Chapter 6
Teacher Feedback in L2 Writing

Introduction

Although teachers spend a massive amount of time writing feedback on student texts, this aspect of teachers' work is "often fraught with frustration and uncertainty" (Ferris 2014, p. 6). As a result, teacher feedback has drawn considerable attention from both researchers and practitioners. In many L2 contexts, particularly in large classes typical of school contexts, the written mode of teacher feedback has remained the major kind of feedback in writing classrooms. In this chapter, therefore, "teacher feedback" refers mainly to teacher written feedback.

This chapter first begins by summarizing salient research findings about feedback in L2 writing, covering the focuses of teacher feedback, written corrective feedback (WCF), written commentary, and oral feedback. Drawing upon studies conducted in some L2 writing classrooms, the chapter then explores the research-practice divide regarding teachers' written feedback practices, highlighting the influence of context on teachers' feedback. Finally, the chapter examines some guiding principles for effective teacher feedback and discusses the implications for classroom practice. The thrust of the chapter is to help teachers develop feedback literacy so that they can use feedback effectively to promote student learning in classroom writing assessment (see Chap. 10 for discussion of feedback literacy).

Salient Findings from Research on Teacher Feedback in L2 Writing

Feedback research is wide-ranging, addressing the focuses of teacher feedback, WCF, commentary, and oral feedback in writing conferences. This section reviews such research and highlights the salient findings with relevance for L2 school

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contexts. Since L2 school teachers focus primarily on WCF and recent research efforts have concentrated considerably on WCF, in the following I devote more attention to WCF than the other feedback issues.

Focuses of Teacher Feedback

Early studies on teacher written feedback consistently showed that teachers played the role of language rather than writing teachers, focusing predominantly on written errors in their feedback (e.g., Cumming 1985; Zamel 1985) and treating writing primarily as a product. Since the introduction of process pedagogy in L2 writing contexts, more research has reported a shift in teacher written feedback from language form to issues such as content and organization (e.g., Caulk 1994; Cohen and Cavalcanti 1990; Conrad and Goldstein 1999; Ferris 1995; Saito 1994). In Ferris' (1997) study, for example, 15% of teacher feedback focused on grammar and mechanics, while 85% addressed content and rhetorical development (also see Ferris 1997; Ferris et al. 1997). In general, the recommendation in the feedback literature is that teacher written feedback should have a balanced coverage on all important dimensions of writing, that is, content, organization, language, and style (Ferris 2003, 2014; Hyland and Hyland 2006a; Zamel 1985), and feedback should be delivered to multiple rather than single drafts (Ferris 1997, 2014; Hyland and Hyland 2006a). In Lee's (2008) study of Hong Kong secondary teachers' feedback practices, however, over 90% of the teacher feedback addressed issues about the language form. Similarly, Furneaux et al. (2007) found that teachers in EFL school contexts (from five different countries) focused predominantly on grammar in their feedback. Such results are not surprising because in a large number of L2 school contexts a product-oriented approach to writing still prevails, and teachers are so preoccupied with language issues that they do not have sufficient time to respond to other aspects of students' writing. However, it is useful to note, based on a meta-analysis of feedback in writing conducted by Biber et al. (2011), that feedback on content and form is more effective than feedback on form alone.

Written Corrective Feedback (WCF)

A sizable amount of teacher feedback research has addressed the issue of WCF. Since John Truscott (1996) published his polemical article in *Language Learning*, arguing fervently for the abandonment of error correction in teacher written feedback, WCF has become one of the most vibrant research areas in L2 writing. Overall, there is a general consensus among feedback researchers that teachers cannot and should not refrain from giving WCF on student writing (Bitchener and Ferris 2012; Ellis 2010; Evans et al. 2010; Ferris 2010; Hyland 2010; Storch 2010), but some major concerns that teachers need to address include the extent to which teachers should respond

to errors in student writing and what WCF strategies should be used to optimize student learning opportunities and to bring about maximum student improvement.

The extent of WCF hinges on the question of whether teachers should respond to all errors in student writing or whether they should be more selective in their approach. These two approaches are referred to as comprehensive (or unfocused) WCF and selective (or focused) WCF (Ferris et al. 2013). One main argument in favor of focused WCF is that it is less overwhelming and more manageable for L2 students than unfocused WCF as the latter can easily lead to "information overload" (Bitchener 2008, p. 109). It is also argued that focused WCF can enable L2 students to develop a better understanding of the errors they make in writing (e.g., Ferris 1995; Hendrickson 1980). The reason is that when a small number of error categories is targeted, students are more likely to notice and understand the feedback (Ellis et al. 2008). Research evidence in support of focused WCF, however, is mostly conducted in experimental classrooms (i.e., laboratory-like rather than naturalistic classroom conditions) where a very small number of errors is selected – e.g., only one error category as in Bitchener (2008), Bitchener and Knoch (2008, 2009, 2010) and Sheen (2007). In real classrooms, however, L2 students have to pay attention to a large number of error categories in order to produce grammatically accurate writing (Van Beuningen 2010), and it is thus recommended that teachers should select at least several error categories, instead of one, for feedback (Ferris 2010; Storch 2010). Overall, feedback research findings are inclined toward a selective/focused approach to WCF; in fact, research that demonstrates the effectiveness of unfocused WCF is hitherto scarce (Truscott and Hsu 2008; Van Beuningen et al. 2008). Bitchener and Ferris (2012) conclude that a comprehensive, unfocused approach to WCF suits advanced learners who do not make a lot of errors in writing. For L2 school learners, it is advisable that teachers adopt a selective, focused approach to WCF, so that students can be helped to develop their written accuracy in a focused and incremental manner.

In the selection of errors for focused WCF, teachers can go for errors targeted for pre-writing grammar/writing instruction and/or select errors based on a number of principles (Lee 2015). First, teachers can make a distinction between errors that can be easily self-corrected (often referred to as "mistakes," such as spelling mistakes) and those that need to be pointed out by the teacher (i.e., those not amenable to self-correction) (Bitchener and Ferris 2012). Ferris (1999, 2011) has made a distinction between treatable (rule governed) and untreatable errors (nonrule governed), suggesting that WCF is most effective for treatable errors. Bitchener and Ferris (2012) suggest that teachers can focus on high-frequency and stigmatizing errors in students' own specific contexts – i.e., errors that are likely to label students as less proficient writers.

In addition to the extent of WCF and the selection of errors, an important consideration in WCF is what strategies teachers should use when they respond to errors. Broadly, WCF strategies can be divided into direct and indirect (see Example 6.1). The directness of WCF can be defined along two main dimensions: (1) error location – i.e., errors are directly located – and (2) provision of correct answers (Bitchener and Ferris 2012). In Example 6.1, Examples A, B, and C provide the

most typical kinds of direct WCF used by L2 writing teachers – namely, crossing out of unnecessary words/phrases (Example A) (where strictly speaking, correct answers do not have to be provided), insertion of omitted words/phrases (Example B), and circling/underlining errors and giving correct answers (Example C). In addition, teachers can provide metalinguistic explanation to supply explicit grammatical information about the errors, as in Example D (Bitchener 2008; Bitchener and Ferris 2012). Indirect WCF refers to indication of errors without providing correct answers (Ferris 2011), which can be uncoded or coded. In uncoded WCF, teachers simply underline/circle errors (Example E), whereas in coded WCF error codes are used to indicate the error types (Example F). Instead of using an error code (i.e., metalinguistic clue), teachers can number an underlined error and provide a metalinguistic explanation, as in Example G. While Examples E, F, and G locate errors directly, indirect WCF may also refer to indirect location of errors, as in Examples H, I, and J. In this kind of indirect WCF, teachers simply indicate the occurrence, number, or type of error(s) in the margin. In Example H, an * is used to indicate an error in a line of text. In Example I, a number is written in the margin to indicate the total number of errors in a line of text, whereas in Example J, an error code is written in the margin to indicate an error of that particular error type in a line of text. To sum up, as shown in Example 6.1, when errors are located and correct answers provided (see ticks in both the "locate error directly" and "provide correct answer" columns), such WCF is direct. When correct answers are not provided (see crosses in the "provide correct answer" column), such WCF is indirect. In giving indirect WCF, teachers can further decide whether or not to locate errors directly. When errors are not located directly (see crosses in "locate error directly" column), such indirect WCF is more challenging for students as they have to locate errors as well as correct them. Hence, teachers should use this strategy sparingly. Finally, when metalinguistic clues (i.e., error codes) or metalinguistic explanations are provided (see ticks in the "provide metalinguistic clue (error code) / explanation" column), such feedback is referred to as metalinguistic WCF (Ellis 2009). Metalinguistic WCF can be given when the feedback is direct (Example D) or indirect (Examples F, G, and J). While the use of error codes (coded WCF) is widely practiced by L2 writing teachers, providing written metalinguistic explanation is much less common as it is very time-consuming. The latter has been explored in previous experimental studies (e.g., Bitchener 2008; Bitchener and Knoch 2009) but may lack practical value for real classroom contexts. Instead of giving written metalinguistic explanation, a viable alternative is to provide oral metalinguistic explanation to all students in class, on top of individualistic WCF.

In characterizing direct and indirect WCF, some strategies are more explicit than others. In general, the provision of metalinguistic feedback (metalinguistic clue/explanation) increases the explicitness of WCF, with metalinguistic explanation being more explicit than metalinguistic clue (i.e., error code). In direct WCF, for instance, metalinguistic explanation given in addition to direct correction (Example D) is more explicit than simply providing a correct answer (Example C). In indirect WCF, coded WCF (Example F) is more explicit than uncoded WCF (Example E); providing metalinguistic explanation (Example G) is more explicit than the use of

an error code (Example F); and the indication of errors through an error code in the margin (Example J) is more explicit than simply indicating the occurrence or number of errors in the margin (Examples H and I, respectively).

Example 6.1 Written Corrective Feedback Strategies

Example	Locate error directly	Provide correct answer	Provide metalinguistic clue (error code)/explanation
Direct WCF			
(A) Yesterday I ~~was~~ went to church.	✓	✓	X
to (B) Yesterday I went church. ^	✓	✓	X
went (C) Yesterday I go to church.	✓	✓	X
went (D)Yesterday I go to church. Explanation You should use the simple past tense here because you are describing a past event.	✓	✓	✓
Indirect WCF			
(E)Yesterday I go to church.	✓	X	X
V (F)Yesterday I go to church.	✓	X	✓
❶ (G) Yesterday I go to church. ❶ You should use the simple past tense here because you are describing a past event.	✓	X	✓
(H) Yesterday I go to church. * (An asterisk in the margin means that there is one error in that line)	X	X	X
(I) Yesterday I go for church.2 (2 = 2 errors in that line)	X	X	X
(J) Yesterday I go to church. V (V = one "verb" error in that line)	X	X	✓

Research about the efficacy of WCF strategies is not conclusive but there is copious evidence about the benefits of an indirect approach to WCF rather than a direct approach where answers are provided (e.g., Ferris 2006; Lalande 1982). This is because indirect WCF engages students in "guided learning and problem solving" (Lalande 1982, p. 143), enabling them to reflect upon their existing knowledge or partially internalized knowledge (Bitchener and Ferris 2012), which can improve written accuracy in the long run. Some recent research has, however, found that

direct WCF may be more effective long term (Bitchener and Knoch 2010; Van Beuningen et al. 2008, 2012) and "preferable if learners are unable to correct their own errors" (Shintani et al. 2014, p. 105). While indirect WCF can guide the learners to self-correct the errors, thereby fostering reflection upon their existing knowledge (Bitchener and Ferris 2012), direct WCF is "more immediate" (Bitchener and Ferris 2012, p. 65) and provides more explicit information about the errors made. As for metalinguistic WCF involving error codes or metalinguistic explanation, research has not yet produced conclusive evidence (e.g., Ferris and Roberts 2001; Robb et al. 1986). In general, codes are useful in contexts where teachers put an emphasis on explicit grammar instruction; such metalinguistic clues can foster reflection and enhance cognitive engagement on the part of students (Ferris 2011). With highly explicit WCF that involves written metalinguistic explanation, there is research that demonstrates its benefits – e.g., Bitchener and Knoch (2008, 2010), Esfandiar et al. (2014), but again such evidence is mainly from experimental rather than real classrooms. In the absence of conclusive research findings, teachers should experiment with a range of WCF strategies with flexibility and vary them according to student needs (e.g., their proficiency and motivation). For instance, coded WCF can be confusing and frustrating in L2 school contexts where students do not receive explicit grammar instruction, and it can be discouraging and cumbersome if it is overused (Ferris 2011; Robb et al. 1986). However, coded WCF (with or without metalinguistic explanation) can be effective when it is supported by systematic grammar instruction (Ferris 2011, 2003).

Written Commentary

Apart from WCF, L2 teachers usually write comments on student writing. Research has, however, found that some teachers give vague, non-text-specific, and mostly negative comments (Cumming 1985; Semke 1984; Zamel 1985), appropriating students' writing (Reid 1994; Zamel 1985) and misinterpreting their meanings. As a result, teacher commentary can confuse and discourage students rather than encourage them and help them learn. In giving feedback, teachers should avoid appropriating student texts but deliver commentary through engaging with students and building relationships with them (Goldstein 2004, 2006; Hyland and Hyland 2006b), for example, through involving them in face-to-face conferences. In short, effective commentary is clear, concrete, and text-specific, including both praise and constructive criticism (Goldstein 2004; Hyland and Hyland 2001; Zamel 1985).

Written commentary can take several forms, including statements, imperatives, questions, and hedges (Ferris 1997; Sugita 2006). While Ferris (2014) suggests that questions are generally more desirable than imperatives since they enhance cognitive engagement and promote autonomy, Sugita (2006) has found that imperatives are more influential on student revisions than other comment types. Feedback advice should not be interpreted out of context, however. Younger L2 school learners, for example, may benefit from a more directive approach and hence the use of

imperatives in teacher commentary. As pointed out by Nurmukhamedov and Kim (2010), different comment types may prove more effective for different areas of writing or for certain errors – e.g., a question about content can help clarify ideas; an imperative about a grammatical error can lead to effective revision. The forms of teacher written comments should also vary according to individual student needs such as their proficiency level. Weaker learners, for example, may find it hard to interpret hedges in teacher commentary.

Oral Feedback

Although the large majority of feedback studies have addressed teacher written feedback, it has been pointed out that teacher written feedback is best followed up by oral feedback in face-to-face conferences, during which teachers can respond to individual student needs by clarifying meaning, explaining ambiguities, and allowing students to ask questions (Ferris 2014). From teacher oral feedback, students can also find out their strengths and weaknesses and get a better idea about how best to revise their writing. Despite these potential benefits, the meta-analysis of research on feedback in writing by Biber et al. (2011) has shown that oral feedback is less effective than written feedback for students' writing development.

Most teacher-student conferences take place in writing centers in tertiary contexts, either one-on-one or in small groups (Powers and Nelson 1995). Conferencing research has examined areas such as the purposes, roles, and nature of the tutor's talk (Han and Hyland 2016; Harris 1995), the topics discussed in conferences (Aljaafreh and Lantolf 1994; Cumming and So 1996; Williams 2002), meaning negotiation and its effects on students' revisions (Powers 1993; Weigle and Nelson 2004; Weissberg 2006; Williams 2002, 2004), interactions of tutors with native and nonnative tutees (Moussu 2013; Thonus 2004), and students' and instructors' perceptions of writing conferences (Maliborska and You 2016; Yeh 2016). From sociocultural perspectives, oral feedback delivered through the interaction between teacher and students can enable students to develop their writing abilities (Williams 2002), also providing them with mediated learning experience (see Chap. 5). Research on oral corrective feedback has specifically drawn on dynamic assessment, where teacher-student conferences can be viewed as a "social activity involving joint participation and meaningful transactions between the learner and the teacher" (Nassaji and Swain 2000, p. 35) that extends students' zone of proximal development (Poehner 2008). To leverage the potential of oral corrective feedback, it has to be "graduated" (Aljaafreh and Lantolf 1994, p. 468), beginning in a highly implicit form and gradually becoming more concrete and explicit, so that students learn to identify and correct errors and to gain self-regulation in the long run.

In L2 school contexts, however, conferences tend not to be a regular feature of writing classrooms for two main reasons. First, there is the issue of class size, particularly in EFL contexts where teachers have to grapple with the time constraint – namely, to cover the prescribed syllabus or curriculum, let alone the need to return

timely written feedback on students' ongoing writing. Second, the unequal power relationship between teacher and students makes it challenging for writing conferences to fulfill the purpose of encouraging active student participation and fostering learner autonomy.

Research-Practice Divide in Teacher Feedback in L2 School Contexts

Although feedback research has yielded some "best practice" advice for teachers, it appears that such advice has failed to filter down to classroom contexts. The realities of L2 writing classrooms indicate a huge gulf between research and practice. They are examined in the following.

Incongruity Between Teachers' Written Feedback and Recommended Principles

Based on data collected from 26 teachers of Hong Kong from 15 secondary schools and in-depth interviews with six of them (from six different schools), teachers' written feedback practice was found to be largely form focused, delivered to terminal drafts completed in product-oriented writing classrooms (Lee 2008). Instead of using a range of WCF strategies, the teachers were found to give direct WCF most of the time. Teacher written commentary was primarily negative, with about only 30% of the commentary presented in the form of "praise." Such findings were corroborated by those in Furneaux et al. (2007), who found that EFL school teachers focused inordinately on written errors when giving feedback, and they also tended to provide correct answers to students. Overall, L2 school teachers' feedback practices deviate largely from feedback principles recommended in the literature – i.e., teachers should provide balanced coverage on language, content, and organizational issues in their feedback, which should be given to intermediate rather than terminal drafts.

Insofar as WCF is concerned, while it is recommended that selective, focused WCF be adopted especially for students of lower language proficiency (and in the case of L2 school learners they generally fall into this category), teachers tend to respond to written errors comprehensively (Furneaux et al. 2007; Lee 2004, 2008, 2013). Although teachers are advised to choose their WCF strategies in a principled manner, there is little evidence that L2 school teachers' choice of WCF strategies is informed by systematic principles. In the study by Furneaux et al. (2007), the EFL school teachers used primarily direct WCF, providing correct forms for errors. Similarly, in Lee's studies (Lee 2004, 2008), the secondary teachers mainly adopted direct WCF without varying them according to the error type and student needs. In

Lee (2004), the participating teachers admitted that direct WCF was a means to save them the trouble of having to answer students' questions about their feedback in large classes and having to correct errors again when students turned in their corrections. Indeed, in L2 school contexts, teachers may not be fully aware of the range of WCF strategies available (see Example 6.1), their pros and cons, and the principles that govern their choice of WCF strategies (Lee 2013).

Factors Accounting for the Research-Practice Divide

Four factors were found to have influenced and shaped teachers' written feedback practices, explaining why the "best practice" advice was not translated into teachers' feedback practices (Lee 2008). First, the teachers were significantly constrained by their institutional context which mandated detailed marking of student written errors. Whether they liked it or not, teachers had to respond to errors comprehensively; they were even formally appraised on the amount of WCF they provided to students. All the participating teachers in Lee's (2008) study indicated that the schools encouraged the use of error codes (apart from underlining or circling errors) and suggested that teachers provide correct answers when they thought students were incapable of self-correction. The WCF strategies adopted by the teachers turned out to be rather limited, who ended up giving a lot of overt corrections (i.e., direct WCF) because they could not afford the time to answer students' queries if indirect WCF was used. The second factor concerns the issue of accountability. Teachers felt that they were not free agents but subject to an accountability system monitored explicitly by school administrators and implicitly by students and parents, who all favored comprehensive WCF. Teachers felt strongly that failure to provide comprehensive WCF would lead to negative evaluation and even criticism by all key stakeholders. Additionally, the examination culture within the education system, as in many L2 school contexts, made teachers put a strong emphasis on written accuracy in their feedback practices. The impromptu writing model characterized by public examinations, on the other hand, had a negative washback making teachers adhere to a product-oriented approach to writing. Finally, the teachers indicated the lack of teacher training as one important factor that influenced their written feedback practices. Some teachers were unaware of the "best practice" advice in the feedback literature; others were influenced by the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie 1975) and hence responded to writing in the ways their own teachers did.

Compared with tertiary teachers, school teachers are likely to be more prone to the influence of an array of contextual factors, including national and local educational policies and standardized, high-stakes assessment. In L2 school contexts, as revealed in Lee's (2008) findings, teachers' written feedback practices are subject to the influence of a myriad of contextual factors, such as philosophies about feedback, examination culture, and sociopolitical issues relating to power relations and teacher autonomy (Goldstein 2004, 2005; Hyland and Hyland 2006b). Helping L2 school teachers enhance their written feedback practices therefore entails change not only

in their beliefs and knowledge through teacher education (Ferguson 1993) but also in the cultural and political systems that shape teachers' work. As suggested in the section on "Implementing effective feedback practices in L2 writing" in Chap. 5, feedback does not take place in a vacuum; therefore, undertaking feedback innovations would involve transformation within the conventional feedback activity system (as informed by activity theory – see Chap. 5) – e.g., the goal of feedback (from a focus on comprehensive to selective WCF) and the support of colleagues (from teachers' isolated practice to development of a community of practice among colleagues).

Context and Teacher Feedback

The foregoing section on the research-practice divide has uncovered the complexity of feedback and underlined the importance to situate feedback practices within teachers' specific work contexts, since feedback is deeply influenced by contextual issues such as learners' characteristics, teacher beliefs, as well as the larger institutional context that governs teaching and learning. "Context" here is used to refer to "a unique combination of factors stemming from the institution and the program within which the writing, commenting, and revision takes place, and factors that teachers and students bring to the process, as well" (Goldstein 2004, p. 65). While teacher educators can instruct teacher learners in the "best practice" feedback principles, it is equally, if not more important, to be cognizant of the contextual constraints that impinge on teacher feedback practices. Such nuanced understandings can enable teacher educators to come up with strategies that suit the exigencies of the teaching and learning in L2 school writing contexts. A case in point is the taxing issue around the comprehensive/unfocused versus selective/unfocused WCF debate. In a number of L2 school contexts, teachers and learners (and parents too) are so accustomed to comprehensive WCF that replacing it with selective, focused WCF can present extremely formidable challenges. To tackle this tricky issue, teachers can consider adopting a middle approach that combines focused WCF with comprehensive WCF (Bitchener and Ferris 2012), where appropriate, e.g., giving comprehensive WCF to paragraphs rather than the entire texts or to shorter texts administered occasionally in the writing class (Evans et al. 2010). Instead of abandoning the ingrained practice of comprehensive WCF altogether, combining comprehensive and selective WCF may be a viable way forward.

In many L2 school contexts, feedback is not a matter of teachers' individual effort, but the implementation of effective feedback is contingent upon the involvement of all key stakeholders, including school administrators, students, and parents (Lee 2014, 2016). In some L2 school contexts, teachers may be made to play a subservient role due to the lack of full autonomy, and they may be further thwarted by a host of contextual constraints in their bid to implement feedback practices that are oriented toward assessment for learning. Also, the examination culture may make it difficult for good feedback practices to flourish. While reconciling the

examination and learning culture to facilitate effective teacher feedback practices is a knotty issue, the key to effective feedback practices may lie in an approach to teachers' continuing professional development that "places context at the heart of the profession" (Bax 2003, p. 278). Such professional development activities should involve all key members of the community, where they get together to discuss the specific constraints they are faced with and ways to tackle them. School leaders and administrators should also be included in such a contextualized approach to professional development, so that they understand teachers' concerns and support their feedback innovation by providing a "nonthreatening and motivating environment" (Lee 2016, p. 525). Since teacher feedback is influenced by a range of contextual factors, a context approach to professional development is crucial to help teachers develop contextualized understanding of how feedback can be best implemented to suit the needs of their specific context.

Guiding Principles for Effective Teacher Feedback

Before concluding the chapter, I provide some guiding principles for effective feedback, which are built upon sound classroom assessment practice examined in the preceding chapters, as well as the feedback literature reviewed in the above (Lee 2012). To recapitulate, teacher feedback corresponds to the three stages of learning examined in preceding chapters: "where I am going" (i.e., feed up), "how I am going" (i.e., feed back), and "where to next" (i.e., feed forward) (Hattie and Timperley 2007). Teacher feedback in the "feed back" stage has to be formative in nature, interwoven with teaching and learning, and provides useful information to help students improve their writing. The eight principles below can provide useful guidelines to enhance teachers' feedback practices, as well as a springboard for discussion in school-based professional development activities that focus on feedback in writing.

Less Is More

An overdose of teacher feedback is unhelpful as it is not manageable for L2 school learners. Teachers should be selective in their approach and be reminded that there is no need to respond to every single issue that they find problematic in student writing. They can select issues for feedback according to their instructional focuses, individual student needs, and the stage of the writing process. In responding to student stories, for instance, teachers can choose a few focuses for feedback, especially for the initial drafts, like story structure and several grammar items specific to the story genre, instead of pointing out every single trouble spot in student writing. Such selected focuses could be decided by the teacher and/or negotiated with students.

Respond to Errors Selectively

More feedback is not necessarily better feedback (Lee 2009). In the case of WCF, and particularly for L2 school students who are learning to write, less is probably more. Teachers should come up with a principled approach to the selection of errors, combining pre-selected error categories (that align with grammar/writing instruction) with a selective approach that highlights prevalent and/or recurring error patterns in student writing, as well as those that are amenable to self-correction. In addition, teachers could consider asking students to self-select one or two grammar focuses for teacher WCF and to monitor their written accuracy development in those areas, so that they develop a stronger sense of ownership. This is also a way to promote assessment as learning.

Use Feedback to Diagnose Strengths and Weaknesses

Feedback that helps promote assessment for learning is diagnostic in nature – i.e., it informs students of their strengths and weaknesses in writing. It is important, therefore, that teachers identify students' major strengths and the most critical areas in their writing that merit attention. These strengths and areas for improvement could be related to the "feed up" stage (i.e., where I am going), during which learning targets and success criteria for the writing task are set up. To ensure that written feedback is diagnostic, teachers can include two sections in their feedback: "major strengths" and "areas for improvement." Alternatively, teachers can use feedback forms like those suggested in Chap. 2 (e.g., Examples 2.2 and 2.3), where they can write comments on major strengths and/or areas for improvement with reference to each of the assessment criteria included in the forms. To provide diagnostic feedback on written errors specifically, teachers can perform error analysis to identify students' major strengths and weaknesses in written accuracy (see Example 2.7 for "Error ratio analysis sheet").

Adopt a Balanced Approach

Effective teacher feedback has to be balanced in its coverage. Teachers should steer away from a predominantly error-focused approach to incorporate feedback on content, language, organization, and style/genre. Feedback forms (see examples in Chap. 2) can be used to remind teachers of the need to respond to important dimensions of writing included in the forms. Balanced feedback, however, does not mean that teachers have to give feedback to all areas in a comprehensive manner. As suggested above, teachers should give an optimum amount of feedback according to their instructional focuses and student needs, as well as the stage of writing (i.e.,

whether it is the first, second, or final draft). For example, teachers can focus mainly on content and organization in the first draft and leave language issues to later drafts.

Be Concrete and Constructive

Effective feedback is clear, text-specific, and constructive, which is made possible if teachers deliver their feedback with reference to the success criteria they have established at the instructional (i.e., "feed up" – where I am going) stage. In so doing, they also help increase students' metacognitive awareness and equip them with the relevant metalanguage to talk about and evaluate their own writing. Supposing the teacher has provided clear instruction in the genre features of a story, a teacher comment like "I like the proverb you use at the beginning of the study; it can really grab the readers' attention!" would be rendered meaningful and constructive for the student writer, particularly when compared with a generic comment like "interesting story beginning."

Give Individualized Feedback

It is important that teachers vary their written feedback according to the needs of individual students. Highly motivated learners with strong language proficiency, for example, are likely to prefer detailed WCF, and hence a selective, focused approach to WCF could impact negatively on their motivation. Weaker learners may find questions or hedges in teacher written commentary confusing, and they may be better off receiving more imperatives from teachers to guide their learning. To cater for individual student needs, teachers can encourage students to request individualistic feedback focuses, apart from those specified by the teachers. Students can write their feedback requests on a cover sheet; they can also color-code specific parts in their texts (e.g., certain vocabulary or expressions they are unsure of) on which they want detailed feedback or metalinguistic explanation. Through giving student-specific feedback, teachers are able to enhance students' motivation and help them develop a stronger sense of ownership of their writing.

Use Feedback to Encourage and Motivate Learners

In classroom writing assessment that promotes assessment for/as learning, teacher written feedback has to take account of learner motivation (Assessment Reform Group 2002). Although it is inevitable for teachers to point out weaknesses in student writing, such feedback can be couched in more positive and encouraging terms, apart from the fact that teachers can praise students' strong points, efforts, and

improvement in writing. It is advisable that teachers take a personal approach to written feedback, using it to build relationships with students. A comment like "Although you have a few article errors, I can see that you've made good progress. Way to go, Sandy!" is much more encouraging and personal than "You still have trouble using articles in your writing!" (addressing the student writer personally can also help build rapport). If teachers are able to build a supportive learning atmosphere so that students can write with an understanding that learning to write in L2 is a difficult task and that making mistakes along the way is just normal and expected, students will look at teacher feedback in a positive light.

Use Feedback to Integrate Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

Teacher written feedback delivered in the "feed back" (i.e., how I am going) stage should be directly related to the learning goals and success criteria set up in the "feed up" stage, and it should lead to effective learning in the "feed forward" (i.e., where to next) stage. In other words, feedback should be aligned with instruction (i.e., "feed back" being linked with "feed up") and be prospective (i.e., "feed back" leading to "feed forward"), helping students understand what they can do to improve their future writing (to close the gap between a desired goal and the present state in their writing). It is therefore important that students engage in revision (without which the feedback will be retrospective) to act upon feedback. When teachers teach what they assess and assess what they teach, they relate the "feed back" to the "feed up" stage; and when teacher feedback points students to future directions, the "feed back" serves the purpose of "feed forward," thus bringing "feed up," "feed back," and "feed forward" together in an integrated cycle of teaching, assessment, and learning.

In summing up, teacher feedback has to be sensitive to individual student needs, pitched at their level so that it is comprehensible to students, and phrased in concrete and constructive terms so that students know exactly what to do to improve their writing. When students fail to understand teacher feedback, receive highly critical comments expressed in unpleasant terms, and feel overwhelmed by a large amount of feedback, they are likely to have negative affective reactions such as rejection, disappointment, and frustration (Mahfoodh 2017), making it hard for successful revisions and effective learning to take place.

Conclusion

Drawing upon the feedback literature in L2 writing, this chapter has reviewed salient findings from feedback research and uncovered the gap between research and practice. Context has emerged as a significant consideration in the development of effective feedback practices for classroom teachers, as well as sound professional

development practice for teacher educators. In Chap. 10, the last chapter of the book, I underscore the importance of teachers' feedback literacy (i.e., their ability to use feedback effectively to support student learning) as comprising knowledge that is "contextualized in the realities of teachers' contexts of practice" (Scarino 2013, p. 316). It is hoped that the research insights shared in this chapter, the attention drawn to contextual issues, and the guiding principles anchored in classroom writing assessment practice can help work toward enhancing teachers' feedback literacy.

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