acted upon by the learner (Mayer & Alexander, 2011). Of the six student outlines examined, however, five made changes on the rough draft thesis statements that were directly influenced by the teacher comments. This illustrates that the teacher feedback on the outlines was meaningfully received by almost all of the participants.

Other trends began to emerge as the student writing and teacher feedback was examined on the rough drafts. Fisher and Frey (2012) suggested identifying patterns in student errors to shape and direct instruction to better meet the learning needs of specific students, distinguishing between global and targeted errors. With this in mind, the teacher comments were placed in the following categories found in the writing of all six students: clarification, word choice, mechanics/formatting, support/evidence, omission, and organization. In total, 466 errors were noted by the feedback on the rough drafts.

The category with the highest number of errors was word choice (148 total), while the category with the lowest number was organization (14 total).

According to Brookhart and Moss (2015), simply giving the feedback does not guarantee learning, as the student must decide how to act upon receiving it. This makes the relationship between the instructor giving the feedback and the student receiving it an important component of the feedback process that leads students to make improvements. In this study, significant improvements were made in every essay and in every category. Upon receiving the teacher feedback, all six students consistently decided to act upon it, making a significant number of revisions to their final draft essays. The numbers decreased from 466 total rough draft errors to 33 total final draft errors. The category with the highest number of errors in the final draft writing was mechanics/formatting (14 total), while the support/evidence and omission categories had the lowest number of errors (three in each).

The findings reveal a significant drop in the number of errors in all categories, but the most significant change was made in the word choice category, where total errors addressed in rough draft feedback dropped from 148 to five. Effective feedback occurs when learners begin to see the difference between their ideas of performance and that of their instructors or peers (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). The data suggests that the feedback given in the study did impact the way the students looked at their writing, impacting them to make changes that led to improved performance. Additionally, student responses during the focus group interview supported this data, revealing through the students' own voices that teacher feedback did have an impact on the writing process.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations for future study were made:

1. It was recommended the study be conducted with a mixture of honors and non-honors students. This will provide more insight into the role the student plays in the feedback process and what impact a student's self-confidence as a writer may have on the writing process.
2. It was recommended the study be conducted by including hand-written feedback in addition to typed feedback. The typed feedback may have been easier to incorporate using Google Documents than hand-written feedback.
3. It was recommended the study be conducted with a larger population stretching from 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades. Teacher feedback may impact student writing differently at different grade and ability levels.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A. Post-Writing Student Survey

1. Type your first name only.
2. Of the three assignments required for this essay (the outline, the rough draft, and the final draft), how many did you submit on time?
  - A. 1
  - B. 2
  - C. 3
3. Did you look at the teacher feedback given on your outline?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
4. Did the feedback on the outline impact the way you wrote your rough draft? Explain how it did or did not impact your writing.
5. Did you look at the teacher feedback given on your rough draft?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
6. Did the feedback on your rough draft impact the way you wrote your final draft? Explain how it did or did not impact your writing.
7. Do you feel like your writing improved because of the teacher feedback you received during the research process?

A. Yes

B. No

8. In what ways do you feel your writing improved because of the teacher feedback you received during the research process?

9. What other types of feedback did you receive in addition to the teacher comments in Google Classroom?

10. How likely are you to use this feedback on a future writing assignment?

Not likely at all      1      2      3      4      5      Extremely likely

## **Appendix B. Focus Group Questions**

### **Question 1:**

How does teacher feedback influence and impact you as a writer?

### **Question 2:**

What kinds of feedback are most helpful to you during the writing process?

### **Question 3:**

When do you prefer to get teacher feedback during the writing process? During the outline, the rough draft, the final draft? Other?

### **Question 4:**

What feedback would you like your teacher to give more often?

## Appendix C. Institutional Review Board Approval

**To:**

Kayla Lewis  
Reading Foundations & Tech

**RE:** Notice of IRB Approval

**Submission Type:** Initial

**Study #:** IRB-FY2017-462

**Study Title:** A Qualitative Content Analysis Study Examining the Impact of Teacher Feedback During the Research Writing Process

**Decision:** Approved

**Approval Date:** Mar 2, 2017

**Expiration Date:** Mar 2, 2018

This submission has been approved by the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the period indicated.

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Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB.

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

Researchers Associated with this Project:

**PI:** Kayla Lewis

**Co-PI:**

**Primary Contact:** Kayla Lewis

**Other Investigators:** Jessica Mattson